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From The Past To The Present: A Brief Outline Of The Economic History Of Thoothukudi District

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Introduction

Thoothukudi is an important town in the state of Tamil Nadu. Historically it formed part of the Pearl Fishery Coast that attracted traders from all over the world. But even before the idea of Pearl fishing could evolve human existence and their economic activities were found in areas like Adichanallur which has emerged as a controversial archaeological site in the recent past. Some historians who researched in the mid-twentieth century were of the opinion that the first human species were found in this region. But subsequently with the finding of other evidence the credit was shifted. Moreover, the body of ancient Tamil literature called Sangam poems does not make any mention of Adichanallur although it seems to be the largest archaeological site so far excavated. But even here archaeological study has not been completely done and mysteries continue to exist. In the context of 'neglect of Keezhadi,' interested public have made appeals to carry out further archaeological research in the area. Notwithstanding all these, Thoothukudi has gone through various phases of economic life which the present **article** seeks to explore.

From the ancient to the modern through the medieval periods Thoothukudi region has been economically vibrant except for some stray gaps. Contextually, the name Thoothukudi is understood as 'thoothu' meaning sweep and 'kudi' meaning consume which give the combined meaning of 'could consume food at the least by sweeping the floor' only to say that nobody will starve if taken abode in Thoothukudi. The present study seeks to examine the economic history of the district from the beginning. The study has been divided into ancient, medieval and modern. Since the topic is broad, the method of the study attempts to discuss the macro-level developments than others.

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Ancient Period

Thoothukudi has been a very unique place from time immemorial. Its soil is highly diverse and includes black, red and other types contributing for the crop diversity. The climate with high temperature, humidity, and moderate rainfall had made the region rough and hard. Rivers like Tamiraparani, Vembar, Vaippar, and other rivulets supplied water not only for drinking but also for agriculture. There were regions which remained dry throughout the year whereas some other parts remained fertile where such as hunter-gatherers could survive. Thus human activity in the region was evidenced from the Paleolithic period which has been very witnessed by Robert Brucefoot through the tools used during the period. Nevertheless, earliest activities of human beings were found in the Teri (red fossilized sand dune) region between Tiruchendur and Tisaiyanvilai.

The microliths belonging to the Mesolithic period suggest constant movement of early being in the region. Moreover, these tools confirm the subsistence economy based chiefly on hunting and gathering. Available evidence such as flakes and large core tools also point to the gradual shift from the Mesolithic period to the Neolithic period. Importantly, nowhere in the Teri region do we find macroliths. However, a relationship with Sri Lanka traceable through similarity of tools of the same time period evokes scope for hypothesizing the possibility of cultural ties from the prehistoric period.

The early Iron Age period[*] – archaeologically mentioned as the megalithic period – is important in the context of historical geography pertaining to the Thoothukudi and the surrounding region. The North-East monsoon wind played a key-role in conditioning the cultural setting of the area. Since Sri Lanka stood as a natural barrier the ferociousness of the wind is controlled and the damage caused by cyclone in regions North of Negapattinam was not experienced in Thoothukudi. Moreover, the shallowness of the sea water in the Gulf of Korkai – renamed as Gulf of Mannar in modern cartography – did not support deluge as experienced in Puhar. It was chiefly responsible

[*] P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1995)

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for the rainfall in the region which was normally expected to fill the ponds spread across the region. The catchment area was located in the Western Ghats were the low lying area taps the excess rainwater that fell in the Kerala region. The forest developed around this catchment area was known for its eco-diversity and variety of flora and fauna. In fact it was said that the river that started from the hills was wider in ancient times to the extent of supporting transportation by boats. The forest also supplied raw materials – strong wood – for the manufacture of boats and ships. However, the wind was suitable for transporting huge quantum of materials via sea only during seasons. In the remaining period land routes were extensively used and human activity from the coast extended into the hinterland containing agricultural tracts.

