CHAPTER-VIII

CONSOLIDATION PHASE

Among the Pollams of Tirunelveli, the Pollams of Panjalamkurichi and Nercattanseval were very popular. The Panjalamkurichi Pollam was considered the head Pollam among the Naick Pollams in the eastern part of Tirunelveli Region. Nercattanseval was the head of the Marava Pollams in the western part of Tirunelveli Region. Kattabomma Naick was mainly responsible for the creation of Eastern Poligar League or Confederacy. The forefathers of Kattabomma Naick built Panjalamkurichi into a powerful Pollam amidst various critical situations. They pacified every invader without affecting the interests of the Pollam. There was prosperity everywhere in this Pollam. After their death, the responsibility fell upon the younger Kattabomma Naick who was courageous enough to revolt against the Nawab and the British forces. The enemies of Kattabomma Naick were terrorised by his personal valour, backed by his brother Oomaithurai. His army consisted of military leaders from different castes. Thanks to his military strength, he was prepared to meet any military situation. While the administration of the Pollam was managed by Kattabomma Naick, the external military activities were totally entrusted to his younger brother, Oomaithurai.
S.R. Lushington, the Collector of Southern Poligars, was determined to bring Kattabomma Naick into subordinate relationship. The Ramnad Enquiry Committee, which enquired the behaviour of Kattabomma Naick and Collector Jackson, rightly concluded that the delay on the part of the Poligar in complying with the summons from the Collector was pardonable. The manner in which he was forced to follow Jackson for twenty three days through the territories of inferior Poligars was indeed mortifying and that the illtreatment he received at Ramnad justifiably alarmed him and understandably prompted him to escape. At that time, the Fourth Mysore War broke out and Kattabomma Naick utilised the opportunity for organising resistance.¹

Due to the efforts of Marudu Brothers of Sivagangai and Melappan of Ramnad, the Poligars of Nagalapuram, Mannarkottai, Pavlli, Kolvarpatti and Sennelgudi had already formed themselves into a Confederation and asserted their right to collect taxes from certain villages. Other Poligars also strengthened the League. The Poligars of Saptur, Yelairampannai, Kadalkudi and Kulathur joined the league. The son of the Poligar of Sivagiri and his adviser, Mappilai Vannian visited Panjalamkurichi and held consultations.² In 1799, Kattabomma Naick

refused the payment of tribute and made incursion into the sircar territory of Ramnad. The associates of Kattabomma Naick too withheld payments to the British and made incursions into Ramnad and captured the sircar villages. These hostile activities invited prompt response from the British Government. Determined to quell the rebellion in its early stage, Wellesley, the Governor General, who was supervising the military operations against Mysore, sent a large army to the far south.³

**Bannerman's Expedition**

In June 1799, Major John Bannerman, assuming the command of the British forces, commenced military operations against the rebels. He routed the insurgents of Ramnad and killed their chief Chingum Chetty in a decisive battle at Palamaneri. Bannerman posted a strong body of troops at Kamudi to prevent the rebels from regrouping themselves. On September 1, 1799, Bannerman issued an ultimatum to Kattabomma Naick to meet him at Palayamkottai on September 4, 1799. When Kattabomma Naick failed to turn up, the British troops moved on. The approach of the British troops was so unexpectedly sudden that the Poligar found it impossible to mobilize his troops for the defence of the fort. Bannerman deputed Ramalinga Mudali to the fort with a message, asking for its

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surrender. Kattabomman Naick rejected the offer. Secrets about the vulnerable points in the defence were gathered by Mudaliar and a strategy was worked out. The British troops made a breach in the walls, and advanced with order and determination. But the besiegers suffered reverses partly due to the heroic resistance of the rebels and partly due to the indifference of the native troops in the British service.\(^4\)

Despite the adverse developments, Bannerman did not abandon the siege. He employed reinforcements brought from different places and renewed the attack. Considering their safety, the rebels evacuated the fort on 6\(^{th}\) night. The British forces attacked the rebels at Kolarpatti, inflicted severe loss on them and took Sivasubramaniya Pillai as prisoner. On September 9, 1799, Bannerman defeated the rebels led by Soundrapandya Naick and occupied Nagalapuram. The victorious British forces marched to Kovilpatti and then to Kayatar to wipe out the rebels. Several Poligars surrendered and pledged their loyalty to the British. Thus military operations helped in the restoration of order.\(^5\)

Bannerman brought the ring leaders of the rebellion to an assembly of Poligars summoned at Nagalapuram. He condemned Sivasubramania Pillai and Soundarapandya Naick and executed them at Nagalapuram and

\(^4\) \textit{Ibid.},

The Fort of Panjalamkurichi was demolished. The armed men of Poligars were disbanded. Thus the inhabitants lost the means of native self-defence and effective protection. On September, 18, 1799, Bannerman announced criminal proceedings against the Poligars of Panjalamkurichi, Nagalapuram, Yelairampannai, Kolvarpatti, kadalgudi and Kulattur. Bannerman issued another proclamation in which he insisted on implicit obedience of all Poligars to the British Authority and the destruction of all the forts in various Pollams. He also ordered the surrender of match locks and pikes.

