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South India at War during the 1730s and 1740s

Commentary

*Kenzo: It must be nice, having everything figured out like that.*

*Amos: Ain't nothing to do with me: we're just caught in the Churn, that's all.*

*Kenzo: I have no idea what you just said.*

*Amos: This boss I used to work for in Baltimore, he called it the Churn. When the rules of the game change.*

*Kenzo: What game?*

*Amos: The only game. Survival. When the jungle tears itself down and builds itself into something new. Guys like you and me, we end up dead. Doesn't really mean anything. Or, if we happen to live through it, well that doesn't mean anything either.*

*Amos Burton. The Expanse*

This Commentary recounts some of the military history of South India during the time of, and immediately preceding, the First Carnatic War. 'Some of' because warfare was endemic. The First Carnatic War, waged between 1744 and 1748, was the first real fight between the British and French in India, but it also seemed a sideshow, not only for the Europeans, but for the peoples of the Subcontinent. Most of the conflict took place at sea; on land there were no battles and only two sieges of political significance. At the end of the war everything was handed back, as if nothing had happened. That was an illusion. A great deal had happened, not between the European powers, but among the vast array of states that made up the Subcontinent. War would break out again between the French and British almost immediately, not as a consequence of policies made in Europe, but because of the policies of rival Indian potentates.

It seems to be a requirement to start any work dealing with European involvement in India either with a tirade against Colonialism or an apology for it. As the author is not angling for a Ph.D., this seems a waste of time. More to the point, the narrative is a false one. In India at least, no European (or Central Asian) power held sway without the consent of a high proportion of both the local elites and the general populace. British India was a collection of federated states whose native rulers acquiesced to a certain amount of alien governance and exploitation in return for a guarantee of stability, the promise of modernization, and a portion of the take. As soon as enough people came to believe the costs disproportionately outweighed the benefits (particularly after the effusion of blood and treasure caused by the World Wars), the system collapsed. Colonialism, as the reader probably conceives of it, was a product of 19th Century Liberalism.

As for the 18th Century, the idea of the Europeans enforcing their will on the 'backward' natives of India is so patently false as to be laughable, as should become evident from this Commentary's narrative.

*Europeans did not enjoy any significant military superiority vis-à-vis non-Western opponents in the early modern era, even in Europe. Expansion was as much a story of European deference and subordination as one of dominance. Rather than state armies or navies, the vanguards of expansion were small bands of adventurers or chartered companies, who relied on the cultivation of local allies. Fundamental to the Europeans' success and survival was a maritime strategy that avoided challenging the land-based priorities of local polities... The greatest conquerors and empire-builders of the early modern era were in fact Asian empires, from the Ottomans in the Near East to the Mughals in South Asia, and the Ming and Manchu Qing in China.*

*Sharman, Empires of the Weak, pp. 1-2.*

And again (p.64):

*If not by dint of their modern powerful armies and navies, how, then, did Europeans dominate the Indian Ocean and Asia in the early modern period? The short answer is that they didn't...*

Sharman argues that what the Europeans actually accomplished was to create the first fully global economy. Having built it, they naturally controlled it, and in that way became the most powerful group of states on the planet. It was only when the model ceased to be beneficial to both parties that the

'exploited' partners either detached themselves more or less violently, or turned the tables. It is interesting at the present day to watch the West trying to impose trade barriers against the East, just as the Mughals and Qing tried to do against the West two and three centuries before.

There was no political entity called India prior to the Raj. In fact, there was hardly an 'India' prior to Independence in 1947. There was Hind, or Hindustan, but that word meant exactly the same thing as 'European' does in Europe. For all the difference in culture and customs, India bears a strong resemblance to greater Europe — a peninsula stuffed with people sharing many things in common but with enough differences to keep them always at each others' throats.

It is a convenient shorthand to describe India in the 18th Century as 'feudal' in nature. Recently, this classification has been challenged, but it can still serve for a layman's description. Richard Eaton (*India in the Persianate Age*) prefers to dispense with the old-school divisions into Classical, Feudal, Early Modern, etc. because they are based on a Eurocentric model and do not really fit India's case. His solution is to divide the world of the Subcontinent into Sanskrit and Persianate cultures, the first tallying with the early civilizations whose descendants still existed in the South, and the second the culture of the various Middle eastern and Central Asian invaders who came later. This does seem like a better view, but the word 'feudal' can still serve. If the various states had not sought European aid (both financial and military) to fight their wars, then life on the Subcontinent might still ebb and flow as it had for most of Humanity's existence. The Subcontinent was never an isolated place — indeed, it is Humanity's oldest crossroads — but at a macro level the cycles of political life did not change much. Within that dynamic, however, there was always a lot of change. Empire Rise, Empire Fall. In the 18th Century it was very much Empire Fall. The Mughals were still stretching out their hands to grasp the southern tip of India, but their regime was rotting even as they did so. 'The Churn' describes the situation nicely. So nicely at least one Indian scholar has also used the word to describe India during this period.

*Thus at this period of Indian history might was right. The various subordinate powers were divided against the other and were unanimous only in rebellion against the supreme power. Beyond this there was no common feeling of nationality, no common bond of religion. A state of almost complete anarchy was universal, and everything was decided by force or intrigue. It was only the existence of such a state of things which rendered possible the mighty empire which Europeans have established in India.*

*It was no uncommon thing for mere soldiers of fortune to fight their way to the highest positions in the [Mughal] empire, and such being the case it would have been nothing incredible, if at this period a band of European settlers united for the purpose of conquest had gained for themselves considerable political power in India. Indeed the Portuguese had long ago shown the extent to which this was possible. Up to this time, however, neither French nor English had attained to any such power. Their settlements were in no sense of the word political settlements. They were the possessions not of the French or of the English crown, but of the French or of the English East India Company and these companies were in dependence on the home governments only in the sense that the right of exclusive trade to the East, which they claimed was founded upon the authority of royal or parliamentary charters. Such hatred as existed between the servants of the two companies in India was due to commercial and not to national jealousy.*

*Rapson, The Struggle Between England and France for Supremacy in India, p. 17*

Nowhere on the Subcontinent was this truer than in the South. Here was a frontier zone, a mixing of many cultures, some ancient, some grafted on, and some entirely new. It was a very interesting situation, to be sure. And though the British would in time supplant the Mughals, it was in the South that first stirrings of a breeze could be felt, heralding the coming storm.

## Sources

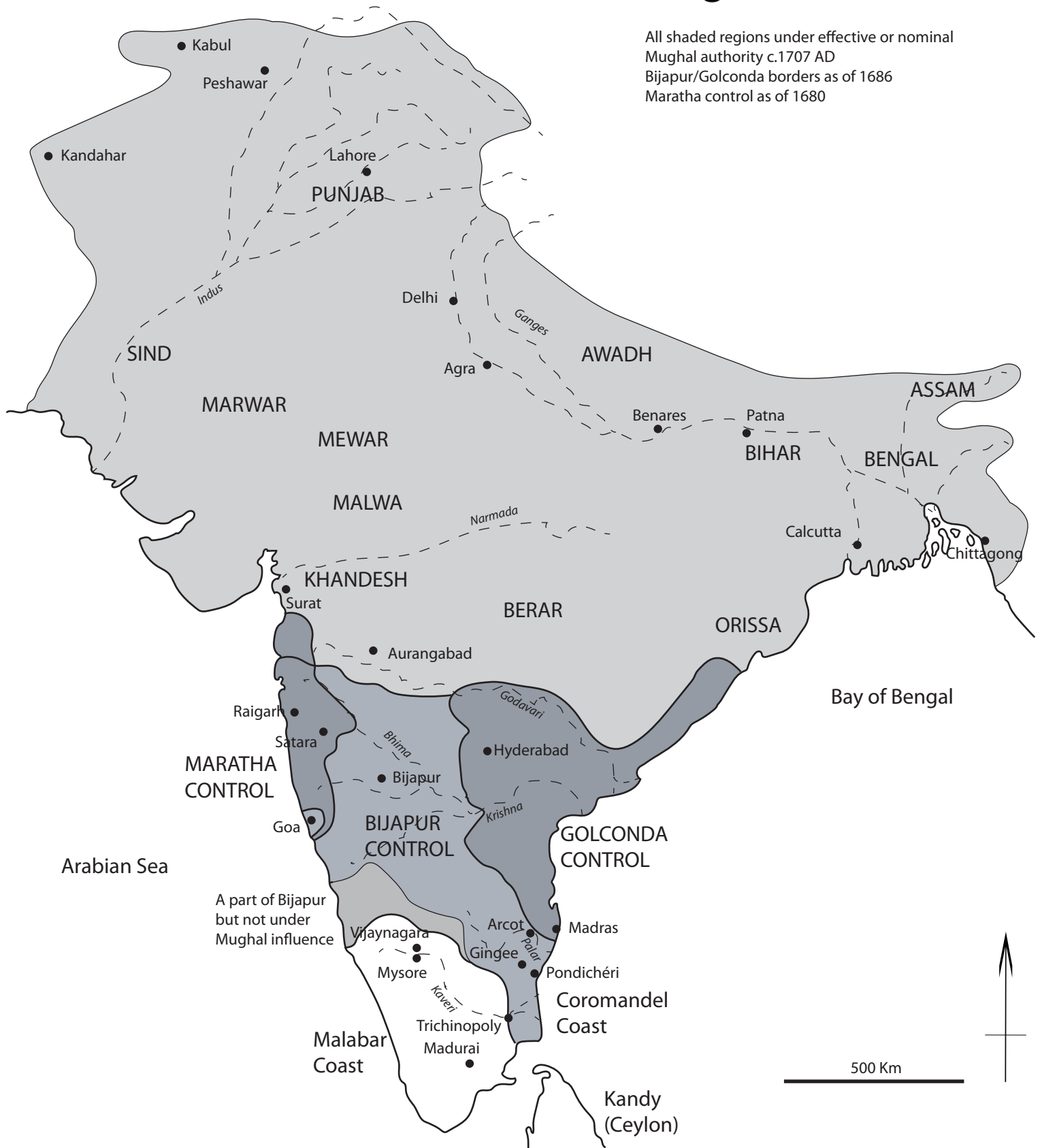
There is a real problem with sources for this period — in fact for all periods prior to the Raj. Everyone kept records, but mostly such things were compiled by the priesthood, stored in the temples on perishable materials, and left to rot. And Indian court poetry is about as realistic as European court poetry, though much more entertaining. The one exception is the records of the various European trading companies. This means, of course, that the written history is European in outlook, and more unfortunately, that even Indian scholars are forced to rely on the same works. Perhaps a person of the country could successfully interpret the records in the light of their own culture, but that is pretty shaky ground. How many Americans interpret their Constitution with the mindset of their Founding Fathers? And that Constitution was written a generation after the events recounted herein. So, the same books turn up in every bibliography. Fortunately, while 19th Century British and French authors might be more biased than modern ones, they could at least write decent prose. Bias can be guarded against, but there is no remedy for atrocious writing. The French have not expended much ink on their time in India, seemingly regarding it as the wild adventures of a handful of rogue agents; while English savants were delving into the old John Company records the French were analyzing Napoleon instead. So, at least the author has not had to read English translations of French renderings of Indian place names, only English renderings of Indian place names.