Evidence suggests the higher role played by the river Tamirabarani in shaping the socio-cultural life of the people.[†] The confluence of the river at the place of its – Punnaikayal – submergence with sea could not be compared with huge rivers. Yet it not only formed backwaters – called Kayals and locally called Manjalnirkayal, Pazhayakayal, and Punnaikayal – and lagoons but also enriched the regions around and contributed for the crop diversity.[‡] At the earliest time, it was the chief source of drinking water based on which human beings controlled their movement. Subsequently, various stages of agriculture developed and storing of the surplus produce became common for which pots were used. Pottery attained perfection with the use of fire and the Black and Red Ware was found widely spread.

The chief feature of the megalithic period of Tirunelveli-Thoothukudi belt archaeologically categorized as fourth and last zone is 'urn burials.' Usually, 'urn burials' elsewhere were associated with the internment of dead bodies. To its contrast, in this region it had a different connotation what has been explained with an economic connotation. As such, it had been said that with age people grew thin, become pale and extraordinarily short and hardly contribute for the sustenance of the economy.

[†] P. Balakrishnan, *"Neydal Nila Makkalin Valzviyal – Oru Aiyvu"* (Tamil), Unpublished M. Phil dissertation submitted to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, 2005, p. 24
[‡] For example, Athoor emerged as a famous area for the cultivation of betel leaves

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[§]Maintaining of such people become a difficulty, and therefore, it was generally preferred to place them in urns that appeared proportionate to the height and width of the aged person along with some food and utensils followed by burial in the ground. Places like Adichanallur and Korkai provide abundant evidence for this practice to have taken place. But at the same period there had been the method of cremating dead people only to show the plural methods of disposing the unwanted human bodies. Adichallur in any case is also important to have provided one of the earliest evidence for Tamil Brahmi script, pot shreds with appealing motifs, and a holding a living space with reasonable commercial activities taking place on a day-to-day basis. However, more information pertaining to the past have to be revealed through further archaeological excavations.

Korkai was also politically important as it maintains the tradition of the three Tamil kings – Pandya, Chera, and Chola – to have originated from a common ancestry at Korkai[**]and owing to a dispute the Cheras and Cholas left the region. A place by name 'Mukkaani'[††] is said to be the centre where the three kings met and divided the combined revenue. Its cultural importance is traceable from the pottery which holds range of information from graffiti to Tamil Brahmi. The Ahananuru mentions a Pandyan ruler by name Vazhuthi who was associated with beautiful chariots.[‡‡] Usually Korkai was assigned with the status of the second capital next to Madurai and was also believed that the crown prince was stationed there owing to its economic importance. Another aspect inferable from the lines of Ahananuru is the importance attached to the art of chariot-making comparable with the Vedic life wherein carpenters were allowed to wear the sacred threads. Maduraikkanji mentions about Nedunchezhiyan as the 'war chief of the Parathavars living in the south' and also 'Lord of Korkai.' Vetrivel Cheziyan is another

[§] Pushparani, C. "*Sangakala Panpaadu*" (Tamil), Unpublished M. Phil. dissertation submitted to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, 2005, p. 61.
[**]W. Robert Caldwell, *History of Tinnevelly*, (Madras: , 1881) p. 12.
[††] H.R. Pate, *Tinnevelly District Gazetteer (1916),* (Tirunelveli: Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, 1993) p. 40
[‡‡] Ahananuru: 130

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name of a Pandyan king in whose name the local goddess was also named – Vetrivel Cheziyanangai.[§§]

War had been part of the basic character of the people particularly during occasions of famine. Chieftains – mentioned as kizhars – below the monarch invaded the neighbouring territory and captured their wealth including cattle. Early literary and epigraphic evidence make mention of this as 'viduthozhil.' One reason for the crown prince being stationed at Korkai could be because of the reason that these invasions had the chance of hindering the trade activities. Trade was important to support other economic activities.[***]At the lowest level there were fishermen who produced surplus in the form of dry-fish which reached the humble segment inhabiting the agrarian land. Alongside that salt was produced and the Sangam literature mentions about salt being bartered for other commodities produced in the fertile lands. At the highest level, there were the traders who were powerfully organized into guilds. There were ships of higher tonnage as also the Tonis which were utilized for trading in short distance.

