CHAPTER -III
SUPPRESSION OF MARAVA POLIGARS

The independent nature and rebellious tendency of Puli Tevar and his allies and his role in uniting the discontented elements against the Nawab, posed a great challenge to the latter. Puli Tevar was not ready to accept the suzerainty of the Nawab of Arcot nor the British. His active cooperation to the central power had disappeared with the end of Pandya’s Rule. On the other hand, the Nawab wanted to establish his central authority over the Tirunelveli Region where the British also wanted to expand their influence. Unable to control the Marava Poligars under Puli Tevar, the Nawab sought the help of the British. The British, who were in financial stringency thanks to the costly European wars, agreed to the Nawab’s plea. They decided to collect *peshkush* from Poligars and adjust it in favour of the Nawab’s debt, popularly called ‘Arcot Debts’.

**British Attention over Tirunelveli**

Among the Marava Poligars of Tirunelveli, Puli Tevar gained a special status thanks to his leadership among Poligars. He strongly believed that he could not accept the overlordship of either the Nawab of Arcot or his representatives, the *amuldars*. He nurtured such an independent spirit not only in himself but also among the Marava Poligars. The Nawab
felt that Puli Tevar was a source of trouble to him in collecting the *circar* revenue and *peshkush*. The leadership provided by Puli Tevar enabled his fellow Poligars to defy the Nawab’s authority. The occurrence of the Carnatic Wars and subsequent defeat of the French provided an opportunity to the British to involve themselves in the Carnatic Affairs. The British realized that the Southern Carnatic region, especially the Tirunelveli region was a fertile region yielding good revenue. Realising the designs of the Nawab and the British, Puli Tevar was determined to provide a formidable resistance. Unable to control the predatory activities of Marava Poligars, the Nawab left the collection of revenue of Tirunelveli to the British authorities. The British began to send military generals to suppress Puli Tevar and his allies. It was very evident that the Tirunelveli Poligars were out of the control of the Nawab. Therefore the Nawab offered the Tirunelveli Region to the British and, the Nawab, in turn, expected the British to help him to quell the Poligars.

The British, on getting the right over the Poligar Region, felt that fight with the native military chieftains was unavoidable. The tussle between the Marava Poligars and the British began in 1751 and it became very severe only from 1755. Puli Tevar, the Poligar of Nercattanseval, resisted the expansion of the British Power as well as the Authority of the Nawab.¹

¹ Pate, H.R., *op.cit.*, p.417
Campaign of Colonel Heron

The British Government at Madras organized the first military attempt in the Poligar Region under the leadership of Captain Cope in 1751. The combined forces of the British and Nawab Mohammed Ali could not suppress the Poligars. As the first attempt ended in failure, George Pigot, the Governor of Madras, sent a powerful detachment to the far south, under Col. Alexander Heron. He attacked the Chieftains of Manaparai. Then the victorious forces moved to Nattam and stormed the Fort of Kovilkudi and massacred the ferocious Kallars. The indiscriminate killing of the inhabitants turned the Kallars against the British. They retaliated and the British suffered considerable loss. Hence the British contingent moved to Tirunelveli.

Before leaving for Tirunelveli, Heron ordered that the Tirunelveli Poligars should forthwith pay all arrears to the Nawab and accept his overlordship. On March 25, 1755, Col. Heron with his army and that of Maphuz Khan, the elder brother of Mohammed Ali, the Nawab of Arcot, arrived in Tirunelveli and threatened the Poligars who did not respond to his first call. The Poligar of Sivagiri remained loyal to the Nawab. However, Puli Tevar, the Poligar of Nercattanseval, raised the banner of

2. Rajayyan K., South Indian Rebellion, op.cit., p.36.
3. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
revolt and refused to acknowledge the overlordship of Nawab nor Col. Heron's mission. Maphuz Khan was ordered to suppress the rebel chief of Nercattanseval. Col. Heron supported the cause of Maphuz Khan against the Poligars and appointed the latter to be the representative of the Nawab in Tirunelveli. In the meantime, Madras Government recalled Col. Heron in accordance with the treaty concluded with the French in 1755, according to which non-interference in Indian politics was imposed on the British. On May 2, 1755, Col. Heron left Tirunelveli in response to the orders of the Madras Government but instead of proceeding directly to Tiruchirappalli, he went to Nercattanseval. Maphuz Khan convinced Col. Heron that the Fort of Puli Tevar was made of mud and very vulnerable. Moreover, Puli Tevar had given asylum to Moodemia and Nabi Khan Kattack, the Pathan chiefs of Madurai who never accepted the Nawab's supremacy. When the British forces arrived, Puli Tevar decided to resist it. It was the misfortune of Col. Heron that he was betrayed by his interpreter. Puli Tevar had earlier received secret information that the

7. Sundararajan.S., *Nooru Aandukalukku Mun Tirunelveli Maavattam*, (Tamil), (Tirunelveli Hundred Years Ago), Chennai, 1985, p.200
10. Three Pathan chiefs were Muhammad Barki (Mianah), Muhammad Mainah (Moodemia) and Nabi Khan Kattack.
British had no battering cannons and that they would not remain long in a state of siege.\(^{11}\)

**Heron in Nercattanseval**

The Fort of Nercattanseval was well built with stone and clay and it stood on a plain. It had no cover near it except a hill. The British troops under Col. Heron encamped near it to batter the fort.\(^{12}\) Heron sent his *vakeel*\(^*\) to the place of Puli Tevar to demand the arrears. When Puli Tevar did not accept the demands, Heron threatened to batter the fort into pieces. Finally, Col. Heron demanded 20,000 Rupees on the spot as a tribute. Puli Tevar replied to the Colonel that he might do as he pleased and that such a huge sum could not be raised and he was determined not to pay even a single rupee.\(^{13}\) Due to lack of cannons, Col. Heron’s attempt to batter the fort failed. Col. Heron’s report on this engagement provided the correct picture of the situation. He wrote, “My information in regard to the strength of the place and force of this Poligar was intolerably bad. Instead of a mud fort and few *colleries*\(^*\) as I was told, we found a very strong fortification. The fort was defended by about 4,000 men and eleven pieces of cannons served by the Dutch. I tried to batter their walls with

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\(^*\) *Vakeel* was a messenger employed for deputation purpose.