End of Kattabomman and Rise of Oomaithurai

Kattabomma Naick and seven other rebels, who sought asylum in the forest area of Kaliapoor in Pudukkottai Region, were captured by the troops under Vijaya Raghunatha Tondaiman, the King of Pudukkottai. On October 16, 1799, Kattabomma Naick was tried before an assembly of Poligars summoned at Kayatar. In an asserative tone and with contempt for death, Kattabomma Naick admitted the charges levelled against him. Bannerman, after a mockery of a trial, declared the death sentence for

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8. Ibid., p.74.
Kattabomma Naick. On October 17, 1799, Kattabomman was hanged to death at a conspicuous spot near the old Fort of Kayatar.\textsuperscript{43}

The execution of Kattabomman shocked the Tirunelveli Poligars. The last scene of Kattabomman bravely facing death, inspired surviving Poligars to form a new strategy of resistance to the British Authority. His brother Oomaithurai strengthened the alliance with Marudu, the Poligar of Sivagangai. It was expected that Oomaithurai again would come to Panjalamkurichi. Oomaithurai waited for the proper time. He consulted the Marudu Brothers. The British, on the other hand, thought that the rebellion was completely suppressed and therefore there was no need for Bannerman's service in Tirunelveli. It was this complacency that prompted them to guard the Palayamkottai prison with nominal soldiers. But their calculation was wrong and they underestimated the ability of Oomaithurai.\textsuperscript{44}

After the martyrdom of Kattaboomman of Panjalamkurichi and Tipu Sultan of Mysore, many of the native soldiers fled away to remote Region and reorganized themselves and started resistance against the

\textsuperscript{43} Rajayyan, K., \textit{South Indian Rebellion,} \textit{op.cit.}, pp.82-83; \textit{Rise and Fall of the Poligars of Tamil Nadu}, p.99.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
aliens in co-operation with the inhabitants. After the execution of Kattabomman, his two brothers, Oomaithurai and Subbu Naick alias Sevatiah, along with fifteen other rebel leaders, were incarcerated at Palayamkottai Fort. In the mean time, a conspiracy was hatched to liberate them. When Maj. Macaulay assumed the commandership of the Tirunelveli Region, Palayamkottai was garrisoned by a small force. In January 1801, the rebels, 200 in number, under the guise of pilgrims proceeding to Tiruchendur, moved into Palayamkottai. Clad in yellow robes, they played Kavadi, chanted mantrams and distributed the holy ash. On reaching Palayamkottai, these ‘pilgrims’ changed their disguise into hawkers, selling fire-wood, plantain leaves and fruits. On February 2, 1801, the conspirators disguised as jugglers, carried bundles of grass and firewood and concealed their weapons in the grass and firewood. They came near the Palayamkottai jail to perform their feats of jugglery.

The conspirators were helped by the spread of smallpox in the jail. Hence the jailors removed the chains on Oomaithurai. With a pre-arranged

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46 Rajayyan, K., Rise and Fall of the Poligars of Tamil Nadu, op.cit., pp.103-105
signal, the conspirators forced the prison gates with their concealed weapons and the doors were opened. The prisoners attacked the two sentries in front of them. The jailors were attacked and overpowered. Oomaithurai and his men picked up the muskets and disarmed the guards. Thus, Oomaithurai made his escape through the southern gate after a long period of imprisonment. The escape of Oomaithurai symbolized the triumph of a confederate strategy unique in the annals of insurrection.

The followers of Oomaithurai missed the opportunity to cripple the British forces on their way because they were keen on their hasty retreat. But, they seized the arms of hundreds of British soldiers. Several native soldiers and civilians at the station, escaped along with Oomaithurai. The British troops followed but returned unsuccessfully.