The importance of trade can be realized through the record of Strabo wherein evidence depict a Pandyan embassy reaching the court of Augustus Caesar. No doubt, the mission of the embassy was only to increase and improve the trade relationship. Nevertheless, notable is the special interest of the Pandyan kings in that front. These Pandyan kings had the potential to develop a navy.[†††] But unlike the Cholas the Pandyans did not foresee a threat from the sea at the least in the earliest times.

Medieval Period

The beginning of the medieval period tended to change the existing political dynamic in the region. The smooth relationship with Ceylon was put to an end by the

[§§] S. Ramachandran, *Korkai Varalatril Sila Pudhiya Seidhigal* (Tamil), Archaeological Report of Curator, Korkai in manuscript dated 13-06-2000 sent to the head quarters, p. 1; in this report the officer has mentions temple belonging to the 13th century wherein Goddess Vetriver Chezhiyanangai identical with Parvathi is venerated.

[***] *See* R. Champakalakshmi, Trade, Ideology and Urbanisation: South India 300 B.C. to A.D. 1300 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996)

[†††] *See* Clarence Thomas Maloney, *The Effect of Early Coastal Sea Traffic on the Development of Civilization in South India,* Unpublished Ph. D. thesis submitted in the Dept. of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania in 1968

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later rulers of the First Pandyan Empire. The Pandyan monarch Srimara Srivallabha (815-862 CE) invaded Ceylon and historians guess that he started his venture by consolidating his strength at the port of Korkai. The Parathavar people who had the control of the Pearl Fishing and Chank diving enterprise at their command as also the overseas trade and mentioned in foreign notices as desperados[‡‡‡] constituted the main ranks and files of the navy. By this time, the Bhakti Movement was at its peak and it is easily guessable that King Srim,ara Srivallabha was a Vaishnavite and had a natural prejudice upon the followers of the heterodox sects. Possibly, Ceylon which had emerged as a Buddhist hub could have religiously motivated the invasion. However, the Sinhalese ambition of having a complete control over the Pearl Fishery could not also be ruled out. Temples like Srivaikuntam, Alwarthirunagari, and etc with Viashnava faith strongly emerged only to bypass the already existing powerful cult of Murugan in the region which had found expression in rudimentary form in places like Tiruchendur.

War became an unending phenomenon devastating the lives of the humble people and also spoiling the economic growth in the region. The emergence of the Imperial Cholas kept the Pandyan kings constantly in their heels. Parantaka Chola invaded the region and was able to briefly establish his control only to be repelled by Vira Pandya who assumed the title 'Cholan Thalaikonda Vira Panndyan.' But again Rajendra Chola I made inroads in to the region and he did not require much energy to establish his paramount power. In his view the taking over of the region was a complete and permanent phenomenon. Therefore, he appointed his son as the viceroy of the region with the honorific title 'Sadayavarman Sundara Chola Pandyan.' The present day Kovilpatti region formed the Surankudinadu whereas the Tiruchendur and Srivaikuntam regions formed the Amitaguna Valanadu under the 'Chola Pandyas.' Interestingly, the monarchs from Chola lineage of this particular time demonstrated their spirit of tolerance for they unlike in Thanjavur region patronized Vaishnavite faith in large scale. The Pandyans did not give up their attempt to reclaim their lost territory.[§§§] But it backfired. The Chola king

[‡‡‡] *The Travels of Marco Polo*, p. 293.
[§§§] T.V. Sadasiva Pandarathar**,** *Pandyar Varalaru*, (Chennai: Nam Thamilar Pathipagam, 2007) pp. 72-80; he informs about the restless condition that marked the period from the ninth century A.D. to the thirteenth

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Kulottunga I defeated the consortium formed by five Pandyas and put to end the vice-regal system and brought the region under direct rule. Thereafter, Saiva tradition was patronized and temples were established in Maranmangalam, Korkai, and Thingalur.