Three names that continually crop up are Edward Rapson, Major G.B. Malleson, and Orme. Robert Orme was not used directly (he is sourced by everyone else in the Bibliography) but he is considered the father of Indian history, at least from a European perspective. His father served as the Factor (Governor) of the EIC post at Anjengo, on the Malabar Coast, and his uncle, Robert Adams, for whom he was named, was likewise the Governor of Tellicherry at the other end of Malabar, during the period covered by this narrative. This Commentary uses extensively Rapson's essay, *The Struggle Between England and France for Supremacy in India* (1887) and Malleson's *History of the French in India* (1868). Rapson covers the First Carnatic War in Chapter Four, but the whole volume is just 120 pages. Always beware of bias, but he aimed for a balanced approach; the essay won the Cambridge Le Bas prize for 1886. Malleson's work is likewise balanced, given when it was written, and indeed somewhat pro-French. For the Dutch, there are some recent works: *The Dutch Power in Kerala* by M.O. Koshy, and *Chain of Command: the Military System of the Dutch East India Company 1655-1663*, a master's thesis by Tristan Mostert that can be found online at [vocwarfare.net](http://vocwarfare.net). European sources describing the various native states tend to focus on the Mughals. The primary work consulted here is *The Army of the Indian Mughals: its Organization and Administration*, by William Irvine (1903). Most of the Indian scholarship accessed comes from a variety of journal publications, which can be found in the Bibliography. The ones dealing with Madurai and Mysore in particular are full of laments on the lack of source material. Two fuller works are *Political History of the Carnatic Under the Nawabs* by N.S. Ramaswami and *The East India Company and the Principal Rajas of Malabar* by Abraham Yeshuratnam. Eaton's work has already been mentioned. Most of it deals with Mughal and pre-Mughal times, but it provides a good look at the foundations of Indian political society. The account of the naval war between Britain and France relies on three old standbys: *Naval and Military Memoirs of Great Britain* by Beatson, *The Navy in the War of 1739-48* by Richmond, and *La marine militaire de la France sous le règne de Louis XV* by Lacour-Gayet. Malleson also provides naval details, although his dates are sometimes slightly off.

## Maps

This Commentary includes a number of maps and diagrams. Some are taken from period sources and others are copied from modern maps. Bear in mind the older maps and diagrams may not be entirely accurate. For example, the plan of Pondichéri is dated 1705. Several important improvements were made between then and the siege of 1748, but all the other extant plans seem either to be architectural proposals or depictions of British Pondicherry, which was a complete rebuild. Also, be aware that in most cases when a town's location is marked, it is not always a discrete location. Especially on the Malabar Coast, there were few urban centers, and what is indicated on the map is really the epicentre of a district. The exceptions there are the great trading cities like Calicut and Cannanore. Elsewhere there are more real towns.

# India at the Height of Mughal influence



## Background

### Exotic Terminology

There are a lot of frequently encountered terms that ought to be defined, and they ought to be defined in one place.

First on the list is NAWAB (Nabob and various other spellings). The dictionary defines it as a royal title denoting a sovereign ruler, similar in rank to a prince. The word comes from North India and was borrowed from the Persian language; the root is the Arabic *Naib*, or deputy. It became associated with Mughal rule and was a title usually granted to Muslim rulers within their governing system, often those who were semi-independent, having voluntarily made submission to the Emperor in exchange for said title. But, there were many grades of *nawab* in the Mughal bureaucratic system and not all *nawabs* were Muslim; the term was used quite loosely. A man might have sovereignty over nothing more than a hill fort and the surrounding farmland. He would, however, still claim status as a prince. The French Governors General at Pondichéri held the title of *nawab*, and it was not a mere honorific. It came with an income and a unit of cavalry. Typically, a *nawab* enjoyed a mix of land grants and cash salary, awarded by the Emperor in exchange for military and administrative service. The female equivalent is Begum.

NIZAM is a related word. In the context of South India there was only one, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Viceroy of the Deccan. Literally, the word means 'governor of a region' and comes from the root *Nazim*, 'senior officer'. The Nizam of Hyderabad's full title was *Nizam ul-Mulk*, or Administrator of the Realm. In the sources he is The Nizam, any everyone knew who was meant — he had a very long reign. But the title is old, and also crops up in the literature from previous centuries.

RAJA (Rajah is equally valid) and MAHARAJA should be obvious. They equate to King and Great King. But in many parts of India *raja* was also an honorific given to mere princes, though they might need royal blood to qualify, or even chieftains of obscure hill tribes. In fact, nearly everyone at a maharaja's court apart from the servants should probably be addressed as 'raja' just to be on the safe side. The female equivalent is Rani, or Maharani. It was not an exclusively Hindu title. The muslim rulers of Cannanore were styled the Ali Raja.

The word POLIGAR will appear many times in the narrative. It is a Tamil word, *Palaiyakkarar*, and it refers to the holder of a military fief. In other words, a baron, or, in the context of the times, more often a robber baron. They were a feature of Southern India. Anyone could be granted the status of *poligar*. It was awarded for military merit. Though the concept was an ancient one, it was the Kingdom of Madurai, a successor state to the Vijayanagara Empire, that codified the system so far as South India was concerned, in the 16th Century. In practice *poligars* tended to come from a handful of Tamil warrior castes, and there were not that many of them; by tradition there were only 72 'true' *poligars*. The term was sometimes used for other rulers in similar circumstances. In exchange for military and civil service they enjoyed a quarter of the tax revenue they collected. They were expected to do such things as build roads, temples, schools, administer justice, maintain the irrigation system (a vital thing in the dry Southeast), and command their own feudal contingent of troops that some sources described as a 'battalion' — so say about 500-1,000 men. *Poligars* could be found wherever Madurai had once held sway, from its heartland on the Coromandel Coast to the Carnatic plateau about Mysore. They were instrumental in stopping the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's southward advance.

ZAMINDAR (Zemindar) refers to the ruler of a *zamindari* feudal estate and in a colloquial sense could be used interchangeably with *poligar*. The word simply means 'landowner' in Persian. *Zamindars* were hereditary petty rulers, with the authority to collect taxes and field their own militaries and were either semi-autonomous or fully sovereign, and thus in many ways the northern equivalent of the Tamil *poligars*, but because the Mughals tended to call all the iterations of 'raja' that they dealt with *zamindars* they varied considerably in wealth, power, and status. Many were Muslim, but some were Hindu. Each would have his own fortress and army of clansmen. They contributed about one-sixth of the revenue of the Mughal Empire, and their estimated recruiting power was just under 5 million men (about 18% cavalry), over 4,000 cannon, and roughly 2,000 elephants.

JAGHIRS (jagirs) are estates. Normally they encompassed a district with several villages. The holder had to provide military service and also administer the territory but in return received the tax revenues. The word also applies to the revenues themselves, and to the tenure. There are many similarities with the Ottoman/Byzantine *pronoia* system.

MANSABS are salaried positions within the Mughal regime, originally with important military responsibilities and associated with *jaghirs*. Later, *mansabs* acquired a bureaucratic function but retained their military character.

SEPOYS are of course Indian soldiers fighting for the various trading companies, and organized along European lines. The word derives from the Persian '*sipahi*', or professional soldier. *Sipahi* came to refer solely to cavalymen because the foot soldiers of Central Asia were mainly useless levies. But before that transformation occurred the word passed into Urdu (same spelling) and was picked up by the Portuguese, as '*sipae*'. The European company armies thus confusingly applied the word to their locally hired infantry. It is a hypothesis, but if a man entered the service of a native prince he would be required to supply his own equipment, including most especially a horse, but if he entered Company service, though he would be paid a salary, it is unlikely the cheese-paring Directors would pony up for a mount, so '*sipahi*' may in that way have become more associated with horsemen and its corrupted form, '*sepoy*', with infantry.

PESHTWA is the word used for the Maratha Empire's prime minister. It is a Persian word, meaning 'foremost leader', and was not used exclusively by the Marathas, possibly originating with the Bahmani Sultanate but likely imported when the first Persian adventurers set up the first Muslim states in India. However, under the Marathas the post became hereditary, and the *peshwas* ruled the Maratha Empire. They were the ones responsible for growing the empire, and their regime was known as the Peshwa Government.

DALAVAYI is the vernacular form of *dalapati*, 'team leader' or 'wing commander'. Alternate spellings are *dalavay*, *dalvoy*, *dalvi*, and *dalwai*. Though the term obviously applies to the role of a general, the title was used by Vijaynagara and its successor states for Prime Minister. Under Vijaynagara, in fact, the set up was much like the Holy Roman Empire. In the latter, the heir to the imperial throne was first elevated to King of the Romans. In most cases the successor states also gave the post to heirs apparent, or at least to royal princes.

The DEWAN or *diwan* or *divan*, was a minister of state under the Mughal Empire. It originally applied to the state's CFO, and in the original Persian meant an account book. It soon came to refer to the chief minister of a state, sometimes even an interim ruler, though it could be used colloquially for any high state minister, and was also used to describe the entire Council of State or Cabinet of the ruler. The term could be used interchangeably with *dalavayi* and *peshwa*.

The word NAYAKA is associated with a number of royal dynasties in the South. It originally meant a provincial governor, and was a post created by the Vijaynagara Empire and awarded to a divergent array of vassals whom the emperors elevated in reward for loyalty. As the empire collapsed, the *nayakas* gradually converted themselves into kings. Nayaka thus became a dynastic name, but because the origins of the governors differed the various Nayaka dynasties are not necessarily related. Some were local to their province and others were appointed from elsewhere in the empire.

The MAPPILAS were one of the important groups on the Malabar Coast. They were Muslims, a mix of the descendants of the ancient Arab trading communities and religious converts. They lived in their own towns — in fact, all the towns of any size were expressly created to house Arab traders; the native rajas and their subjects mainly lived in the countryside. Along with the large Christian community in the region they today make up about half the population of Kerala.