The escape of the Brothers of Kattabomman from the Palayamkottai prison caused panic in the whole region of Tirunelveli. Ramalinga Mudali, the dubash of Maj. Macaulay, conveyed the message of the escape of Oomaithurai, with a body of 1000 men, and their hide out at Vallanadu Hills which was near the border of Palayamkottai, to Mukhtar Jung, the Nawab’s faujdar of Tirunelveli. Edward Clive, the Governor of

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Madras, advised the Nawab to instruct Mukhtar Jung to assist Maj. Macaulay in the suppression of the rebellion organised by Oomaithurai. Mukhtar Jung issued strict orders to the *amils* of several Taluks of Tirunelveli to prevent the rebel activities. He ordered them not to support the rebels by supplying grains and any warlike articles and stores.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the followers of Oomaithurai declared his brother Sevatiah as their leader and called the inhabitants to support their cause. Countless inhabitants from various castes voluntarily supported the cause of Poligar Rebellion.¹⁹ Then the insurgents began to rebuild the Fort of Panjalamkurichi within six days of their escape. The fort was a parallelogram, 500 feet long and 300 feet broad, with walls of twelve feet height.²⁰

Maj. Macaulay diverted all the British forces to Panjalamkurichi area on February 3, 1801. Then he directed Maj. Sheppard to proceed from Sankarankoil, with his troops, to Kayatar. All the officers of Palayamkottai, with twenty eight men from Nawab’s army, joined the

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¹⁹ Kearns, J.F., *op.cit.*, pp.120-121.
troops at Kayatar on February 6, 1801. On February 8, 1801, the forces reached Kulasekaranallur which was nineteen miles away from Kayatar.\footnote{Ganapathy Pillai, W.E., \textit{Ettaiyapuram: Past and Present}, Madras, 1890, p.104.}

The insurgents divided themselves into three groups and attacked from three sides the British camp at Kulasekaranallur. The struggle lasted for an hour. It resulted in the death of forty rebels and six British men. The British troops were vigilant throughout the night. On February 9, 1801, the British troops occupied the open space near the Panjalamkurichi Fort. They had unshakable belief in gaining early victory.\footnote{Selvamuthu Kumarasami, L., and Kumaravani, N., ‘Ommaithurai – A Forgotten Freedom Fighter’ in \textit{The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society}, Vol.XCVI, No.3, Bangalore, July-September 2005, p.101}

On seeing the newly erected Fort of Panjalamkurichi with a garrison of thousand men, the British troops were astonished and felt the inadequacy of their force to face the insurgents. On account of the rebels’ sudden attack on the British troops, Maj. Macaulay was alarmed and determined to return to Palayamkottai. The British troops reached it on February 10, 1801.\footnote{Pate, H.R., (ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.63.}

S.R. Lushington, the Collector, who was at Nagalapuram, came to know about the rebellion of Oomaithurai. He reached Ettaiyapuram to study the situation and to initiate military operations against the newly
erected fort. Fortunately for the British, the Ettaiyapuram Poligar consented to give all possible help. After ensuring the support of Ettaiyapuram Poligar, S.R. Lushington directed Maj. Macaulay to receive a strong force, which he earlier sent to Kovilpatti, and under the control of Ettaiyapuram men. Subsequently additional muskets were supplied to the British force. Lts. Laughton, Landen and Warren arrived at Ettaiyapuram in order to lead the attack. The Ettaiyapuram Poligar, with 2000 men, proceeded to Panjalamkurichi.23

On February 27, 1801, Kadalgudi was attacked by the British force. But a relief force of Oomaithurai, consisting of 2,000 men, arrived to fight against the British Army. A clash took place and it resulted in the death of three men and injury to fifteen on the side of Kadalgudi Poligar. The loss of relief force was not known.24

Tuticorin, which was defended by a subaltern and a few sepoys, was captured by the men of Oomaithurai. They also imprisoned Baggot, the Master Attendant. But responding to his wife’s request, Baggot was set free by the rebels. The rebels then proceeded to Srivaikuntam to attack the British military warehouse, maintained at temple premises, on March 16,

1801. But their attack was foiled by the first battalion of third regiment under Maj. Sheppard.  

In order to control the rebel activities, new reinforcements arrived in Tirunelveli Region continuously for two months. On March 27, 1801, Maj. Macaulay, with 3000 men, gathered at Kayatar. On his march to Panjalamkurichi, he had to face many risks. He was attacked at Ottrampatti, six miles away from Kayatar, by 600 men of Oomaithurai. Lt. James Grant, brother of Maj. A. Grant and his subedar, Sheik Ibrahim, were employed against Oomaithurai on March 30, 1801. Continuous rain frustrated their attack. Lt. James Grant killed three but he was speared in his lungs and he fell down. His senior subedar Sheik Ibrahim attacked the rebels and he himself was pierced by several pikes. One of the pikes pierced his throat and he was killed. The rebels lost ninety-six men in that engagement. 