The son of Kulothunga I, Pillayar Sundara Pandyan seemed to have made serious attempts to appease the local population. Although a place by name Cholapuram was established near Kovilpatti, he included the Pandya title along with his name. In Chola style he established a temple in his name i.e. Sundara Pandya Vinnagar temple suggestive of a kind of cultural colonialism. However, he created endowments in the temple to carry out welfare activities in the region. Usually the region which is dry throughout the year required such support from the administration. Moreover, it was elevated to the level of Chatuvedimangalam – seat of Vedic learning – so that the administration could give first priority to the place. Among his successors Maravarman Srivallabhan (1132-1163 CE) was said to be an efficient king who had immensely contributed for the development of the regions in and around Thoothukudi. From his name, it can be ascertained that he patronized the Vaishnava sect. The sect had wide popularity among the people and even the Parathavars who were strong within the fold of Muruga cult also seem to have taken to this faith.[****] It can also be inferred that the economic contribution of the Pearl Fishing was immense during this period.

After Maravarman Srivallabhan, Maravarman Sundara Pandyan (1210-1239 CE) took special effort to spread Vaishnava sect. He built the Gnanasamuthira Mandapam to the Thenthiruperai temple. He also renamed the place as Sundar Pandya Chaturvedimangalam. Similarly, he changed the name of Kurumbur temple from Sundara Chola Pandya Vinnagar Alwar to Sundara Pandya Vinnagar Alwar by deleting the Chola addition in it. By and large, it can be affectively stated that the concept of Vaiishanvism' attained importance during this period. Artefacts recovered from Korkai and neighbouring region suggest the existence of Jainism till the 12th Century CE. However,

century A.D. caused chiefly by the wars between the Cholas and the Pandyas to the extent of altering the socio-political and economic life of the people in the context of the Tamil country.

[****] James Hornell, Op. Cit., p. 120; the *sangu-thali* worn by the females of the community suggest their link with Vaishnava cult.

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to the conflict that ensued among Saivites, Vaishnavites and Jains, a new challenge emerged through Islam.

The invasion of Malik Kafur and subsequently followed by Kuzro Khan (1319 CE) and Ulugh Khan (1323 CE) gave a severe blow to the Pandyan economy. It was only natural that they attempted to compensate the loss by excessive taxation of regions that remained largely unaffected by the invasion. Such regions were in the South, and therefore, the Pandyan kings entered into direct contact with the Southern region. With the establishment of the Sultanate of Madurai that lasted from 1335 to 1378 CE the Pushing of the Pandyas further South was aggravated and the lot of the people became deplorable and difficult. The description of Marco Polo project the unrest between Vira Pandya and Sundara Pandya by the first quarter of the 14th century CE whose revenue resources in large scale was wasted in the purchase of horses from Arab traders. He also point to the social degeneracy hitherto unheard of in the region. The political unrest added to all of this. Mohammed Jalaluddin established a mosque in Kayalpatnam by 1336 CE and caused the first wave of Parathavar conversion to Islam†††† and consequent Arabization.

A Pandyan line based on Kayathar continued to rule the Thoothukudi region among who Vettumperumal was popular in the sixteenth century. His border was marked at Punnaikayal and further South went under the control of the Travancore kings. There was conflict over the control of the Tiruchendur temple‡‡‡‡ which went under the rulers of Travancore. The endowments of the Temple established to secure the well being of the people underwent strain. Gradually the Nayaka system under the Madurai Nayaks

†††† Before the religious conversion to Christianity, Islam was the main religion that attracted considerable number of the coastal people. The economic crisis was the major factor thatguided the people to new religions. Important settlement of the Muslims apart from Kayalpattnam was Keelakarai. Their relationship prior to conversions maintained by the mutual addressing of the male members by the term 'chacha' meaning father's brother although both form separate endogamous groups.
‡‡‡‡ T.S. Subramanian, Tamil Nadu temple murals portray Tamiraparani battle? *The Hindu* (Madurai edition) dated 10/09/2011.