LAKH is a unit of measure commonly applied to money and men. It means 100,000. Thus, 1 *lakh* of rupees would be 100,000 rupees, or 100,000 troy ounces of silver. At the time of writing, one *lakh* is worth roughly \$73,000 US dollars, but modern currency fluctuates in a way that the currencies of those days could not. A related term is CRORE, 100 *lakhs*, or ten million (usually but not exclusively rupees).

*[A rupee is supposed to be one troy ounce of silver. A troy ounce is roughly 31 grams or 0.07 of a physical pound. In 1717 one British pound sterling was 111.4 grams of silver.  $111.4/31 =$  roughly 3.6 troy ounces to the pound sterling. Thus 3.6 rupees to the pound. 1 lakh (of rupees) would therefore be about £278,000. But of course the rupee was often badly debased. The French received the right to mint their own coins in gold, called pagodas, which were prized for their purity, and many payment records are given in that denomination. The currency soon spread all over India. 100 pagodas equalled 350 rupees, so 1 lakh (of rupees) would be 28,571 and change in pagodas.]*

## Geography & Climate

Geography and climate play a major role in the way history pans out. In the north of India, though secured by a mountain barrier, the story was always one of foreign conquest; once through the mountains the survivors of the generic 'horde' found a vast fertile plain with plenty of room to establish themselves. Farther south, things were more problematic. It is interesting that the same forces that could penetrate the Hindu Kush found it nearly impossible to penetrate the Western Ghats and reach the Southwest corner of the peninsula. This Commentary deals exclusively with events in the South, but briefly, as one moves down from the Indus Valley and Ganges Plain the land rises to form a semi-arid plateau, with some actual desert in the West. The plateau, colloquially known as the Deccan, is wedged between two north-south mountain ranges, the Western and Eastern Ghats. It is itself divided up by a number of lesser ranges running at odd angles, roughly east-west. Of these, the Vindhya is the one that actually grants access to the Deccan and has always marked the boundary between North and South India.

Curiously, the word *ghat* does not actually mean 'mountain', it means valley, and more specifically a difficult mountain pass. However, long usage has led to the term being applied to mountain ranges. The Western Ghats, or Sahydari, the Benevolent Mountains, are more contiguous than the Eastern Ghats. They have an average height of about 1,000 metres; the highest peak is 2,700 metres. The Western Ghats run very close to the Arabian Sea, creating a narrow coastal plain that runs the length of the peninsula, roughly 1,600 Km long, with only a handful of passes leading up on to the inland plateau. This is the range that gives India its weather pattern; the coastal plain is regularly inundated with rain, occasionally as much as 200 inches annually, while life in the rain shadow depends very much on the rivers that form high in the mountains.

There are two Monsoons in the Indian Ocean and they reverse both the airflow and some of the ocean currents. The Summer, or Southwest, Monsoon, blowing from April to September, was used to bring ships to India and the Northeast, or Winter Monsoon, starting in September or October and lasting until March, was used to send them back. The Southwest Monsoon brings the heavy rains, mainly to the West coast, but also to the southern part of Coromandel, opposite Sri Lanka, while the Northeast Monsoon brings relatively dry and relatively cold air, but it can also bring cyclones across the Bay of Bengal. March and October, being the months when everything changes, bring extremely unpredictable weather. Once they had passed it was usually safe to operate ships in the area since the winds remained constant from then on.

One note on Sri Lanka. Although an island, the presence of the chain of islets that link it with the mainland meant there was no way large vessels could pass through the Paik Strait. Instead, they had to pass around Sri Lanka. This is relevant when the narrative discusses the Anglo-French naval war. It also meant that overland communications between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, perilous as they might be, were faster than by ship.

The Western Ghats are older than the Himalayas, but the Eastern Ghats are older still. In a way, the two ranges mirror the Rockies and the Appalachians. The Eastern Ghats are not contiguous, but do help create their own coastal plain on the Bay of Bengal. If on the West the coastal plain is isolated, on the East the plains slope up gradually in many places to merge with the central Karnataka plateau, the high land south of the Deccan. Officially, both this plateau and the coastal plain make up Karnataka. The coast around the corner from Malabar is Coromandel, a corruption of the Tamil name of the Chola dynasty (*Cholanamdalam*). The Bay of Bengal side also sees a lot of rain, if not as much as the West, because it receives both a branch of the summer monsoon and the full force of the reciprocal winter

monsoon, though that is admittedly much drier and cooler. The lower elevations also suffer from high humidity.

Most rivers flow east or west. In the South, nearly all flow out of the Western Ghats. The western ones are naturally short, and in olden days kept the lands waterlogged; their mouths often lay within mangrove swamps. The western shoreline, also, is lined with lagoons and barrier islands, much like America's southeastern seaboard. It was on such islands that the trading companies loved to establish their factories or trading posts. The eastern rivers are long, and while they might run north or south off the plateau — usually north — they all end up in the Bay of Bengal. Most, except for the great Kaveri River, are either dry or fordable when the monsoon is not running. This also meant there was no great canal system as in China or Europe. There were some short canals and a lot of irrigation works, but interior communications relied on foot traffic. Indeed, there was almost no domestic long distance trade.

Six major climates are identified for the Subcontinent. The relevant ones in the South are the tropical rainforests of Kerala, in the Southwest, the arid steppe of the interior, and the tropical Savannah that covers the rest of the land. Up in the mountains the vegetation is still rainforest, but the climate is temperate — there can even be snow on the peaks. In the modern day India has the second greatest area of arable land (behind the USA), and the greatest extent of irrigated land. In the 18th Century it was the greatest in both categories, but at the same time about two-thirds of the irrigation was (and is) dependent on the monsoon, meaning only about a third of the land was reliably irrigated. The need to manage an unreliable water supply meant life revolved around the 'tanks', the open air cisterns or manmade ponds that were used to store water. These were (and are) especially prevalent in the Southeast, along the Coromandel Coast.

## The People

There is no one Indian race or culture. The British tried to create one and their political heirs are still trying. In fact, until the Partition in 1947 many communities, and not just isolated ones, did not speak the official language of Urdu. All that can be said is that there was an Indian culture in the same way there was a European culture. During the 18th Century France dominated Europe and the overall culture was French in nature (except in places like the Balkans); during the same century the Mughals dominated the Subcontinent and the overall culture was based on Persian forms (except in places like Malabar) — yes the equating of Malabar with the Balkans is deliberate. Eaton's idea of Sanskrit and Persian cultures blending is quite elegant. He argues convincingly that Religion was never a dividing force until the British tried to make it one, but culture — habits of thought and action — was. Of course, Religion has a cultural angle, and in that respect it could be divisive, but he notes that in many places the common people blended various practices. In Malabar, for instance, the Christians had leave to enter Hindu shrines, while the *mappilas* of Cannanore put an Islamic spin on Hindu customs. While it can be argued that Aurangzeb championed Islam, and that in response the Marathas championed Hinduism (which was not an 'ism' prior to that time), the Mughal Emperor was the exception that proves the rule. Usually, wars were not about religion, though they had religious elements, and mixed coalitions of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic kingdoms frequently fought on the same side.

There was a recurring theme on the Subcontinent. An invader would come from the North and conquer south as far as the Deccan. Peoples would be displaced south, and displace others. The Conquerors would push south themselves, but the process would take so long that they would cease to be the same people. Whatever political entity they established would fragment and mix with whatever political entities had not been assimilated. Meanwhile, their culture would influence the peoples they came in contact with, even in hard to reach places like Malabar. Thus even that region had its *kshatriyas* and *brahmins*, concepts that came with the so-called Aryan invasions and were alien to the older Dravidian-speakers — who themselves are thought to have been immigrants displaced from the Indus Valley, or Elam in modern day Iran. By the 18th Century the rajas of the Coast had still not adopted Persian forms, but that was because the Mughal regime was a recent arrival, only a few centuries old.

Eaton argues that it was the Europeans who tried to classify the peoples of India along religious lines, thus creating that fatal split that led to the creation of Pakistan and the expulsion of much of the Muslim

population of India. There were and are many different religions, interpretations within religions, and philosophical schools in India. Some were specific to certain groups and some were universal. Buddhism, for example, came from the North but there were distinct southern schools. The Jains were also highly influential. Depending on who one reads the religion, which is distinct, was either founded around the same time as Buddhism or goes back to before the Indus Valley civilization. It has influenced both Buddhism and Hinduism. It was strong in Karnataka. There were Jews and Christians, too, a sizeable minority. Many on the west coast were Catholic, but Coromandel had a large community of Syriacs, lending credence to the work of Saint Thomas. And of course, there were Muslims.

Unlike the other religions and schools of thought, Islam did have a unifying political quality. However, it was so only so for the ruling classes of those areas that were under foreign rule, their soldiers, and the merchants, most of whose ancestors came from Arabia, Persia, or Central Asia. Hinduism, on the other hand, was not a unifying force. 'Hinduism' in those days was a blanket term covering everything from the nearly monotheistic worship of Vishnu to the folk beliefs of backcountry Dravidians and aboriginal headhunters. But, while the 'unified' Hindu religion may be a product of 19th and 20th century thought, its start was organic; it gelled as a necessary reaction to Islam, and its greatest proponents were the Marathas. Because, left alone, the various belief systems that made up Hinduism, and those of Buddhism and Jainism, were not evangelical systems. Even the Christian communities made no dynamic push to gain converts. Religion was a part of one's caste. A particular faith might boost its followers if a particular ruler embraced it and offered incentives, but generally speaking, one followed the ways of one's ancestors. No one would be upset that such and such a caste held such and such a belief system, because of course such people would. Violence would occur only when someone went against the social norms. And even the Muslims tended toward toleration. The brutal conqueror Akbar protected the Jains, for example.

Scholars seem to find language the best way to categorize the people of the Subcontinent. The racial elements of Indo-Aryan have been debunked or discredited, but it is still a language classification. Whether they were invaders or a steady drip of immigrants depends on what school of thought one espouses. Probably it was a mixture, some groups being more violent than others. 'Classical' India is, loosely speaking, Indo-Aryan — that is the Vedic literature, the worship of a pantheon of sky-gods instead of earth-gods, the cult of the Warrior, and so forth. Parallels with the classical Mediterranean civilizations are obvious (though some of that may be due to the east-west or west-east transfer of ideas). The Indo-Aryans are actually a smaller group (just) than the Dravidians. The language group can be split into a lot of branches, but the only ones relevant to the Commentary are Sinhalese, the predominant language of Sri Lanka, and Marathi, spoken in Maharashtra and Konkan. The latter was the language of the Marathas, who will figure largely in the narrative, though their heartland was well to the North, in the Deccan.