\(^*\) The armed retainers of the Poligars are called *colleries*. 
six pounder but found that they had no effect.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore it seemed it was not an easy task to suppress Puli Tevar who was ready to meet any situation of grave danger.\textsuperscript{13}

Robert Orme, who narrates the achievements of Puli Tevar, does not mention the resistance of Puli Tevar and reasons for his success.\textsuperscript{15} The success behind Puli Tevar was due to good command and the support of all the Marava Poligars and a disciplined band of dedicated soldiers. They were fired by the spirit of challenge and they were ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of defending their fort.\textsuperscript{16}

In the course of military expedition, Col. Heron committed another mistake. Induced by handsome presents, he appointed Maphuz Khan as Renter of Tiruneveli without the knowledge of the Madras Government and the Nawab. This was a violation of trust placed on Col. Heron by the British Authority. It was disliked by both the British and the Nawab.\textsuperscript{17} Later Col. Heron was tried by the court martial on charges of bribery and dismissed from service.\textsuperscript{18}

This information prompted Puli Tevar to continue to be rebellious against the Nawab and the British. He was assisted by the Pathan Chiefs

\textsuperscript{14}George Pigot in Council, 27 May 1755, letter, M.C. Vol.5,1755, pp.88-89.
\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{17}Hill, S.C., \textit{op.cit.}, p.38.
\textsuperscript{18}Pate, H.R., \textit{op.cit.}, p.71.
who had been the representatives of Chanda Sahib at Madurai. During the expedition of Col. Heron, these Pathan Chiefs abandoned their rule and took refuge with Puli Tevar.\(^{19}\) After the departure of Col. Heron, once again these Pathan Chiefs commenced their struggle over the regions of Madurai and Tirunelveli which were then held by Maphuz Khan.

The Pollam of Puli Tevar and his fort gave him a good citadel of resistance. Among the Poligars, Puli Tevar was known for his heroic activities in the battlefields. He was determined that at any cost it was his duty to replace the Nawab’s supremacy. He aspired for the rule of either the Pandyas or the Nayaks whom he called Patron Saints of the Poligars. He was well backed by his able generals. His soldiers were well trained in native guerilla warfare methods. As the British troops were not acquainted with this region, their forces faced untold miseries. Hence all the early British military expeditions against Puli Tevar could not succeed. Convinced of the leadership of Puli Tevar, the contenders for the governorship of Madurai and Tirunelveli Regions sought the help of Puli Tevar and accepted his overlordship.

Even Col. Heron was astonished by the activities of Puli Tevar. The imperial forces under Col. Heron could not face the military prowess of Puli Tevar and his forces. With the help of mere native soldiers, Puli

\(^{19}\)Caldwell, R., \textit{op.cit.}, p.97.
Tevar met the mighty British General and resisted the British Administrators. The victory of Puli Tevar and defeat of the British were events of significance in the annals of the rise of Tirunelveli Poligars.

After the victory of Puli Tevar over Col. Heron, the independent activities of the Poligars increased in Tirunelveli. The growing power of Puli Tevar increased the threat to the Nawab and the British. The Nawab urged the British to suppress the power of Puli Tevar. Hence the British adopted the strategy of divide and rule. They realised the strength of Puli Tevar and decided to wean the Eastern Naick Poligars away from the Western Marava Poligars of Tirunelveli. Puli Tevar responded by taking steps to strengthen his position by organizing the Marava Confederacy. All the local chieftains and Marava Poligars whole-heartedly combined and extended their support to Puli Tevar. Thus Puli Tevar was acknowledged as a leader and the responsibilities to protect the interests of the Poligars devolved on him.

**Puli Tevar’s League**

To meet the imminent danger of the British at any time, Puli Tevar, Nabi Khan Kattack and Moodemiah formed an alliance to terminate the Nawab’s Rule over Carnatic. Marthanda Varma, the King of Travancore, also joined the alliance, resenting the annexation of Kalakkad
by the Nawab. The King of Travancore had already acquired Kalakkad and a range of areas extending thirty miles from Kalakkad to Cape Comorin which separated Travancore from Tirunelveli. Heron’s expedition, on behalf of the Nawab challenged the King’s right over Kalakkad. Moodemiah went to Travancore to persuade the King Marthanda Varma to hold on to the Kalakkad Area. When Maphuz Khan came to know about these schemes and preparations, he immediately rushed to Tirunelveli with the British sepoys. Before his arrival, Moodemiah reached Tirunelveli with 2000 Nairs and a number of sepoys. Their forces also joined Puli Tevar near Kalakkad. In the subsequent fierce battle, Maphuz Khan was defeated and 300 of his sepoys were driven away. Their muskets were collected by Puli Tevar’s soldiers and it was regarded as a very valuable trophy. Maphuz Khan continued the attack without any success. After the failure, Maphuz Khan returned to Tirunelveli in order to collect new forces and materials.