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emerged under whose administration several minor chieftains assumed importance. They seem to have supplanted the Pandyan line based on Kayathar.

While the Vijayanagar kingdom under the rule of Krishna Devaraya was making its inroads into the Thoothukudi region or the Pearl Fishery Coast, the Portuguese came with the motive of trade and commerce.[§§§§] They were looking for potential allies in the coastal front to support their aspirations. A novel opportunity came through a riot that took place in the region wherein the Muslims instigated the Hindus to kill the Parathavar people for money. The Parathavar people – also known as Paravas – sought protection from the Portuguese and the latter demanded the permanent loyalty of the former by adopting Christianity. The Parathavar people thought that among several Gods a few others have to be incorporated within the belief system, and hence, without much hesitation agreed to the plan of the Portuguese.[*****] The Portuguese used the opportunity to exploit the proceeds of the Pearl Fisheries although the Parathavars were made Portuguese citizens for more than a century.[†††††] Eminent missionaries like Francis Xavier, Henri Henriquez and others visited the region and large number of people predominantly belonging to the lower caste adopted Christianity. The Church of 'Our Lady of Snows' was established near the Thoothukudi harbor influenced by the popularity of the 'Mother-Goddess' worship in the region.

Modernity

The Portuguese control over the Thoothukudi region was put to an end by the Dutch in 1658 CE. There were several lapses in the side of the Portuguese which were chiefly responsible for the predicament experienced by the Portuguese. They did not even realize the need to fortify the area. Their motive was only to make maximum profit from the proceeds of pearl fisheries and taxation. Although the missionaries made good

[§§§§] *See* S. Decla, *Muthukulithuraiyil Porchukeesiyar* (Tamil), (Chennai: New Century Book House, 2009).
[*****] A. Sivasubramanian, *Kirittavamum Tamizccuuzalum* (Tamil), (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, 2010).
[†††††] C. Veeramuthu in K.A. Manikumar and Vinod Vincent Rajesh (eds.), *Southern Tamil Nadu through the Ages*, (Tirunelveli: Dept. of History, M.S. University, 2011) p. 101.

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attempts to change the attitude of the officers, the latter exhibited colonial mindset and racial arrogance. They did not either establish factories in the Pearl Fishery Coast or they involved the Parathavar and other converts in the trading of horses.[‡‡‡‡‡] To its contrast, the Dutch realized the importance of fortifying the Thoothukudi region and did that. They established factories in Vembar, Vaippar, Punnaikayal, Pazhayakayal, and Manapad. Hinterland was also well utilized and purchase stations were established in several areas like Alwarthirunagari. It is said that they invited the Jathithalaivan of the Parathavars to take his residence at Thoothukudi and support them.[§§§§§] It seemed that in view of the better military strength of the Dutch vis-à-vis the Portuguese and the available scope for a riot prompted by the Muslims and Hindus, the Parathavar leadership and the general public preferred to cooperate with the Dutch.

The Dutch had always placed Gospel above gold in matters of colonialism, and therefore, were humanist in outlook. Moreover, the Portuguese-Dutch conflict was taking place when as powerful monarch as Thirumalai Nayak was holding his position in Madurai and the substantial part of the Pearl fishery went under his control which he explored employing his vassal Sethupathy Raja of Ramnad. Nevertheless, the arrival of Dutch in the political scene of Thoothukudi marked the introduction of the Protestant segment of Christianity. With that, new art forms also emerged based on which several Churches across the region was constructed and gave employment opportunity to local craftsmen. But the Dutch also undermined the importance of religious identity when their economic interest was at stake, and thus preferred to cooperate with the Palayakars of the neighbouring region when they foresee danger to their authority in Thoothukudi from the growing British influence in the region. However, they developed the port and town of