The umbrella language group in the South is Dravidian, comprising four main branches: Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam. The last is what is spoken in Kerala, on the Southwest coast. Kannada is the language of the people to the north of them, along the coast by Mangalore and Goa, and among the historical kingdoms of Vijaynagara and Bijapur. Tamil is the language of the Carnatic and Coromandel, Telugu of the lands farther north, in historical Golconda and up into Orissa along the Bay of Bengal. There are still isolated pockets (with their own names) to be found as far away as Pakistan. Apparently Dravidian influenced Indo-Aryan far more than the reverse.

From a common language springs a common culture. That of the Dravidians was one of animism, local 'village' deities, sacred groves, a mother goddess, and god-kings. Two distinctive customs were snake-worship — every village had its *naga* shrine complete with sacred snake — and the erection of memorial 'hero' stones immortalizing great warriors, that were believed to grant petitioners victory in war. The mother goddess concept underpinned a matrilineal dynastic system. This had gone out of fashion in many places but was still practiced in Malabar. Likewise, Dravidian art and architecture is quite unique. The Dravidians also cultivated martial arts in a manner similar to the Japanese and are still considered excellent swordsmen.

[Does the reader remember the old Sinbad movie where the multi-armed Kali statue and the snake with a woman's body do a stop-motion dance? The snake-woman was a naga. In Dravidian culture snakes were worshipped as protectors of the clan.]

Eaton's work deals with a later period, in which, he argues, there were the two main cultures of Sanskrit and Persianate, the former culture being the older, 'classic Indian' way of seeing the world and the latter being introduced only around 1000 AD or so, by invaders from the North. Both cultures were based on and disseminated through literature. He compares the Sanskrit world to the Hellenization of western Asia, which mainly came about through cultural exchange. Persian culture, in contrast, was always attached to a spirit of conquest. But the two world views were not distinct, and were only incidentally associated with particular religions. A case in point might be the Kalmyk people of Central Asia. These were of Turkic stock, influenced by Persian culture, yet followed the Buddhist religion.

The concept that more than any other identifies 'Indian-ness' is Caste. All societies have a caste system, whether they admit it or not, but all over India this system was (in theory) codified and rigid. In reality, the concept of caste remained somewhat vague, and depended on one's point of view. For example, in the eyes of the rulers of a state, an entire community within their realm might be classified as a single caste, and fall under the same legal or tax code, yet within that community there would be degrees of separation, which to the community would be crucial to daily living. Also, when it was useful to do so, exceptions could be made. One of the most commonly seen is the rise of some group of peasants into the military castes, and ultimately into the ruling caste. This is where Reincarnation was so handy. The usual argument was that although they were peasants now, in their former lives they had been warriors. A specific example in the other direction is the Maharaja of Travancore. Though of the highest caste, with the status of a god-king, he involved himself in questions of Trade, because for him it was a matter of state policy.

'God-king' does not really capture the nature of the old Hindu political systems that still existed in the far South, nor does 'priest-king', though that is closer. The Muslim rulers of the North, and even their Hindu neighbours, had a political system that was a blend of Middle Eastern and Central Asian kingship with the Hindu model. The Muslim invaders became 'Hindu-ized' and the Hindu rulers adopted the foreign 'Persian' ways. But where there had been no outside conquest the old forms remained, and the rajas were the bridge between gods and men, responsible to both. They swore their oaths before and to the gods, not the People. Their people venerated them but they did not exactly rule by divine right, they ruled because they were the intermediaries, taking on divine status by association.

On paper, the *varna* of ancient times — the four-fold division of labour — was, in descending order, the priestly *brahmins*, the *kshatriya* warriors, the *vaisha* merchants, and the *shudra* peasants. In theory, the *kshatriya* ruled under guidance of the *brahmins*. In practice the *kshatriya* married into the *brahmin* class for extra legitimacy, the scribal *brahmins* led armies in battle (or became bandit chiefs), and the *shudra* rose to become rajas — the Marathi being a case in point. This system was superimposed on existing structures by the so-called Aryan invaders of India's prehistory, so that in reality there were many, many different castes. In Malabar, the most hidebound and conservative region, there were over 250.

Over much of India the fundamental social unit was not the nuclear family but the extended family, all living together. It fostered greater social cohesion, but could also lead to complications, especially when matrilineal succession was tossed into the mix. If the reader has trouble determining what motivations are at play in any political circumstance, just remember that the heart of Indian society is the extended family, functioning as its own 'tribe'. Beyond the family was the village, and beyond that the Outside World. Towns served only two purposes: administration and trade, and the latter only existed on the coasts, where foreigners brought exotic goods like warm winter woolies, and where most of the inhabitants were also foreigners. Apart from royal administration the only other kind of urban setting was religious. Life revolved around the festivals, each in its season, and each sponsored by patron temples. The temples were the engine of the economy. They collected taxes on their own account, and took donations, but were also the repositories of a kingdom's funds. The rajas had their treasure rooms, but those were partly for emergencies and partly to impress; it was the custom to give half one's income to the temples. They in turn dealt in social welfare and handled infrastructure projects on the ruler's behalf.

## Dynastic Succession & Politics

As elsewhere in the world, most of the conflicts on the Subcontinent fell into three categories: bullying, wars of conquest, or wars of succession. In all cases it was a matter of family business. Malabar is distinct, but in most of 'Sanskrit' India male succession was preferred, except in dire emergencies — and she had better be pregnant. Preference went to the eldest son, pre-installed or at least earmarked for the throne, or the most capable (or at least the most energetic) male family member. The Mughals originally followed the Central Asian custom of not caring which family member it was so long as they were great in war or had overwhelming moral dominance, but long before the 18th Century they had shifted to the usual eldest-son-or-most-favoured-son, in common with the kingdoms around them. In Madurai they tried making all the potential heirs co-rulers and giving each an order of precedence. That worked out about as well as could be expected. In Malabar the royal lines passed through the women, and there could be queens, but usually a male member of the household governed. Usurpers were universally despised, but a new family winning a throne by right of conquest was acceptable. That was the theory. In the 'Persianate' regions succession practices were more or less the same as in Persia and the Ottoman Empire — i.e., 'Game of Thrones' on steroids.

Naturally, in practice there were all sorts of arrangements, but they had to be legitimized to fit the political theory, somehow. Very often, an unsuitable person could obtain the throne in a fair fight and be accepted, and perhaps even survive. Even more often, two or more sons would fight to the death for the throne with either a military campaign or a campaign of assassination. In the Vijaynagara Empire, as at the court of the Great Mughal, most successions were violent. (Eaton argues that this was not destabilizing, because it ensured the 'survival of the fittest'.) Sometimes a chief minister might take the throne of a vassal state, and such men were often awarded by the overlord with what amounted to vassal kingship governing a province. In such cases the 'governor' was supposed to have his heir vetted by the overlord, but that rarely happened. Frequently, too, a new dynasty had blood ties to the old, in the same way the French Bourbons could claim descent through the Valois. The dynasties might even trade places multiple times. There was also a tradition called a 'sword wife'. A sword wife was a woman who 'married' the raja's sword, and held the same during the wedding, instead of his hand. Rajas often had multiple wives and it was generally assumed that the senior, 'real' queen's progeny were the most eligible to succeed — but of course the other wives would scheme and they and their sons might have more favour with the old raja. The Merovingian kings have nothing on the rajas of India.

Lennart Bes (*The Heirs of Vijaynagara*) notes that Court life was fraught with factionalism and intrigue, and there could be high turnover, but it did serve to keep things 'fresh'. In some cases rajas supposedly imprisoned their intended successors to avoid being preempted. In others, rulers who might still be regarded as minors assumed the reins of power; for religious and cultural reasons, age twelve was the typical year a boy could assume the throne and begin to act on his own, though with supervision. At seventeen he could claim full authority. Louis XIV's rule was not much different. Despite the violence it is estimated that the average length of rule for an Indian raja was a little over twenty years. But Bes concludes that none of the regimes he studied really cracked the code of stable government. Like the Roman Empire, it was always 'last man standing'. He also devotes a chapter to the power of the Courtier. Kings and courtiers always go together, but in Indian regimes, the courtier was even more potent than in Europe, excepting prodigies like Richelieu. At the same time, the life of an Indian courtier tended to be much shorter than his European counterpart. Some aspired to become raja, and a few actually succeeded. This was possible because they were often men of royal blood. Or, they might succeed in marrying into the direct royal line. Many of them instead founded their own bureaucratic dynasties, son succeeding father as the raja's chief minister, or army commander, or head of a particular department, and these dynasties rose and fell in sympathetic harmony with those of the rajas.

One of the chief differences with dynastic politics in Europe was, as already mentioned, that Hindu rajas very often claimed divine or semi-divine origin. Of course, some of them believed it, for some it was a useful fiction, and for a few it was rather embarrassing. But there is a sense that their public religious life was in general more important for the State than their personal political ambitions. Their role mattered to them.

As for diplomatic relations, there were the usual elaborate and convoluted diplomatic protocols; the insults often suffered by European embassies were apparently no different from the insults meted out to the ambassadors of rival kingdoms. When one Dutch embassy was permitted to shake hands with a raja this was considered an unheard of honour, as the raja's person was normally regarded as too sacred to be touched. One common act of submission was to eat betel leaf out of the raja's hand. Gift-giving was one of the main ways to get things done. Not only would an embassy have to present rich gifts to the persons who guarded access to the raja and even richer gifts to the raja himself, but the gifts they received in return carried an obligation to pay the raja back, perhaps with an alliance. Actions and responses were, ideally, to be carefully graded to both the state and the individual being dealt with. Faux pas were a mark of ignorance or stupidity. The duplicity for which Indian rulers were notorious in European eyes was usually calculated policy, just another tool in the diplomatic bag of tricks.