At the same time, Puli Tevar, Moodemiah and Nabi Khan Kattack continued their rebel activities. All the Marava Poligars of the west, namely, the Poligars of Uttumalai, Surandai, Talaivankottai, Naduvakurichi, Singampatti,

Urkad, Seithur, Kollankondan and Wadagarai, except the Vannia Marava Poligar of Sivagiri, were with Puli Tevar. Among the Pollams, Wadagarai Pollam was notable for its strategic position. It could offer the facility to communicate directly with Travancore, if the latter turned hostile. The eastern side of the Tirunelveli region was dominated by Kattabomman. Puli Tevar proposed a union between the two groups. But Kattabomman and his dependent, Ettaiyapuram Poligar, refused to accept the offer in order to safeguard their hostages who were in prison at Tiruchirappalli. Both the Poligars of Madurai and the Poligar of Nattam agreed to join the confederacy. Such an extensive confederacy gave new strength to Puli Tevar to pursue his relentless struggle. As Maphuz Khan faced a lot of difficulties in reorganizing his forces, he could not put down the unrest of the Poligars in general and rebel activities of Puli Tevar in particular.

The disunity between the two groups of Poligars helped the central rulers, to some extent, to assert their authority. The Poligars, both Maravas and Naicks, were on opposite camps. Tamil-speaking Maravas and Telugu-speaking Naicks were locked up in rivalry. Kattabomman realized that if he joined the confederacy, his status would be lowered to

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25. Ibid., p.114.
the level of an ordinary chief. Therefore, Kattabomman did not join the League. However, the unity of strength among the Marava Poligars enabled the confederates to commence their activities of plunder and raid in *sircar* territory in Tirunelveli. They even threatened the existence of Maphuz Khan.\(^{28}\)

The Madras Government received the news about the rising power of Puli Tevar. Captain Caillaud of Tiruchirappalli, the Nawab of Arcot and the Governor of Madurai were apprised of the movements of Puli Tevar. The Government of Madras was greatly alarmed at the growing influence of Puli Tevar and decided to send a strong force under the leadership of Khan Sahib.

**March of Khan Sahib**

As per the direction of the Madras Government, Khan Sahib started his march from Tiruchirappalli on March 26, 1756, along with a huge army of 1200 sepoys, 100 *caffrees*, 150 Kallars and four field pieces, with an eighteen pounder managed by Europeans to reach Madurai on May 6, 1756. He also enlisted outside help. Both the Kings of Tanjore and Pudukkottai agreed to assist Khan Sahib.\(^{29}\)

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\(^{28}\) Mapuz Khan letter to Captain Caillaud, M.C.C. 1 January 1756, Vol 5, 1756, p.72

Khan Sahib took the hostages of Panjalamkurichi and Ettaiyapuram along with him. While he reached Madurai, the Thondaiman’s forces joined him on May 10, 1756. He was assisted by two European officers, namely, Faulkner and Lisle who were sent by Captain Caillaud. Barakatulla, the Deputy Governor of Madurai, also sent his forces under Jamal Sahib, the Commandar of the army. The first fort to fall into the hands of Khan Sahib was Srivilliputhur. Then Khan Sahib proceeded across the Nadumandalam which was about thirty kilometres north of Tirunelveli. Maphuz Khan was waiting for the arrival of the victorious forces and later joined them.

The combined armies moved towards Ettaiyapuram, situated about forty eight kilometres to the east of Kayatar. The Poligar of Ettaiyapuram delayed his co-operation while Kattabomman readily co-operated with the British. Both Maphuz Khan and Khan Sahib encamped near Ettaiyapuram and hence the place was called ‘Khansapuram’. Then they captured Kolvarpatti. Khan Sahib returned to Srivilliputhur and encamped there on June 10, 1756. Majority of Poligars of Tirunelveli were threatened by Khan Sahib.

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32. Gurugathasa Pillai, S., *op.cit.*, p.75
Puli Tevar realised that the next target of attack by Khan Sahib would be Nercattanseval. However, he felt that the time was not suitable for him to wage any rash attack on Khan Sahib since the latter’s army was well trained and superior in standard. Indeed the army of Khan Sahib was larger in size than the forces of Poligars. Therefore, Puli Tevar wanted to delay the direct confrontation with Khan Sahib and preferred the diplomatic means. He sent a messenger with a proposal of reconciliation. It symbolised the strategy of Puli Tevar to face the enemy as per the exigency.\textsuperscript{33}

**Rivalry between Khan Sahib and Mudali**

At the same time, the Government of Madras concluded a treaty with Titarappa Mudali, the agent of Nawab of Arcot at Tirunelveli, granting him the right to collect revenue over Tirunelveli, only for a period of three years. He was to meet the expenditure of British troops stationed in Tirunelveli Region. The Madras Government decided that Mudali was a suitable person to collect revenue because he had tremendous influence over the Poligars of Tirunelveli.

In Tirunelveli, Khan Sahib wielded military authority while Titarappa Mudali obtained the control of revenue. This was done to establish British supremacy much against the wishes of Maphuz Khan.