On the same day, Ettaiyapuram Poligar and Maj. Macaulay met at Panjalamkurichi. They opened fire on the north-western portion of the fort. It had little effect. Therefore, the guns then advanced to 400 yards. The continuous use of artillery fire resulted in some signs of breach on the fort. The troops were ordered to storm the fort. The storming party

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consisted of two companies of the seventy-fourth regiment, all the native grenadiers and a battalion company of the third regiment. Though assault was made on the fort, it was not possible to demolish the fort. Heavy fire was launched on the six bastions of the fort. When the British force was reaching the summit, they were pierced by pikes and fired at by muskets. Hence the British forces failed to gain footing on the fort. They were ordered to retreat. In that skirmish, four officers and forty-nine men were killed, and thirteen officers and 254 men were wounded.27

Since the existing British forces were less superior to the rebels, more reinforcements were demanded. In order to suppress the rebellion and for a systematic arrangement of tranquillity in the Tirunelveli Region, the Madras Government felt that the forces under Maj. Macqulay was inadequate. It decided to take away the chief commandership from Maj. Macquely for strategic reasons.28

**Expedition under Agnew**

The commandership to undertake a new campaign was entrusted to Lt. Col. Agnew, the Adjutant General of the British Army. He proceeded to Tirunelveli, along with powerful siege guns, which were despatched

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from Malabar and Tiruchirappalli. He arrived at Panjalamkurichi on May 20, 1801 and he began his attack on the Panjalamkurichi fort on May 23. On May 24, the fort was assulted and captured by him. He won the signal victory at Panjalamkurichi and it resulted in the dispersion of rebels.29

Lt. Col. Agnew ordered the Ettaiyapuram men to pursue the fugitives on May 24, and also ordered the punishment of rebels, wherever found. It was followed by a minor battle in the nearby villages of Panjalamkurichi. During that battle, a few rebels were wounded. When the village womenfolk were healing their wounds, the Ettaiyapuram men arrived in the pursuit of rebels.30 Oomaithurai was found in a pool of blood. The women folk conceived a brilliant plan of escape for Oomaithurai. They covered Oomaithurai with clothes and pretended that he was stricken with chicken pox. The Ettaiyapuram men fled away, without even looking back. Panjalamkurichi Brothers joined the Marava Poligar of Ramnad on May 28, 1801 and waited for the wound to heal.31

The dissatisfaction against the British expansion spread out to Ramnad. The Tirunelveli Poligars had twice rebelled and they were subdued at great expense to the British troops. The rising in Ramnad was

much more intensive than that of the rebellion by Tirunelveli. Sivagangai became the citadel of the native resistance. The Sherogar of Sivagangai utilised the situation of Tirunelveli Rebellion and ravaged the neighbouring villages.  

On May 28, 1801, Lt. Col. Agnew directed Maj. Sheppard to mobilize forces at Nagalapuram. Oomaithurai and the Poligar of Kulathur ravaged the villages in and out of Kamudi in order to assert authority over Sircar territory. The Panjalamkurichi Brothers were warmly welcomed by Chinna Marudu who gave shelter to them at Siruvayal. Lt. Col. Agnew commanded the Marudu brothers to hand over Oomaithurai. The Marudu Brothers, who had connection with Panjalamkurichi Brothers for a long period, turned down the appeal of Lt. Col. Agnew. The British, therefore, prepared themselves to face 20,000 soldiers of Marudus. After the triumph in the Mysore Wars and Panjalamkurichi Wars, the British gained much strength from various quarters. The British could now pursue the war against the rebels with the help of Tondaiman of Pudukkottai, Serfoji-II (1798-1833), the Ruler of Tanjore, and various native rulers.  

During this period, Wellesely, the Governor-General, appointed Serfoji-II to the throne of Tanjore in the place of Amar Singh. But

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Tondaiman hesitated to help the British because he felt that he was responsible for the death of Kattabomma Naick and all the sufferings of his Brothers. Capt. Blackburn, the Resident of Tanjore, however, persuaded the Tondaiman to help the British against the Marudus.34