Eaton, following his Sanskrit/Persianate model, notes two main ideas of kingship and statecraft, but also notes how they became blended over time, even when it was not a case of one system being imposed on the other by forces. The Sanskrit model was the *mandala* or Circle of States:

*The term referred to a series of concentric circles, where one's own capital and heartland was at the centre, surrounded by a second circle of one's allies, and a third circle of one's enemies. Beyond that lay a fourth circle occupied by one's enemies' enemies, understood as potential allies with whom a king endeavoured to ally himself. With all of India's major dynastic houses playing by the same geo-strategic rules, the result was not only intense political jockeying and perpetual conflict, but overall stalemate and equilibrium.*

Eaton, p.36

In practice, states often just regarded every other state as a rival. Alliances shifted constantly. Both domestic and foreign politics were a stage on which the raja could display his skills and power. Under the Mughals much of these tendencies were kept under wraps until it became evident that the Empire was in terminal decline, but the South was the frontier, perpetually in turmoil, and the Far South was balkanized and had been since time out of mind. The whole of southern India was in a constant state of agitation and often outright war, although individual wars did not usually last long. Often the purpose of a war was simply to collect tribute, ensuring ones' neighbours knew their places in the pecking order, but there was also a significant spiritual element — not of crusade or jihad, but of obeying the will of the gods. Eaton uses the example of the Chola king who marched all the way to the Ganges and collected thousands of tubs of its holy water to be brought home and poured out to Shiva as an offering, because his land was suffering a severe drought. This also mimicked the Hindu legend of Shiva creating the Ganges in the first place; the king became 'he who took the Ganges'.

These notions of reality had not died out by the 18th Century, but Persian culture had certainly modified them. Especially, the adventurers and second sons operating under the Mughal umbrella were out to carve up kingdoms for themselves. For that was the nature of the Persianate world view. Where the Sanskrit world was one of balance, the Persian world was one of obtaining land, and tax revenues, either by conquest or by imposing vassalage, even a vassalage that was merely notional. Thus the Mughal Emperor, weak as he was, was still the source of true legitimacy for all rulers north of the Kaveri River, though they might never obey a single one of his decrees or ever send him tribute.

At the same time — and this is one of the chief reasons for the weakness of the Mughal system — every vassal of the Emperor aspired to accrue ever more prestige and wealth, offering dubious loyalty in exchange for great honours and emoluments. Which explains why every petty hill raja had a string of names and titles. Curiously, the *mandala* system produced the same results. Eaton uses the Chalukya kings as an example, but the names do not matter:

*The mandala theory not only informed inter-state relations, however. Its logic also sowed the seeds of decline for its participant states. Since bestowing land on vassals was understood as a mark of royal dignity, the greater a king's pretensions to imperial grandeur or universal dominion, the more land and authority he was obliged to bestow on courtiers or vassals. But this was ultimately a self-defeating enterprise, as is seen in the case of the Chalukya kings of Kalyana (974–1190), the Cholas' principal rivals*

*for control of the Deccan plateau. From the mid twelfth century on, that dynasty's subordinate rulers increasingly appear in inscriptions bearing exalted titles and enjoying powers to grant land, dispose of local revenues, wage war and administer civil and criminal justice. Mere generals were given the most prestigious insignia of royalty, such as the white umbrella, the great drum and the fly-whisk. Although in theory the Chalukya emperor remained the supreme bestower of such honours, over time even this prerogative was delegated to feudal lords in his confidence. Ultimately, ceding so much authority only encouraged larger feudatory lineages to assert their autonomy from their imperial overlords, a process that effectively hollowed out the Chalukya crown to an empty shell.*

*Eaton, p. 40.*

That paragraph could apply to pretty much any Southern Indian empire. The difference in the Persian model was that the rebellious forces tended to remould the basic territorial building blocks of earlier kingdoms, whereas the *mandala* system encouraged the survival of those units. In the long run it probably gave the new rulers greater legitimacy; in some instances there is definite evidence of usurping dynasties claiming they were given the right to rule a province by the empire they overthrew. The Persian model, by contrast, needed an existing overlord — i.e., the Mughal Emperor — as the primal fount of authority. And, beyond him, the Muslim rulers would claim authority from the Caliph. This last became more common with the rise of Sufism and its tenet of a spiritual authority that overshadowed temporal authority. In a way, this matched the older notions of a priest- or god-king that were still used in the far South. In both cases the sovereign was executing Divine Will and obtained legitimacy if he was committed to the way of Justice.

## Vijaynagara

It may help to take a look at the last great southern empire, Vijaynagara. It both perpetuated ancient models and served as a fresh template for its successors. The Vijaynagara Empire had been the latest iteration of the Churn. To be pedantic, they called the core kingdom Karnataka — hence the name of the modern state. Vijaynagara, the Victorious City, was the name of their capital. And, the empire was ruled by no less than four dynasties, three of which took power in military coups.

Vijaynagara was built on the rubble of a pair of powerful kingdoms from earlier times, the Chalukyas and the Cholas. The first was based in the Deccan and the second was based in the Kaveri Delta. The first was founded among the Kannada speakers and the second among the Tamil. Both expanded to include other linguistic groups and both slowly fragmented over time, leading to the rise of smaller regional powers. The Chalukyas were succeeded by three kingdoms, one Kannada-speaking, one Telegu, and one Marathi. The Cholas of Tanjore were supplanted by the Pandyas of Madurai, also Tamils.

(Marking kingdoms linguistically in this way is probably the best option for keeping things straight. Otherwise one is left with long lists of royal families, even more extended and intertwined than those of Europe. The lifecycle of the Holy Roman Empire used to be cited by foreign observers as a template for the situation in India. Modern scholars point out the inadequacies of the example, but it is still useful. The South even had its own Circles — *mandalams* — that one can match with Saxony or Bavaria, and as in Europe, those Circles maintained themselves over the centuries, even as families associated with one or the other rose to prominence and formed a kingdom here, an empire there.)

The Pandyas and their Deccan counterparts lasted until the 14th Century, when the next ingredient in the mix was added: the Delhi Sultanate — not the Mughals, but a predecessor, emerging out of a host of Central Asian refugees fleeing the Mongols. The Ganges levels were home to a number of Muslim kingdoms; from among them the Delhi Sultanate rose to empire status, and expanded south. It not only conquered the Chalukya successor kingdoms, it replaced the culture of the ruling caste. Before, the various dynasties and their courts claimed legitimacy from the Chalukyas and even older regimes, going back to mythical times. Hindu customs prevailed, though there was a significant difference from the past. Unlike the pre-Chalukyas, the various royal families encountered by the Delhi Sultanate all came from the Shudra *varna*, the lowest of the four classical castes of Hindu society. Starting at the bottom was a badge of pride, but it also broke the mould. Political theory held that the rajas should be *kshatriya* — warriors. This justified the role of the *brahmins*, the highest caste of all, as both state administrators

and priests, who had the job of containing the 'warrior rage' of the rajas. If this sounds alien, Europe too had its Estates, and the Priests came first, followed by the Nobles. Think of Cardinal Richelieu running France in the name of Louis XIII.

The successor states of the Chalukyas were thus run not even by the Bourgeoisie, but by the Peasants, yet run as monarchies, not democracies. Still, they were more egalitarian, less snobbish. Caste did not mean as much as it did, for example, in the Far South. This peasant nobility held authority because in the beginning they had formed the armies of the older kingdoms. How was it possible for low caste groups to serve as soldiers? Well, to begin with there never were very many *kshastriyas*, so the idea that only the warrior caste could fight would have severely limited the size of armies. The idea of a four-fold division of labour was also a northern import, and it was always more of a theoretical concept, with plenty of workarounds. If a man wanted to become a soldier he could just say that in a former life he had been a *kshastriya*. Besides, calling them 'peasants' is misleading. In England they would be yeomen. They would have owned their own farms, worked as artisans, been small and not-so-small traders, and acted as local law enforcement. The various groups that emerged as social leaders were as much communities as castes, and had influence in many spheres. Becoming war leaders and then dynasts gave them a martial tradition, but it was tempered by a culture of material excess typical of groups that did not use Honour to justify their right to rule in the way the *kshastriyas* and the European knights did. Lennart Bes (*The Heirs of Vijaynagara*) notes the portraiture of the various royals proudly depicting themselves as rather paunchy men, while their court poetry exalted their skills in the bedchamber more than their hunting or martial prowess. The rulers of those successor states called themselves *nayakas*. This was a term that simply meant either a war leader or a man with authority, and it is the origin of the word '*naik*', used for the army rank of corporal and also for a police constable ('constable' is also a word marking authority). But after Vijaynagara's provincial governors became independent, '*nayaka*' became a mark of royalty. The Vijayanagara used the *nayakas* as counterweights to other powerful castes within their empire, and their descendants could be found ruling states all over the South, each with its own bloodline.

The arrival of the Delhi Sultanate (or Tughluq dynasty) was an interruption in the life of the Chalukya successor states. The Sultanate did not establish a lasting regime in the Deccan, but it did succeed in destroying all three successors before it was buried by the Mughal avalanche. Motivated by a desire to obtain the riches of the southern kingdoms (with which it could hire more mercenaries and make even more expansions), it set up various satrapies, and when the Sultanate collapsed under its own weight the satrapy in the Deccan, the Bahmani Sultanate, became independent, then fragmented in turn into no less than five pieces. All these states were ruled by northerners, Muslims, often of Persian or Arab stock, or who at least claimed that descent, who introduced alien customs that became grafted onto the earlier culture. Thus, for example, the language of the Court became Persian. Martial prowess was exalted. There was no attempt to suppress Hindu practices, but anyone who wanted to get ahead would be advised to act like a Persian. And, because the rulers were foreigners they coopted local strongmen to aid them, providing the model for the later *nayakas*.

Vijaynagara's own origins are shrouded in myth. This is unfortunately typical of Indian regimes. Stone carvings can only hint at what might have happened and were always set up for propaganda purposes. Vijaynagara's origin stories are as fantastical as its predecessors' and as its successors, matching the origin stories of the foundation of Rome, but with the extravagance of a Bollywood miniseries. The succeeding dynasties of the Empire needed to legitimize their sordid takeovers by claiming they were descended from the Chalukya royals, with the odd bit of divinity thrown in. In fact, the claims grew more ancient with each passing dynasty. It is fairly certain the Empire arose in the middle of the 14th Century. The story closest to the truth seems to be that the capital was founded by five brothers, two of whom had impressed the raja whom they had been fighting against; he pressed them into service and bade them set up a kingdom at an auspicious location. When the Bahmani Sultanate fragmented the pressure lessened and the family was given room to breathe. The successive dynasties were probably rebel generals, though it is likely they were all related by blood. That is how these things usually go.

Vijaynagara was a hybrid state. The rajas consciously sought to bind themselves to their 'Sanskrit' past, particularly through the raising up of the *brahmins* and the sponsorship and construction of many

temples and monasteries; the city's foundation myth involved a local river goddess who was elevated into being Shiva's consort. Yet, at the same time they continued the newer practices brought in by the Northerners, and encouraged their vassals to adopt the same culture, with a fair amount of success. Partly this was from habit, and partly it was to ease relations with the existing Muslim successor states on their northern border. One thing that Bes stresses is the outward-looking-ness of the Empire, which was surely a product of the new ways of thinking. Previous southern empires had been navel-gazers. Vijaynagara became the last great empire of the South, playing a role vaguely similar to that of the Habsburg Empire in Europe. Like it, Vijaynagara ruled over many different peoples and cultures, including the former Pandya empire of Madurai.