[‡‡‡‡‡] A. Patrick Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel-A Social Study of the Paravas of the Coromandel*, (New Delhi,: Manohar, 1984) p. 45.
[§§§§§] The Dutch had originally attempted to devastate the Church of Our Lady of Snows as they have had a grudge over Roman Catholics. It was the Jathithalaivan who protected the Our Lady of Snows statue in his residents. *See* Vinod Vincent Rajesh, *Between Water and Fire*, (Chennai: Notion Press, 2018)

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Thoothukudi which was mentioned as a handsome place by the marines of the time and also contributed for the growth of cotton trade.******

The important Palayams ruled by the Palayakars that emerged in the Thoothukudi region owing to the Nayaka rule in Madurai were that of Panchalamkurichi, Nagalapuram, and Ettayapuram. But when the Nawab of Arcot took charge of Maduarai from the Nayaks the previous kinship ties were relegated to the background and the tribute payable was increased manifold which the Palayakars dissented and refused to pay. But it was the Ettayapuram Palayam which was about to be reprimanded. In order to smoothly settle the issue the Ettayapuram Palayakar resorted to convention and as in the past made attempts to solve the problem by bribing the officials. But it landed the Palayakar in paying 35000 more panams than the actually collected 110,000. Hence Ettayapuram †††††† decided to fall in line while Panchalamkurichi and Nagalapuram Palayams did not like and they formed a confederacy with the palayams located in the West of Tirunelveli headed by Pulithevar what has been asserted as the 'First War of Indian Independence' by some of the Tamil scholars.

A solution was reached after the surrender of the confederacy before Khan Sahib. Under that Thatharappa Mudali a well to do person of Tirunelveli was appointed as renter. He agreed to pay – like in the guarantee system that emerged latter – rupees 36 lakhs on triennial basis. Thatharappa Mudali innovated his own revenue methods. He made settlement individually with every village headman and also derived concurrence pertaining to payment from the Palayakars. Although the Palayakars liked the system, Kan Sahib did not cooperate. Khan Sahib's – judged as one of the great natural military genius along with Hyder Ali – victories prompted him to introduce economic and administrative reforms. He understood the difficulties of the peasants and drafted a scheme of advancing loans for the purpose of cultivation. He also undertook the work of

****** *See* David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (New York: Acls History E Book Project, 2008)
†††††† Anand Yang, Bandits and Kings: Moral Authority and Resistance in Early Colonial India, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (Nov. 2007), pp. 882-883.

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repairing the channels that were dug by early rulers and thereby caused the extension of cultivable lands. His attention also included the war front and he attempted to establish factories where modern weapons could be produced and artificers skilled in handling gunpowder were created. The business class was protected from undue exactions. The cotton belt was taken into his special consideration and they were also provided with loans. Since his method contributed for increased rotation of money and brought better revenue, the British administration also was defensive of his approach. The people after his departure from the area were expecting this kind of revenue administration in the region.

Not much development took place during the beginning of the nineteenth century as dissenting Palayams like Panchalamkurichi and Nagalapuram were dismembered and Ettayapuram became a British loyal. The exploits and martyrdom of Kattabomman found its way into the memory of the people and found expression in the folklores of the region and gave warnings to the possible rebellions.[‡‡‡‡‡‡]The status of this new leadership was not much different from that of pensioners. They were chiefly engaged only in managing the affairs of the temple like that in Kazhugumalai.[§§§§§§] By and large the British administration evoked a conducive atmosphere to develop industries. In the latter half of the nineteenth century it made initiatives to lay down railway lines. Thus, from being a mere an agricultural economy supported by coastal income, Thoothukudi was about to be transformed into an industrial hub by the British Administration which by this time established complete authority over other powers. Initially three spinning mills were started from the capital generated from the natives and imported from abroad. Thus the Coral Mills, Thoothukudi Mills and Kovilpatti Mills (started with Indian funds latter renamed as Sri Chidambara Vinayagar Mills) were started

[‡‡‡‡‡‡] N. Vanamamalai (ed.), *Veerapandya Kattabommu Kadhai Padal*, (Madurai: Madurai University, 1971)pp. 7-8; leaders of marginal territories like Nagalapuram, Auvudayarpuram, Kadalkudi, Kolvarpatti, Elayiram Pannai and Kulathur were found to have feared that the Ettaiahpuram Palayam would subdue them. Therefore, they made their cause with a competent leader like Kattabomman.
[§§§§§§] *See* Anthony Good, 'Mamul' and Modernity in South Indian Temple, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Oct. 2001).