\textsuperscript{33}Rajayyan, K., *Rise and Fall of the Poligars of Tamil Nadu*, Madras, 1975, pp.54-56.
Therefore Maphuz Khan revolted against the representatives of the Nawab and the British. Both Maphuz Khan and Mudali claimed the right of collecting rent and it led to the confrontation between them. Mudali depended upon Khan Sahib for military support during the time of revenue collection. But he did not get any active support from Khan Sahib. Annoyed by this negative support, Mudali refused to meet the expenditure of the British troops. The hostile relations between Khan Sahib and Mudali opened the way for Maphuz Khan to collect revenue independently and act freely.

Further, the inimical relation between Khan Sahib and Mudali led to many unexpected events. The forces of Travancore renewed their incursions into the territory of Kalakkad. Nabi Khan Kattack appeared again, concluded an alliance with Maphuz Khan against the Nawab and disturbed the sircar region. He appealed to Hyder Ali, the able General of Mysore, then at Dindigul and Reza Sahib, the son of Chanda Sahib, for assistance to the cause of rebellion.

Mudali, the amuldar of Tirunelveli, maintained smooth relations with Puli Tevar, Kattabomman and other Poligars of Tirunelveli. He almost followed a policy of appeasement with the Poligars. Puli Tevar and

34 Kadirvel, S., op.cit., p.121.
Kattabomman met Mudali and agreed to co-operate with him in all possible ways.36

On the other hand, Khan Sahib was determined to prevent the activities of Poligars. He wanted to bring them into submission by a show of force. He ordered all the Poligars, who assembled in Tirunelveli in response to the call of Mudali, to withdraw from Tirunelveli. Meanwhile, the dissension between the British sepoys and the Renter, Titarappa Mudali at Tirunelveli, had increased.37 Mudali, by his contract, was only obliged to furnish the payment of the sepoys employed by him. But Khan Sahib argued that Mudali was obliged to meet the expenses of the whole forces wherever employed. To end the dispute, Mohammed Ali, the Nawab of Arcot, wrote letters to Setupati of Ramnad, Tondaiman of Pudukkottai, Puli Tevar and Kattabomman of Tirunelveli and requested their support to Mudali in collecting the money and settling the problems of the region.38

Renewal of Rebel Activities

In the meantime, Puli Tevar met Nabi Khan Kattack and offered his assistance, both men and money. They made a united call to Kattabomman to join their league but the latter refused to join the League.

36.Caldwell, R., op.cit., p.111
38.Caldwell, R., op.cit., p.112.
Barakatulla, the Deputy Governor of Madurai, now joined Puli Tevar and Nabi Khan Kattack. The whole force assembled about sixty kilometers to the south of Madurai and instead of proceeding directly to the south, marched to the east into the areas of Kattabomman. The whole force, numbering 10,000 men, of whom 1000 were horsemen, defeated the forces of Naick Poligars. This was done to prevent the Eastern Bloc from assisting Khan Sahib against the Poligar League.

At this juncture, the British were anxious to bring Madurai under their control in order to prevent the French intervention in support of the rebel Poligars. Pigot, the Governor of Madras, enlisted the support of the Nawab to regain the support of Maphuz Khan. At his request, Captain Caillaud sent his emissaries, Ram Narayan and William Rambold, to Madurai in September 1756 for negotiating a settlement. 39

The combined anti-British forces marched to Tirunelveli and remained there for two days, and plundered sircar territory. Khan Sahib, for sometime, could not understand the design of the Poligars in the south. At last, he heard the news after four days of their movement. Immediately he started his march towards Tirunelveli from Madurai. The two hostile forces met on December 1, 1756 at Gangaikondan, about twenty kilometres north of Tirunelveli. The inferior number of Khan Sahib’s army was more than compensated by superior

skill. The British sepoys faced the enemy on every side with advantageous situation and discipline. The field pieces were fired with precision against the confederates till they ran away from the contest and the field. The Poligars fled away to the forest and Barakatulla returned to Madurai. Nabi Khan Kattack settled at Srivilliputhur. Mean while, Titarappa Mudali sent one of his relatives, Alagappa Mudali, to negotiate with Puli Tevar and agreed to offer some areas for cementing the alliance.

Puli Tevar sent an agent, with Alagappa Mudali to the camp of Srivilliputhur. At the same time, he sent his troops to join Barakatulla and Nabi Khan Kattack. The agent was accompanied by two to three hundred colleries under the pretext of doing honour to the court of Khan Sahib. But Khan Sahib entirely disapproved of this diplomatic move because he anticipated Puli Tevar’s clever strategy. As Khan Sahib anticipated, Puli Tevar’s men were plundering the western part of Tirunelveli. Five of Puli Tevar’s men were taken into custody by Khan Sahib who branded them as thieves and immediately sentenced them to death. They were blown off from the mouth of a cannon, a sanguinary execution. The agent of Puli Tevar and his colleries immediately ran away from the camp.

The Confederacy, organised by the Poligars under the leadership of Puli Tevar frequently involved themselves in plundering sircar territory. The

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political circumstances and monarchical weakness of the imperial authority further induced the Confederates to play a vital role in the Carnatic Politics. Puli Tevar and his men wanted to install their friends in the Madurai Kingdom and hence they supported the cause of the Pathan Chiefs in Madurai. The growing politics in Madurai and Tirunelveli challenged the authority of Nawab Mohammed Ali. In the meantime, the appointment of Khan Sahib as the Commander and Titarappa Mudali as the Renter of Tirunelveli provoked Maphuz Khan, the brother of the Nawab, to become a rebel. The rebellious Maphuz Khan sought the help of Puli Tevar who did not miss this chance because he wanted to dominate Tirunelveli Region in the name of Maphuz Khan.