Madurai was the successor of the Chola Empire. It was primarily a Tamil state, though there were Telugu communities on its northern marches. While the Chalukya successor states rose and fell Madurai's rule spread over most of the Southeast, from Cape Cormorin to the fringes of the Deccan. It was relatively untouched by the rise of Delhi, but the shockwaves of the Sultanate's rise and fall still had their impact. Madurai was slowly pushed back across the Carnatic plateau by both Vijaynagara and the Muslim successor states, until it became merely another tributary power in the Empire's orbit.

As a Sanskrit-Persian hybrid, Vijaynagara was very much a militarized state. Dynasties changed through military coups. Originally, the empire was somewhat federal in nature. Neighbouring kingdoms were conquered, but in feudal manner were allowed autonomy so long as they paid tribute and honour to the Emperor. As the decades wore on it became common to install members of the imperial Court as rulers over the provinces, posts which became rewards for relatives, favoured generals, or court officials. Naturally, the Center weakened over time. This was more likely to happen because Vijaynagara itself was located on the arid central plateau. In contrast, many of the provinces were extremely fertile and rich. To begin with, the governors were accorded the same autonomy as the original feudatory rajas, but this was not enough. In 1565, the year the Ottomans failed to take Malta, the neighbouring sultanates, reacting to the empire's ceaseless expansion, and especially to the arrogance of its current ruler, combined to attack the capital. Not one of the provincial governors lifted a finger to help. Vijaynagara was sacked and the dynasty fled into internal exile; the governors set themselves up as independent rulers. Vijaynagara lived on as a concept, a tiny rump state in the Carnatic, constantly shifting between the towns of Vellore, Penukonda, and Chandragiri. Yet the Emperor — the final dynasty was called the Aravidu — remained the one through whom all the ex-governors' royal families justified their rule. Contemporary visitors from Europe used the example of the Holy Roman Emperor, but a better comparison would be the last of the Merovingian kings of Frankland.

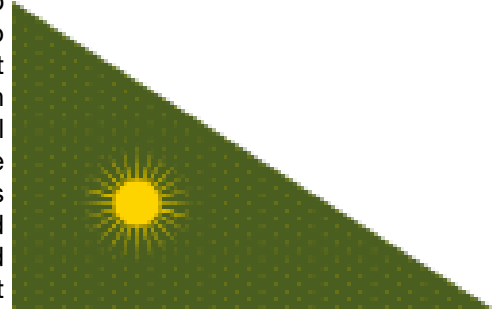
Meanwhile, as the Mughals established themselves on the Ganges Plain the Deccan sultanates avoided them by pushing ever south, taking over many of Vijaynagara's lands and extending Persian culture and Muslim practices. The Marathi Bhonsle clan even conquered Tanjore, in the Kaveri Delta — now, the Bhonsle were Hindus, and they would go on to establish the Maratha Confederacy as a counterweight to the Muslims, but at that time they were just another warrior-peasant community raised to greatness in the service of the Sultanate of Bijapur.

Each of the successor states of Vijaynagara will be introduced in its proper place in the narrative. Apart from a variety of small polities there were five: the Wodeyars of Mysore, the Nayakas of Ikkeri, the Nayakas of Tanjore (Thanjavur), the Nayakas of Madurai, and the Nayakas of Gingee (Senji). By tradition, the ruler of Madurai was said to be the spittoon-bearer of the Emperor, Tanjore the betel-bearer, and Gingee the fan-bearer; menial job descriptions matching European noble titles like 'cupbearer' and 'groom of the stool'. Though all were rivals and in some cases not even related by blood, they did regard themselves as kin. Of the five, Gingee was soon absorbed by the Sultanate of Golconda and ceased to exist. Tanjore was conquered by the Marathi Bhonsles but remained a viable entity; formerly part of the Pandyan realm, its ruler under Vijaynagara had been a powerful imperial general. Madurai (and Gingee) likewise were ruled by generals. The Wodeyars and Ikkeri were, by contrast, local chiefs given authority by the Empire. The Ikkeri lived high in the Western Ghats and it would have been impossible to overthrow them, while the Wodeyars were next door neighbours and had been the first to swear fealty to the new empire. Of the plethora of small states that fell under the Empire's shadow the most important

to the narrative will be the *poligars* and *zemindars*, a minor nobility that can be equated to the chieftains of the Scottish Highlands or the Balkans.

## The Mughals

Despite rumours that the modern rulers of India are trying to erase the Mughal period from the history books, there is no possible way to discuss India in the 18th Century without them. There was no true sustained Mughal presence in South India, but the Empire did sponsor several nominally Mughal states, appointing their first rulers, and, so far as can be gathered given the lack of source material, these states operated at least in part along Mughal lines and employed armies that fought in the Mughal fashion. They also adopted many native customs and military tactics, so that a lot of what is said about them can be applied to their enemies too.



Moreover, the ripple effect that occurred throughout the Subcontinent every time the Great Mughal sneezed cannot be ignored. The European trading companies always obtained trading privileges from Delhi, and the mercenaries and adventurers who declared themselves members of the Mughal hierarchy issued their decrees and collected taxes in the name of the Great Mughal, even if they were not sure what his name was.

*[Indian politicians would probably like to erase the Raj, too, but unfortunately for them, too many South Asians speak English for that to work. Besides, they would have to give up cricket.]*

The Mughal Empire, the last of the Turkic-Persian-rooted civilizations to rule in India, got its start with Babur (1482-1530). He claimed descent from Timur (Tamerlane) on his father's side and Genghis Khan on his mother's side, but preferred to describe himself as a Turk rather than a Mongol. The Muslim Timurids were one of those Turkic war bands swept up into the Mongol army and deposited on the shores of a new land — in this case Transoxania — where they proceeded to found a kingdom. Timur the Lame was their contribution to the list of History's great conquerors. He was more brutal than Genghis Khan, which is saying something. Heavily influenced by Persian and Turkish culture, the Timurids built a decent-size kingdom and made the traditional Conqueror's Pilgrimage to Delhi, but while Babur was still a young man the Uzbeks came out of the eastern hills and erased his inheritance. Babur himself tried to hold on to Samarkand but was eventually forced to flee into nominally Persian territory, to wit, Afghanistan. He set up shop as a Kabuli warlord, paid tribute to the Safavid Emperors, and was left alone by them. Initially he hoped to regain his homeland, but this proved impossible, so he turned to raiding the lands below the Kyber Pass. The raids grew stronger and longer every year, until from a band of 2,000 men harassing the Punjab the Mughals reached the Bay of Bengal with an army of 20,000 Turks, Persians, Mongols, and Afghans. This might conjure up the picture of a barbarian horde, but the leadership at least was well educated and cultured, quite fit to interact with the rulers of the Ganges Plain on equal terms. Babur was one of those men who could make the most out of whatever tools he had to hand, combining techniques of steppe warfare with the advantages of firearms, the latest in siege technology, and the use of elephants and the Indian bow (which stood up better in humid climates than the composite bow).

Babur's accomplishment was not negligible, but he had certain advantages. North India was already ruled by a Muslim minority elite heavily influenced by the Persian culture which he and his people shared. Most of the petty rulers Babur encountered were adventurers like himself: Arabs, Persians, Afghans, Turks. The Hindu majority enjoyed a toleration that their ancient Hindu rulers had seldom displayed, but only Muslims had a military obligation. That said, it was common practice to employ the Hindu warrior castes as *foederati*, particularly in the Deccan, where Muslims were a minority. Military service was rewarded with donations of land, on a model similar to the Ottomans (or Byzantines). The ruler granted land in exchange for service, but it was not heritable, and could in fact be sold for cash, the new owner then taking on the obligations that went with the parcel of land. A man could get a stake in

the game by converting to Islam. This system the Mughals retained and elaborated. As Eaton says (p.222):

*If the kingdom that Babur established in India was initially a transplant of Central Asia's semi-pastoral oasis culture, his descendants would root the state ever more deeply in India's agrarian economy, its socio-religious culture and its political life. Evolving gradually over several centuries, this process is often overlooked by historians seeking to capture the character of the Mughal empire in static essences such as 'centralized bureaucratic state', 'Oriental despotism', 'feudal kingdom' or 'Islamic empire'. No such facile characterization is satisfactory, not least because that empire was never static: its history was one of a progressive fusion of two very different worlds.*

(It also needs to be said that although this Commentary is most interested in Mughal expansion southward, Babur's empire incorporated most of modern Pakistan and Afghanistan — see the map.)

Babur claimed North India as his inheritance from Timur, who's own armies had sacked Delhi and wrung notional submission from its sultan, but his personal success generated enough legitimacy to claim overlordship of all the petty states of the North in any case, though as one might expect, he had to keep the reins loose. His notion of kingship derived from the Mongols, where the entire dynasty was in a sense the Ruler and the most able man would be picked to administer the 'family property' regardless of his exact relationship to the founder. The effectiveness of this style of leadership was undercut by Babur's successors, however, particularly in the reign of Akbar (1556-1605). Akbar and his descendants went in for tighter central control, the pomp and circumstance of the Hindu rajas, and the elevation and isolation of the Ruler behind a wall of eunuchs and court officials. Apparently, Akbar came to regard himself as a Messianic figure —in his day the Muslim world was going through a 'millennial crisis' as the thousandth year of the Islamic calendar approached, and he was not the only ruler to think and act in such a way.