After the reduction of many rebel strongholds, Lt. Col. Agnew was determined to bring many areas in Ramnad Region also under his control. He reached Tiruppuvanam, eighteen kilometres on the south east of Madurai, on June 1, 1801. Then he moved towards Ramnad on June 8, 1801 and on his way, he reached Manamadurai on June 10, 1801 and captured the strongholds of rebels at Paramagudi on June 11, 1801. He finally reached Ramnad on June 14, 1801. On his return to Madurai, he marched towards Tirupattur and captured it on July 24, 1801. He waited for the detachment of Col. James Innes who defeated the rebels in the region of Dindigul. On July 26, 1801, Col. Innes advanced to Tirupattur. He was attacked by the rebels but he was rescued by Col. Agnew.35 The combined armies of Agnew and Innes reached Siruvayal on July 30, 1801, the regular residence of Marudus. The rebels were forced to retreat. While retreating, the rebels set fire by their own hands to their houses and to the Town of Siruvayal and fled away to the jungles of Kalayarkoil, the stronghold of Marudus. This is the famous Scorched Earth Policy. They

burnt Siruvayal only with the intention that it should not be used by the British. Since Kalayarkoil was five miles away from Siruvayal which was inaccessible due to impenetrable jungles, the British brought wood cutters from Dindigul and Pudukkottai Regions to clear the barriers. After the clearance of the wood, the British came very close to Kalayarkoil, within a distance of about thirty yards.

**British Victories**

During this time, the British forces in other places played a vital role in bringing them under control. At Karaikudi, Lt. Macleane met a rebel force of three thousand armed men under Oomaithurai. He chased the rebels from Singampunari jungles, in the southern side of Piranmalai. Lt. Col. Agnew, with the help of Tondaiman, captured the temple of Piranmalai, a strong fort. Col. Martinz scored a resounding victory at Ramnad. Likewise Maj. Macauly routed the Marava Chief, Vellappan at Abirman. Lt. Miller gained a victory in Kamudi. Thus the simultaneous victories of British Generals consolidated the British for a concerted action against rebels in Ramnad Region.

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On September 18, 1801, Col. Agnew left Piranmalai and reached Okkur through Melur, Singampunari and Nandikkottai. On September 30, 1801, Agnew played a trick. To divert the Marudus, he sent forces in different directions. Lt. Col. Spray was ordered to attack Kalayarkoil and Maj. Sheppard was sent by another route to assist Lt. Col. Spray. While the Marudus were misled by the trick, Agnew sent his forces to Sivagangai.\textsuperscript{39}

Due to continuous chase by the British forces, Oomaithurai and his brother Sevatiah fled away to Dindigul Region and erected barriers with 4,000 inhabitants at Virupakshi. Maj. Jones could not tackle them and he had to return.\textsuperscript{40} But on October 14, 1801, Col. James Innes and Maj. Burrows defeated the rebels, led by Panjalamkurichi men. On October 16, 1801, Virupakshi was captured. Oomaithurai ran away to the valley of Dindigul. A battle was fought at Vettilagundu vigorously. But unfortunately the brave Oomaithurai, with sixty-five followers, were captured by the British troops.\textsuperscript{41} Oomaithurai and Sevatiah were taken to Panjalamkurichi, with their followers. Oomaithurai was executed on the

\textsuperscript{39} Rajayyan, K., \textit{op. cit.}, pp.187-190.
\textsuperscript{40} Kadhirvel, S., \textit{op. cit.}, p.201.
northern side and Sevatiah on the southern side of the Panjalamkurichi Fort on November 16, 1801.  

On October 24, 1801 Marudhu Brothers and a herd of other rebels were executed on the ruins of the Fort of Tirupattur in Ramnad Region. The British were determined to deport seventy-three rebels. Among them, Vengam Periya Vodya Thevar of Sivagangai and Kumaraswamy Naick of Panjalamkurichi were included. On February 11, 1802, they were deported to the Prince of Wales Island, escorted by Lt. Rock Lead from Tuticorin. The voyage lasted for seventy-three days. On April 26, 1802, they reached Penang with a loss of two. But within five months, the loss of life increased to twenty-one.  

The spirit of native resistance enabled the Poligars of Tamil Country to make all possible efforts to meet the challenges posed by the British troops. But the British, in a diplomatic way, totally diverted their superior forces to the suppression of the principal Poligars in Tamil Country only after the end of the Mysore Wars. The new reinforcements regularly arrived in Tamil Country to check the spread of rebellious activities. The great relief, received by the British on the execution of the

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47. Kearns, J.F., *op.cit.,* pp.30-34.
Kattabomma Naick, was very soon thwarted by Oomaithurai. Thus the Poligar Rebellion, initiated by Puli Tevar, sustained by Kattabomman, reached its culmination in Ramnad under Marudu Brothers and ultimately it culminated in the South Indian Rebellion. It became the earliest native resistance posed by the valiant fighters of Southern Tamil Country in driving away the British from India.\(^{48}\) Thus, the whole of Southern Tamil Country came under the British Rule from 1801 which marked the final formation of the Madras Presidency.