The oppressive measures of Khan Sahib once again forced Puli Tevar to take to arms and prepare to fight. The presence of Maphuz Khan provided a new boost to Puli Tevar. Taking advantage of Mysorean forces in Madurai, Puli Tevar plundered the sircar territory. He even expected the arrival of Hyder Ali in the Tirunelveli Region. He received support from the French also. It further strengthened the position of Puli Tevar against Khan Sahib. Hence Khan Sahib was unable to control Puli Tevar because he had to face the invasion of Hyder in the north. The unsettled position of Khan Sahib in Tirunelveli provided Puli Tevar a favourable situation to continue anti-British activities.
In spite of his defeat at Gangaikondan, Puli Tevar conceived a new strategy. He realised that the ill-equipped forces of the Poligars was not a match to the equipped and modernised forces of the British. Hence he decided to have an alliance with Hyder Ali and the French. To win a valuable alliance, Puli Tevar proposed to pay five lakhs of rupees to Hyder Ali.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{Asylum at Nercattanseval}

Maphuz Khan, who disagreed with the Nawab Mohammed Ali, was planning to assert his claim over Tirunelveli. Hence he ceded Wallachinatham, Taravadin and Terampore, the places situated near Madurai, to the Pathan Chiefs in return for their military service and financial aid. He permitted Kattabomman to occupy \textit{sircar}'s villages adjoining Panjalamkurichi, and the King of Travancore to annex Kalakkad. In January 1757, Maphuz Khan proceeded to Nercattanseval, the principal base of rebel operations in Tirunelveli. A few days later, Barakatulla and Nabi Khan Kattack came with 500 horses to Puli Tevar's palace. Puli Tevar and Maphuz Khan, along with Barakatulla and Nabi Khan Kattack, mobilized forces against the British. Sensing great danger,

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., pp.122-123.
the Madras Governor warned the Poligars of Nercattanseval and Panjalamkurichi and the King of Travancore.  

Activities of the Rebels

To tackle the activities of rebels at Alwarkurichi, a place about thirty five kilometres to the western side of Tirunelveli, Mudali kept three pieces of cannon and placed 150 hired sepoys under the command of his nephew, Alagappa Mudali. But Puli Tevar and his companies attacked the fort and captured it in January 1757. Alagappa Mudali became a prisoner at Nercattanseval. To block the rebels, Khan Sahib advanced from Srivilliputhur but did not succeed. The Poligar of Vadagarai occupied Kadayanallur, Tenkasi and a part of Sankarankoil. The King of Travancore annexed Valliyur. With the spread of rebellion, the major part of Tirunelveli passed under the control of Puli Tevar and Maphuz Khan.

Khan Sahib, as a counter move to the rebellious activities of Puli Tevar group, formed an alliance with the Poligars of Sivagiri and Seithur. He was determined that Puli Tevar and Maphuz Khan must be suppressed before they could get any reinforcement from the French. The Poligars of Sivagiri and Seithur sent their soldiers to join Khan Sahib’s forces. Khan Sahib marched towards Tirunelveli and reached it on March 5, 1757.

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fierce battle took place on the following day. Khan Sahib inflicted defeat upon Puli Tevar. Puli Tevar lost two of his able generals and Chinna Tevar. The Wadagarai Poligar lost one of his legs. By this victory, Khan Sahib captured Singampatti Pollam. This arrested the progressive movement of the Confederates. At that time, the news of the capture of Madurai by Maphuz Khan compelled Khan Sahib to go to Madurai and lay siege to the fort. Although Khan Sahib was a good general, he could not control Puli Tevar’s activities because of the latter’s diplomatic move. The Confederate’s army was able to launch an attack on two fronts whereas Khan Sahib did not have sufficient force to meet his enemies at two fronts.

Campaign of Caillaud

On March 17, 1757, Caillaud, the British General, with his force reached Tirunelveli where he was joined by Khan Sahib and Titarappa Mudali. Caillaud spent a few days at Tirunelveli. He regulated the affairs of Tirunelveli but failed to drive away the rebels from their key posts at Uththumalai and Wadagarai. Puli Tevar and Barakatulla persuaded Hyder Ali to rush his troops to their rescue. Mudali, in turn, urged Caillaud first to suppress the rebellion of Puli Tevar and then to

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46. Ibid., p.178.
47. Kadhirvel, S., op.cit., p.165.
49. Rajayyan, K., History of Madurai, op.cit., p.179.
take up other matters. At that point of time, Puli Tevar seemed a formidable rebel leader. But Capt. Caillaud decided to march first to Madurai and take it and then proceed to tackle Puli Tevar. Capt. Caillaud left for Madurai with an army on April 11, 1757. With Khan Sahib, Capt. Caillaud encamped near Madurai on April 25. On April 29, 1757, the assault on Madurai progressed according to the plan but the rebels rained a shower of arrows, stones, lancers and fire arms on the intruders. Hence the troops of Caillaud retreated. The attempt of Caillaud thus failed. Soon afterwards, Caillaud marched towards Tiruchirappalli for the defence of the city against a possible French invasion.  

The Madras Government decided to send back Capt. Caillaud to take Madurai Fort. Accordingly Captain Caillaud returned to Madurai to resume the steps to take over the fort in August 1757. Khan Sahib persuaded several chiefs to render help. The Poligars of Ramnad, Sivagangai, Panjalamkurichi, Sivagiri, Seithur and Ettaiyapuram joined the British troops. Kattabomman served with 1000 troops. The combined forces encamped and threatened the Deputy Governor, Barakkatulla. But at this critical juncture, Barakatulla did not get any aid either from Tirunelveli or from Hyder Ali. Frustrated by these disappointments, he agreed to surrender the Fort of Madurai if the British paid twelve lakhs of

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50 George Pigot in Council, 1 September 1757, letter, M.C., Vol. 7, 1757, p.36.
rupees. Therefore, Capt. Caillaud, entered into a settlement with him by agreeing to pay him Rupees 1,70,000. On September 8, 1757, the rebels evacuated Madurai and it was taken over by Caillaud.