*It was only in 1585, after his younger brother had died, that Akbar reimagined the empire as an indivisible state to be handed down to a single heir, while all princes would be rotated around the empire as high-ranking mansabdars, like other nobles.*

*This new conception of the Mughal state meant that princes, acutely aware of the winner-take-all nature of any future succession struggle, would devote their entire adult lives to building up enormous households, learning political skills, gaining military experience and establishing allies on an empire-wide basis in preparation for the contest that would inevitably follow a sovereign's demise. Such a strategy not only guaranteed the empire's territorial unity and integrity from one sovereign to the next; it also meant that the best-'networked' prince would become the new emperor, since in any given pool of contenders the prince winning the empire would probably be the most competent militarily, politically and administratively. On the other hand, the system implied that succession disputes would be more intense and violent, since siblings knew that in the aftermath of such succession struggles the losers would be eliminated, whether by blinding, exile or execution. For the winner, meanwhile, it would be necessary to reintegrate back into the empire's governing structure the former supporters of losing contenders. Much Mughal history from 1585 to the early eighteenth century flowed from this revised notion of the state.*

*Eaton, pp. 267-268.*

Like most empires, Mughal power based itself in the urban centers. So long as the hinterland fulfilled its commitments it was left to its own devices. The Army, meanwhile took on even more of a mercenary character. Akbar is credited with overseeing a major reform of the Army and Civil Service. It worked better on paper than in practice. Officers were arranged into thirty-three salary grades (with subdivisions). Of course, it was not possible to pay pure cash salaries, so the bulk of a man's pay came in the form of *jagirs* — estates — though there were the usual cash bonuses and other rewards for meritorious service. A man of low station would work such an estate himself with his own family and some employees, while those of high status held many large *jagirs*, run by overseers, just as one would expect. As mentioned earlier, these were not heritable lands, though of course a man's son might buy them from his father... But there were hurdles. Even the man who purchased his new pay grade in the bazaar was required to go through elaborate steps before he received his commission. First, he had to

fill out an application and present it to the correct official, then pay his respects at Court. If he passed muster he would be given a provisional rank. After which he had to make the rounds of various departments getting the paperwork signed, stamped, and countersigned (for a fee at each stop, naturally).

Befitting a Mongol regime, rank was graded by horses, all the way from ten to ten thousand (or slightly more when it was a question of granting extra prestige). Men of 1,000 and up were accorded the title of Mir (emir). In the beginning, an officer of say, 5,000, would be expected to raise and maintain 5,000 horsemen, and would be given lands and possibly a cash supplement to allow him to do so, with some wealth left over for him to invest and some clawed back by the bureaucracy. As time wore on, the imperial clerks began making double entries, showing what a man's pay grade was beside a lesser number to indicate how many troops he was actually required to contribute. One might suspect that the second number would be extremely low for a civil servant, but in that culture anyone who held a state job was generally expected to fight himself, or provide a substitute who would have to be equipped. The great nobles were required to attend Court regularly, and when on campaign with the Emperor met at his tent every morning and every evening. Irvine (*Army of the Indian Mughals*) thinks the only numbers that can truly be relied upon are the *suwars*, the horsemen of the *mansab's* (salaried official's) personal retinue who were drawn from his own family and clients. The bulk of the troops might stay home until required for field service, at which point they would decide whether it was worth showing up for the campaign or not. It became commonplace for commanders who did have large contingents to rent their men to commanders who were short and expecting a visit from the state inspectors.

Administratively the empire was divided into *Suba* or provinces headed by a viceroy called a *Subahdar*, who would be a grandee, but not necessarily a member of the Great Mughal's personal family. The Nizam of Hyderabad was a Persian mercenary. As defined at the start of this Commentary '*Nizam*' was the title of a governor, but the word '*Nawab*' was also used; it carried an implication of independence. The provinces were in turn divided into *Sarkar* or districts, under a *Faujdar*, who, like the governors, was in theory directly responsible to Delhi. His job was to maintain order, and he was authorized to maintain a militia for the purpose. Taxes were collected at the 'parish' level, the *pargana* or *mahal*, with the headman of the parish likewise authorized to keep a gang to help him collect. Some of these 'contract companies' could grow quite large, enabling the boss to set himself up as a local warlord. On the fringes of the Empire were vassal states, generously granted autonomy (because they were out of reach) who paid tribute and supplied additional troops. There were also various wild tribes within the Empire who were alternately suppressed or hired for odd jobs.

The rot is generally assumed to begin with the reign of Shah-jahan (1628-1659/1666). Famed for the Taj Mahal and the overall splendour of his reign, he got off to a bad start by rebelling against his father and ended a prisoner of his successor, Aurangzeb (1659-1707). The latter pushed the Empire to its greatest extent, but he was a hard driver with a religious agenda and succeeded in alienating the majority Hindu population. Under his successors, a string of short-lived rulers and pretenders, the provinces of Bengal and Hyderabad followed suit, though they still acknowledged the suzerainty of Delhi. The Mughal name retained its cachet. Muhammad Shah (1720-1748) was Great Mughal during the 1740s; one of the better ones, he saw the sack of Delhi by both the Persians and the Marathas, actions which shattered the myth of Mughal power. But, that power had already been long in decline. The empire grew too large, its center rotted and its periphery, still dynamic, was governed by ambitious men jealous of each other's power. To quote Irvine, '*My experience of India is that if a man has only two servants, one of them will at once attempt to supplant the other and monopolize his master's confidence.*' [p.297]

South India was on the periphery. The provinces there were nearly-independent Muslim governorships or nominal Hindu vassals. The Empire had a 'standing order' to conquer as far as Cape Cormorin, but it never penetrated into most of Kerala. As will be seen, Mughal influence was pushed down to the cape, but by adventurers acting in their own best interests under the Mughal banner, not by a Mughal army. This was in part because of internal dynastic policies. Beginning with Aurangzeb, the emperors got in the habit of not — as was old custom — giving their sons great households, lest they be overthrown. But, this meant that in order to properly fight over the succession, the heirs had to remain at Court, which only weakened them further. None of Bahadur Shah's sons ever took a governorship. Now that their

power bases amounted only to court factions, they were all too afraid of being cut out while absent. Eaton gives the example of Bahadur Shah's successor, Jahandar, whose personal following amount to a meagre 300 horsemen, in contrast to the tens of thousands his ancestors could call upon when they were heirs apparent. In fact, not only were great clashes between the princes a thing of the past, but Jahandar got the job because he was so weak; the real power was in the hands of the grand vizier, Zulfiqar Khan.

Thus the employment of mercenaries and adventurers as governors, and thus a period of instability at the Center throughout the first decades of the 1700s. The problems were compounded by the viziers and other high officials, who doled out land grants — the *jagirs* — to their followers regardless of ability. Worse, the number of *mansabs* increased steadily while the available *jagirs* decreased. In the past, *jagirs* were transferred frequently. This was still the way things were supposed to work, but more and more holders kept their *jagirs* in their families, and the Emperors were too weak to do anything about it. In theory, the empire's southward expansion should have solved that particular problem, opening up new lands, but in practice the conquering princes preferred to set up autonomous kingdoms and only use the Emperor as a token of legitimacy. Eaton adds one more systemic problem, the discontinuation of land evaluations and a regular tax assessment in favour of tax farming by contractors. This squeezed the peasants, who either turned to local rulers for justice and authority or began to take orders from the tax collectors, be they old nobility, zamindar chieftains, or Marathi administrators, rejecting the Empire.

As for the remaining independent kingdoms in the South, the Nayakas either treated Delhi as a peer or measured themselves against her. There are many legends of southern heroes refusing to kowtow to Mughal emissaries, or proving their warrior-hood by trouncing Mughal fighters in single combat. Yet Vijaynagara had given them a veneer of Persian culture and Delhi was the current center of that culture in India — faced with a choice between Muslim Mughal authority and Hindu Maratha authority, most of the southern kingdoms felt Delhi was the more legitimate fount.



Emperor Muhammad Shah 1719-1748

## The Maratha Confederacy

*When a Kunbi [peasant] prospers he becomes Maratha*

*Old Maharashtra saying*



The name 'Maratha Confederacy' is a loaded term, because it was used by the British to describe what they saw as a coalition; Hindu nationalists are made angry by this, as by so many other things, and prefer the term 'Empire', which it undoubtable was during its short heyday, but, after all, empires usually are confederations in practical terms. The term 'empire' really applies to the time when the hollowed out Mughal Empire was given new flesh and bones by its former enemy.

The Marathas were a specific warrior caste, but they were also a linguistic group, speaking Marathi, and there were other castes speaking that language and sharing a common culture, in the Deccan region now called Maharashtra. What came to distinguish them particularly was the rallying cry of 'self-rule of Hindus', or 'Hind for the Hindus', attributed to the recognized founder of the state, Shivaji I Bhonsle. The Maratha caste was what is known as endogamous, that is, a community that intermarries within itself. Identities are disputed because so many people claimed to be Maratha for socioeconomic reasons, and in fact some scholars dismiss the concept of a Maratha 'ethnicity' entirely. Some had specific job

descriptions, like shepherd or blacksmith but more generally they were superior artisans and yeoman farmers, primarily of rural origin. As yeomen, many gravitated to service in the army of the Bijapur Sultanate, which hired something like 30,000 of them. Many of the soldiers were *bargirs* — that is, men who had their horses supplied by the State (the reverse, those supplying their own mounts, were known as *siledars*). Though technically belonging to the *shudra*, or lowest of the four classical Vedic social ranks, their more important warlords quickly began to claim *kshatriya* status. Nevertheless, even today about 80% of Marathas are farmers.

The Maratha country, in the western Deccan, had its own peculiar political organization. Like much of India, society was clan-based, and predominantly agricultural. There were supposedly 96 Maratha clans. But, although the Marathi culture was fairly uniform, politically they were very fractured. Each of those 96 clans had its own *pargana*, or district, comprising anything from 20 to 100 villages, overseen by a *deshmukh*, or hereditary chieftain. This in itself was not that different from elsewhere, but the clans of the Deccan were loyal by contract, not by blood. They swore fealty to the overlord who granted them their land, but, at the same time, since they claimed a hereditary right on that land independent of the overlord, they also claimed the right to ‘shop around’ for a better ruler whenever they felt like it.

As the region entered the Mughal orbit, the *deshmukhs* became feudatories of the Empire, and were confirmed in their rights, including the right to collect taxes. Marathi society was already highly militarized, and this taxation right permitted the chiefs to legally maintain their own war bands, for tax collectors were always authorized to raise and maintain small bands of warriors on their own account to ‘assist’ in collection. Their tendency to seek the best ‘employer’ only intensified as the 17th Century wore on and instability grew widespread.

Shivaji (1630-1680) was the son of one of the Adil Shahi’s most respected military commanders. This Adil Shahi was the Sunni Muslim ruler of the Bijapur Sultanate. In typical fashion, the Adil Shahi’s family had been governors who rebelled against last dynasty. They extended Bijapur as far south as Bangalore and spread between Goa (which the Portuguese would wrest from them) and the Golconda province, which was at that time ruled by the rival Qutb Shahi dynasty. There was a fair degree of religious toleration in Bijapur and the Marathas found favour as tax collectors and soldiers. But by Shivaji’s day the Mughals were pressing south and the sultanate was in trouble.