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Apart from the mills there were the weavers – ranging from the silk weavers belonging to the Saurashtra community to other weavers of Senguntha Mudaliar community - who received patronage from the local population particularly of humble background existed in Thoothukudi. The British government's encouragement to imported foreign goods affected the interest of these native producers which found natural expression in the Swadeshi Movement. It created a stream of active leaders who took the cause of protecting not only indigenous products but also issues that affected native interest to the tune of finding a native shipping company entitled 'Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company in 1906.. Popular among them was a leading lawyer and ardent Nationalist – V.O. Chidambarm Pillai.[*******] He took to active politics by the beginning of the twentieth century when the spinning mills in the Thoothukudi region were making huge profits. Yet they did not care about the welfare of the employees. The working atmosphere could not be distinguished from that of a prison. The employees of these mills were chiefly the migrant unskilled people from the lower segment of the rural agrarian background who caused not only the expansion of Thoothukudi town but also for the vibrancy of the Port. The profit motive of the management intensified the sufferings of the labour which first took up strike as an option in 1908 first based on the Coral mills.

The strike received the sympathy of V.O. Chidambaram who converted it into a people's problem. He negotiated with the management which came forward to reduce the working hours from 5am to 7pm and did not commit to increase the wages. The owners of the mill were gheroed by the general public and spontaneous opposition emerged in other parts of Tamil Nadu as well. Ordinary people such as dhobis, sweepers, scavengers, and barbers made their cause with the mill workers and they also struck work. Young students in considerable numbers filled the ranks and files of the sympathizing population. This was reflective of not only the class consciousness of the proletariat but also the new form taken by nationalism in the region. It increased the morale and gave encouragement to the leadership as well as the striking labour. As such, the strikes

[*******] *See* M. Balaram, *Immortal Lights: V.O. Chidambaram Pillai*, (Bangalore: Sapna Book House, 2001)

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marked the beginning of a new era in the industrial sector and were a success which further had manifestations in the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company.

The Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company was started as a joint stock company with a capital worth Rs 100,000 divided into 40,000 shares. The ownership of shares was allowed only for Indians, Sri Lankans, and other Asian nationals and not for Europeans. There were 36 elected Board of Directors who were presided by Pandi Durai Thevar by virtue of his investing more funds in the company. The company had head office in Chennai and was initially successful in giving tough competition to the British owned rival BISNCo. The company found encouragement from not only from Indians but also from Burmese and other Asians. But sooner the motive shifted from national to commercial and the Board of Directors even passed resolution to stop V.O. Chidambaram Pillai from participating in national issues. But the British taking excuse of his unending patriotic activities sealed the navigation company. Further activities took place during the Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement during which hartal and other strikes took place but not to the tune of the Swadeshi movement.

Conclusion

The history of Thoothukudi is marked by a harmonious interplay of various factors of nature. The sea and its resources, the wind, the Tamirabarani water, the land with black and redsoils etc invited people from other parts. Hence if traders from Rome, Greece and China visited the region in the ancient period, the Telugu people with an aim of permanently settling in the region arrived in the medieval period. They all used the mineral wealth of the region and in return enriched the overall Tamil culture. This unity and class consciousness was responsible for the evolution of industries in the region However, the lopsided development of one group benefitting by exploitation of another had no space in Thoothukudi as the very nature of the people is one of freedom loving. Moreover, they loved the land which was manifested in the freedom movement and leadership of eminent people like V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Bharathiar.

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