Rebel Activities

By the end of November 1757, Khan Sahib marched towards Tirunelveli and recaptured Papankulam, Alwarkurichi and Brahamodesam. Before he could complete his conquests, his presence was required at Madurai because of the advancement of Hyder’s forces. When Khan Sahib left Tirunelveli, Puli Tevar renewed his incursions. All his Marava allies also were involved in plunder. The notable among them were Sivananja Tevar of Wadagarai, Subbayya Tevar of Naduvakurichi, Kuthala Tevar of Surandai and Saravana Tevar of Kurukkalpatti. Puli Tevar, with a view to punishing the Maravas who had joined the British camp, attacked Uttumalai and Seithur.

Capt. Caillaud personally convinced the Madras Government that the rebel activities would never cease nor any revenue be collected until Maphuz Khan was in alliance with Puli Tevar and other Poligars in the Tirunelveli Region. It was proposed to the Nawab that Maphuz Khan should be assured of receiving an annual pension sufficient for his life

51. Ibid.
maintenance. The Nawab approved the proposal and sent a representative to contact Maphuz Khan.\(^{53}\)

The representative of the Nawab arrived at Nercattanseval on February 28, 1758 and found that Maphuz Khan did not relinquish his claim over Tirunelveli. Maphuz Khan answered to the agent that “the Nawab of Arcot is a very sensible man and I am his well wisher; if the countries of Tirunelveli and Madurai are conferred upon me, I shall remit something to the British and the Nawab will receive something.” Thus the negotiation ended in failure.

With the arrival of Count-de-Lally in Pondicherry in 1758, the Anglo-French conflict in the Carnatic was renewed.\(^{54}\) In June 1758, Khan Sahib was asked to defend Tiruchirappalli from the French and he moved his forces from Tirunelveli. Puli Tevar exploited his absence and reoccupied Tirunelveli on July 28, 1758. Subsequently Puli Tevar was entrusted with the task of choosing a suitable candidate acceptable to all the Confederates.

Puli Tevar had chosen Maphuz Khan due to a number of factors. At that time, the British and Nawab were trying to win over Maphuz Khan. Moreover, Maphuz Khan had contacts with the French in

\(^{53}\)Caldwell, R., *op.cit.*, p.116

Pondicherry and it would be an easier task to obtain French help with Maphuz Khan. Moreover, he being a Muslim, might be in a better position to deal with Hyder Ali. Therefore, Puli Tevar decided to make Maphuz Khan the ruler of Tirunelveli. Above all, he was the elder brother of the Nawab of Carnatic, an outstanding and well-known personality in those days. On July 28, he was coronated in the Tirunelveli Town and the plundering activity in the Tirunelveli Region continued under the protection of Puli Tevar.\(^{55}\)

Maphuz Khan appreciated his relationship with Puli Tevar who had unassailable command over the Marava Poligars. No wonder their alliance continued. They once again took possession of Palayamkottai. Puli Tevar constructed a separate residence for Maphuz Khan and provided him with all facilities. It was told that a mosque was also constructed for his worship near Nercattanseval. Maphuz Khan remained with Puli Tevar and styled himself as the 'Governor of Tirunelveli.'\(^{56}\)

When Maphuz Khan joined Puli Tevar, Mohammed Ali, the Nawab of Arcot, sought the counsel of the British Government. To weaken the position of Puli Tevar, the British wanted to appoint a capable person as Governor in the Madurai and Tirunelveli Regions. They took away the


rentership from Maphuz Khan and placed Khan Sahib in his place. It led
to a direct confrontation between Puli Tevar and Khan Sahib.

**Khan Sahib As Governor**

In May 1759, the Madras Government, with the approval of
Nawab, sent Khan Sahib back to Madurai as ‘Governor of Madurai and
Tirunelveli Regions’ for a period of one year. The Governor of Madras
asked Khan Sahib to get friendly relations with Puli Tevar and if it was
not possible, to subdue him. As there was no problem in Madurai, he
decided to move to Tirunelveli. The rebel activities of Maphuz Khan and
Puli Tevar rose to the highest pitch. In an encounter, a British subedar
was wounded and several of British soldiers were killed. The Madras
Government now directed Khan Sahib to carry on war with Puli Tevar.
However, it was felt that the forces of Khan Sahib were inadequate to deal
with Puli Tevar and the British requested the King of Tanjore and
Tondaiman of Pudukkottai to send their troops to assist Khan Sahib.\(^57\)

Puli Tevar maintained alliance with Maphuz Khan for tactical
reasons. The period of negotiation between the British and Maphuz Khan
was utilized by Puli Tevar to prepare the ground for the final clash with
the British. Maphuz Khan, in due course, also realized that Puli Tevar was

\(^{57}\) Yusuf Khan, 30 March 1759, letter to George Pigot, M.C.C., Vol. 7, 1759,
pp.52-59.
keeping him only to serve his purpose of rebellion against the British. Maphuz Khan was almost a puppet in the hands of Puli Tevar. Therefore he wanted to quit Puli Tevar’s camp and sought the help of Khan Sahib. Immediately, Khan Sahib used this opportunity and won over Maphuz Khan by granting him a Jaghir and Maphuz Khan took up his residence in Madras.\(^{58}\)

**Victory of Puli Tevar**

In the meantime, Khan Sahib found, on his return, that all the territories extending from Nattam to the walls of Travancore were again occupied by Puli Tevar and his Confederates. Only a few strongholds like Madurai and Palayamkottai were under the British troops. Khan Sahib launched a simultaneous offensive against the Naick as well as the Marava Poligars of Tirunelveli on July 2, 1759.\(^{59}\) He attacked and captured Ettaiyapuram and Kolvarpatti Pollams. In the western side, he captured the forts of Uttumalai and Surandai by night. The war dragged on. Puli Tevar, being too powerful, over-powered the troops of the British. As a result, British soldiers fled away by throwing the muskets and the guns from their hands. Thus the steps taken by the British to punish Puli Tevar, again ended in failure. Khan Sahib wondered at the


Sh activity of the Marava Poligars and exclaimed. "It is inhabited
more by devils than men." Khan Sahib wanted one thousand musketeers
for increasing the strength of Puli Tevar. The Governor of Madras
expressed his surprise regarding the power of Puli Tevar even after the
exit of Maphuz Khan. The power and strength of Puli Tevar and his
Confederates alarmed the Nawab and the British. 60

Division in Puli Tevar Camp

The King of Travancore considered Puli Tevar as the Leader of
Confederates with the exit of Maphuz Khan. At that time, there was a
dispute between the King of Travancore and the Poligar of Wadagarai
regarding the possession of the fertile village of Ilangi. Rama Varma, who
succeeded Marthanda Varma to the throne of Travancore, expected the
Confederates to accept him and his decisions in view of his large
territorial possessions. Under these circumstances, he sent his troops to
take over the territory of Ilangi but the Poligar forces stopped him and
repulsed his forces. This triggered a rift between Travancore and Poligars.

Rama Varma, the King of Travancore, was enraged and he wanted Puli
Tevar to take the initiative and punish the Poligar of Wadagarai. But the King
did not appreciate Puli Tevar's indifference. The King was annoyed that Puli

60. Yusuf Khan, 25 August 1759, letter to the George Pigot, M.C.C., Vol. 7,
1759, pp.212-222
Thevar, the Leader of the Confederation did not intervene on his behalf. This opportunity was seized by Khan Sahib to negotiate afresh the terms of friendship and mutual assistance with the King of Travancore. The Madras Government, in an earlier dispatch, authorised Khan Sahib to enter into an alliance with the King of Travancore through liberal concessions. Khan Sahib was ready to offer anything to the King. 61 This was a very significant diplomatic move of Khan Sahib to weaken the Confederate strength of Puli Tevar. Negotiations with the King of Travancore were finalised at the end of August 1759.

**Attack on Wadagarai**

The King of Travancore, with considerable forces in conjunction with Khan Sahib, marched against Puli Tevar and the Poligar of Wadagarai on September 23, 1759. Khan Sahib marched from Tirunelveli with his whole force against Wadagarai, thirty-two kilometres beyond Nercattanseval. At Shencottai, he was joined by the Travancore Army of 10,000 strong infantry who marched through the Shencottai Pass. 62 This was perhaps the greatest force that had been ever assembled for some centuries in this region. Wadagarai could defend itself only for a day. About 100 men were killed and wounded on both sides. But in the night, the fort was abandoned and the Poligar escaped to Nercattanseval.

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Diplomacy of Puli Tevar

The unexpected defeat of Wadagarai Poligar compelled Puli Tevar to act fast. He employed his diplomatic skill to defuse the crisis. The initial repulse of the British troops at the battle of Wandiwash on September 30, 1759 was flashed throughout the Tamil Country. The letters from Bassault K. Jung, the Governor of Pondicherry, to the rebel leaders made them to believe that they could very soon defeat the British in Tirunelveli and the Nawab in Carnatic. Puli Tevar communicated these correspondences and his expectations to the King of Travancore. Puli Tevar informed him that if he would quit the British and join him again, he could get whatsoever territory in the Tirunelveli Region which he might be liked advantageous to him. The King immediately exposed this matter to Khan Sahib and asked him to cease war and cede Kalakkad and the adjacent places. Khan Sahib was informed that the eighteen pounders with 500 muskets, which had been sent according to his request from Madras, were lost at sea and that the two pounders were stopped by the Dutch agents at Tuticorin. The mishap added greater weight to the King's arguments and enhanced the value of his assistance. The forces of Khan Sahib were not sufficient to reduce Puli Tevar whom all the best

63. Ramachandra Nair, K.K., Shungoony Menon's History of Travancore, Cochin, 1983, pp.119-120.
64. Robert Orme, op.cit., p.566
colleries in the region were flocking to defend. Khan Sahib, therefore, readily surrendered the territory of Kalakkad which the King demanded. However, the Madras Government remained determined to suppress and punish Puli Tevar at any cost in order to establish peace in Tirunelveli.

**Clash at Vasudevanallur**

As soon as the agreement was signed, the Travancore troops joined Khan Sahib’s troops. On November 6, 1759, they stormed the forest and fort of Easal Tevar who was one of the supporters of Puli Tevar. The colleries defended the fort for three days and then abandoned the fort and retired to Nercattanseval on November 8, 1759. Soon after this victory, more forces from Anjengo in Travancore and from Ramnad and Sivagangai joined Khan Sahib. On December 22, 1759, the combined forces began the siege of the fort at Vasudevanallur. On December 27, 1759, Khan Sahib’s forces launched a vigorous attack. When the attack was in progress, Puli Tevar with 3,000 men from Nercattanseval gallantly fell upon the attackers.\(^{65}\) Khan Sahib instantly despatched a large body to repulse Puli Tevar and his men and continued the assault. But the garrison within the fort received encouragement from Puli Tevar’s success, which was announced to them by the usual war cry and the sounding of their conches. Two hundred men of Khan Sahib and of the

King of Travancore were killed. The Travancore forces retreated through the passes of Shencottai. Khan Sahib was compelled to retreat with his own troops and those spared by Tondaiman of Pudukkottai and the Poligars of Tirunelveli. At this critical time, a heavy cannon of the British regiment burst accidentally and the war materials in Khan Sahib’s camp were destroyed. This tragedy in Khan Sahib’s camp was exploited by Puli Tevar and he defeated the forces of Khan Sahib and Rama Varma of Travancore. This impressive victory was entirely due to the sheer gallantry of the Puli Tevar who was helped by the accident in Khan Sahib’s camp. Thus the combined attack launched to suppress Puli Tevar ended in fiasco.

Puli Tevar’s tremendous victory was due to the determination and valour shown by his dedicated soldiers as well as their sense of devotion and sacrifice. Donald Campbell rightly observed “they were as superior to the other natives of the Carnatic as the best Europeans that ever were in the East Indies.” The retirement of Khan Sahib after his futile attempt to storm the Vasudevanallur Fort resulted in a lull for a period. The news of this failure of the British reached Madras on January 28, 1760.

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However, Puli Tevar was left with depleted strength of forces. The King of Travancore, the Poligars of Seithur, Uttumalai and Surandai had gone over to the opposite camp while Maphuz Khan had retired from the scene. His only hope was Hyder Ali and the French. The latter promised that they would distract the attention of the Nawab and the British by raising disturbances in the Nawab's territory. But Hyder Ali could not create the disturbances due to the crucial developments in Mysore. The King of Mysore, in order to punish Hyder Ali, the rebel commandant, joined the British and fell upon him.69

The defeat at Vasudevanallur was undoubtedly a serious reverse to the authority of the Nawab as well as to the prestige of the British. Khan Sahib continued to maintain an effective sway all over Tirunelveli, excluding the Marava Pollams which remained independent thanks to the presence of Puli Tevar.70

**Final Clash**

The defeat at Vasudevanallur compelled Khan Sahib to gather more strength. He commissioned bigger guns and won over some more allies of Puli Tevar by gifts and concessions. The King of Ramnad and Travancore sent more troops to strengthen the hands of Khan Sahib. With all these advantages, Khan Sahib did not venture to attack Puli Tevar

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because he waited for the big guns and ammunition from Tiruchirappalli, besides those from Anjengo and Nagapatnam. Puli Tevar’s rebel activities against the Nawab and the British still continued. In this connection, Khan Sahib wrote to the Governor of Madras thus, “I desire you will be pleased to supply me with great guns and that I may punish Puli Tevar in a regular manner, then this country will remain in safety.”

Khan Sahib sent Venkatachalam, the *dubash*, in order to inform the Governor of certain matters and occurrences in Tirunelveli. In his letter, he remarked, “It is impossible to punish Puli Tevar without having some great guns and in order to punish him I have posted guards in different places and kept my whole army on that side.” But these efforts did not deter the Poligars under Puli Tevar from continuously harassing the guards of the British. Khan Sahib gained the loyalty of 2,000 peons of the Poligars and entered into an agreement with them. According to the agreement, they were promised regular service under the British rule to come. The regular fighting was going on until the end of May 1760.

On September 26, 1760, Khan Sahib received the big guns he had requested and on the same day, he set out to punish Puli Tevar. The

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sardars, four in number and some colleries of Puli Tevar, were killed when they launched an attack against Khan Sahib’s troops. Some men were wounded and killed on both sides. In October 1760, once again Khan Sahib marched from Tirunelveli to punish Puli Tevar and halted at Uttumalai to regroup the forces. Puli Tevar sent his forces to check the advance of Khan Sahib. Both of them met at Andanallur and after five days of continuous fighting, the fort was captured by Khan Sahib. This was the first of victory by Khan Sahib.

**Fall of Nercattanseval**

The Poligar of Sivagiri remained loyal to the Nawab of Arcot and supplied forces to Khan Sahib against Puli Tevar. Amidst this background of support, Khan Sahib was waiting for the arrival of the eighteen pounder guns to attack Nercattanseval Fort. As soon as they arrived, he started his mission on March 21, 1761. But the eighteen pounders failed to produce the expected result. The siege continued till May 16, 1761, when the three major forts of Puli Tevar, namely, Nercattanseval, Vasudevanallur and Paniyur fell into the hands of Khan Sahib. Puli Tevar, unable to withstand the ordeal and to obtain reinforcements, gave up the battle on May 1761. But he was able to escape to Kadaladi, the Marava Settlement. As a matter of fact, the victory over Puli Tevar was accomplished by Khan Sahib only

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with the help of Sivagiri and Naick Poligars. The other allies of Puli Tevar did not surrender immediately. They continued their fight against Khan Sahib. But Khan Sahib was able to demolish many of the forts of the Marava Chieftains of Singampatti, Nattampattil etc. Thus the British Power was partially expanded in the Western part of Tirunelveli Region.

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