The career of Shivaji’s family typifies the Maratha way. They originally served a powerful vizier of Bijapur’s previous dynasty, named Malik Ambar. (He is an interesting individual whose career is outlined in the section on the Mughal military below.) When that regime crumbled, Shivaji’s father signed on with the Mughals, had a falling out with them, and returned to Bijapur to serve the new dynasty of the Adil Shahi. When Shivaji in turn came to manhood, he set about consolidating his power, first seizing a Bijapur fortress and holding it successfully against them, then using that base to best each of the rival *deshmukhs* in turn. Like his father, Shivaji then — to guarantee possession of his acquisitions — entered the service of Aurangzeb, before the latter became emperor, and asserted Mughal authority on his behalf within the bounds of his new realm. He then saw off an attempt by Bijapur to reassert its control, and turned the tables, capturing many more hill forts and securing part of the western coastline for himself. This was in the 1650s. By the 1660s politics had taken a new twist and Shivaji was fighting the Mughals. Traditionally this was because of Aurangzeb’s hardline Sunni stance against all other faiths. While partly true — the 27-year struggle between them does have a Muslim versus Hindu veneer — Shivaji’s ‘rebellion’ probably came with the breakdown in their working relationship that Aurangzeb’s attitude triggered. And, Shivaji was ultimately just one of those men who are born to go a-conquering. His fight with Aurangzeb may have had more to do with them being similar personality types.

Shivaji sacked the great port of Surat and made a daring night raid on the camp of the column sent to punish him. However, he was eventually cornered, and renewed his service with the Mughals in their final drive to destroy Bijapur. This honeymoon did not last long. After making a scene at the Mughal Court (then at Agra) he broke definitely with both Mughals and Bijapur, and set himself up as a Hindu raja. To obtain badly needed legitimacy, especially among the haughty Rajput nobility of the North who regarded all Marathi speakers as Kunbi (peasants), he summoned a famous Brahmin who declared he was really of Rajput blood, after which he had himself crowned Shiva Chhatrapati (1674). He had already taken the

title of *haindava-dharmodarakla*, 'protector of the Hindu Faith'. It was at this point that he began the Marathas' own southern drive, which would ultimately result in the establishment of a Marathi regime at Tanjore and several hybrid Marathi-Persianate kingdoms in the Carnatic.

The Marathas relied on light cavalry, later augmented with firearm-equipped troops and cannon, which acted as garrison forces. The cavalry would make long distance raids to collect *chauth* (tribute), try to avoid battle, then return to the safety of their hill forts. The forts also allowed their army to be dispersed spatially so that the loss of a single location had minimal impact, but they were close enough that rapid concentration of force could be achieved. Collecting the *chauth* was a key feature of the Maratha regime. In origin it was the typical Indian tribute of 25% on a province's tax revenue (though 15% was a more common amount). Shivaji is sometimes credited with co-opting the *chauth* into an exclusive Maratha right, but it was actually his son's widow, the Warrior-Rani Tarabai, who extorted the right from the Mughals, in 1707, and turned the whole thing into a gigantic protection racket. In theory the *chauth* was only to be levied in Hindu lands 'suffering' under Mughal rule. In theory.



*Shivaji Shahaji Bhonsale 1630-1680*

Satara became the official Maratha capital, but at first Chhatrapati Shivaji based himself not far from the coast of the Arabian Sea at Raigad, just south of Mumbai. The Marathas now owned a large section of coastline and were one of the few Indian empires to develop a navy, which they used to good effect against the Europeans. By the time of Shivaji's death in 1680 his regime was a fully militarized state, with 300 forts heavily protected by cannon, and an army of 40,000 horse, plus another 50,000 or so foot soldiers. Many of these were not Marathi, but *mavalis*, tribesmen who lived high up in the Western Ghats.

This use of tribal peoples had an important impact on Deccan society, because the Mughals also bid for their loyalty. This was not uncommon, but the bidding war became unusually intense, and came to involve competing Maratha factions, too. Then, the Nizam of Hyderabad stepped in as a third contender on his own account, even though he was supposed to be a Mughal functionary. The Deccan soon became a giant military bazaar, where even a landless peasant could turn himself into a condottiere, hire a war band, and make the rounds of the various major players seeking the best deal. 'Maratha' became not just Marathi-speaking clansmen fighting under Shivaji's banner, but the whole mix of professional soldiery living in the Deccan, all of whom quickly blended into a single martial caste, regardless of their origins. The name 'Kunbi' was adopted by those who did not fight, but the Maratha brand extended to the peasantry, because the professional warlords routinely hired them to fight for six months out of the year (October through May). In this way the lower orders became a sort of hybrid Maratha-Kunbi community who could pass from one to the other caste as it suited them.

Shivaji's kingdom never became a centralized monarchy. Even when they later became the prop of the Mughal regime, the Marathas retained a fierce clan-based independence. As Maratha power grew, they chose to maintain control of their conquests by creating a federation of semi-autonomous states ruled by the most reliable of their nobles — clan names such as the Holkars, Scindias, Jadhavs, Dabhades, Puars, and of course Bhonsales or Bhonsles. The founders of these dynasties were *sardars*, senior generals. This reason for this was undoubtedly in part due to the nature of Marathi society, but Shivaji's ambitions for his family may also have been nipped in the bud by Aurangzeb, who captured his son, Sambhaji, in 1689 and had him executed with great brutality. The grandson, Shahu, was also taken, but being a mere boy, was kept and groomed to become a Mughal vassal. What Aurangzeb did not do was completely stamp out the Maratha Confederation, though he tried. Some Maratha chiefs were bought with offers of *mansabs*, and still more served either side as the fancy took them. But, four years were wasted in a siege of the fortress of Gingee, then a Maratha stronghold containing Shivaji's second son,

Rajaram. Ultimately the Mughal generals let him escape — they needed a prestige victory, but also realized the Emperor was not long for this world and that they had better ingratiate themselves with the Marathas.

Under Rajaram's guidance the Confederation quickly rose from the ashes. Shivaji's capital had been at Raigad. It had been heavily fortified but that had not prevented the Mughals from eventually taking it. Rajaram made Satara the new capital, a little over 100 Km southeast of Raigad, but on the eastern side of the mountains. Rajaram died in 1700. Enter the *peshwa*, Balaji Vishwanath. A *peshwa* was a 'prime minister' but also, usually, a senior general. The other phenomenon the Marathas were noted for was their employment of *brahmins* in administrative and treasury roles. Again, many regimes had similar practices, for the *brahmins* were scribes as well as priests, but their bureaucratic role was more entrenched among the Marathas; being mercenaries by nature, their contracts had to be enacted enmasse at the start of each campaigning season. The Maratha *brahmins* quickly became an indispensable part of the ruling elite, and would in time become the actual rulers of the Confederation. Balaji Vishwanath was such a man, and being extremely well-connected, he soon found jobs for all his brothers, cousins, and hangers-on. But this is to anticipate.

Shivaji's grandson, Shahu, had been taken hostage by Aurangzeb, but the latter's successor, Bahadur Shah I, released him, though keeping his mother imprisoned. This was not an act of kindness. At the time the Marathas were governed by Shahu's aunt, Tarabai, on behalf of her own son. (She had refused to commit *sati* — ritual suicide — on the grounds she was pregnant. A common tactic for female royals.) By releasing Shahu a succession war was therefore made inevitable. And, from the Mughal point of view a succession war was needed. Tarabai was a woman of exceptional ability, who rallied the Marathas and waged aggressive war against the Mughals. What other woman has her own equestrian statues? The Mughals had no better option than to reduce each Maratha hill fort one by one, usually only to see the fort they had just conquered be retaken by the Marathas. Hence the ploy of releasing Shahu. Shahu set up shop at Satara and Tarabai at Kolhapur. Shahu appointed Balaji Vishwanath of the coastal Bhat clan, a very able Brahmin, to assist him. In the short term this was a brilliant move. The *peshwa* not only secured the release of Shahu's mother, but obtained recognition of Shahu's legitimacy from the Great Mughal. However, recognition by the Mughals was a two-edged sword. It made the *chhatrapati* look like a puppet. Balaji was perhaps more useful in weakening Tarabai's influence through a systematic campaign of intrigue.

Once Tarabai faded from the picture (she continued in her position for many more years, but with waning influence), the *peshwa* gained great authority. Balaji's son, Baji Rao I was appointed *peshwa* in 1719, securing the post for the Bhat family. In 1731 Baji Rao defeated a dangerous rebellion in Gujarat, further cementing control by the Bhat clan. Baji Rao had imperial ambitions, but he died in 1740, so his son, Balaji Bajirao (1720-1761), otherwise known as Nana Sahib (Nana Sahib), became the most famous of the Maratha conquerors. Upon the death of Shahu, by his own will, the *peshwas* were made his legal successors, with the proviso that his descendants would be styled Raja of Satara with the title of Swami and remain the titular head of state. 'Swami' means 'true owner' in Marathi. This promise was kept, but after the Battle of Panipat in 1761 the *peshwas* would be made ceremonial heads of state in tandem with the *swami*.



Bajirao I (1700-1740)

Nadr Shah's invasion in 1739 altered the Maratha ethos considerably. Initially his Persian-Afghan army had been seen as a potential ally against the Mughals, but after the sack of Delhi, the Marathas came to see that even their own legitimacy stemmed from Mughal authority, and they became champions of the Mughal cause — not that that stopped them raiding their ward. The idea of a political Confederation was Nana Sahib's. Under it, the individual nobles could expand their personal territories in the name of the

common cause, and not become frustrated in their ambitions. Under his rule the Marathas ever so gradually began to become the flesh and bones of the Mughal State.

Balaji Bajirao was something of a genius, adept in all spheres of government. He assumed the mantle of *peshwa* against much opposition, at the tender age of 19. During the period covered by the narrative, he was still securing his position, and it was his rival, Sardar Raghuji Bhonsle, who appears in the chronicles of the South. Balaji Bajirao, though, was the brains behind the empire, and his efforts would expand it to its greatest extent, covering nearly a third of the Subcontinent. Unfortunately, it would all fall apart under the brother who succeeded him — not at the hands of the British, by the way, but at the hands of an Afghan warlord.

Curiously, the British takeover of India followed a somewhat similar pattern. A mix of conquest, hostile corporate takeover, and, to quote Eaton (p.419): “*British conquest*”, writes the historian C. A. Bayly, ‘often meant no more than the slow drift to the East India Company of soldiers, merchants and administrators, leaving the Indian rulers with nothing more than a husk of royal grandeur.’ Eaton also argues that it was the Indian ‘military labour market’ that gave the EIC the same opportunity as every other warlord to grab power. And British service paid well, better even than the Marathas or the Mughals.



Balaji Baji Rao (1720-1761)

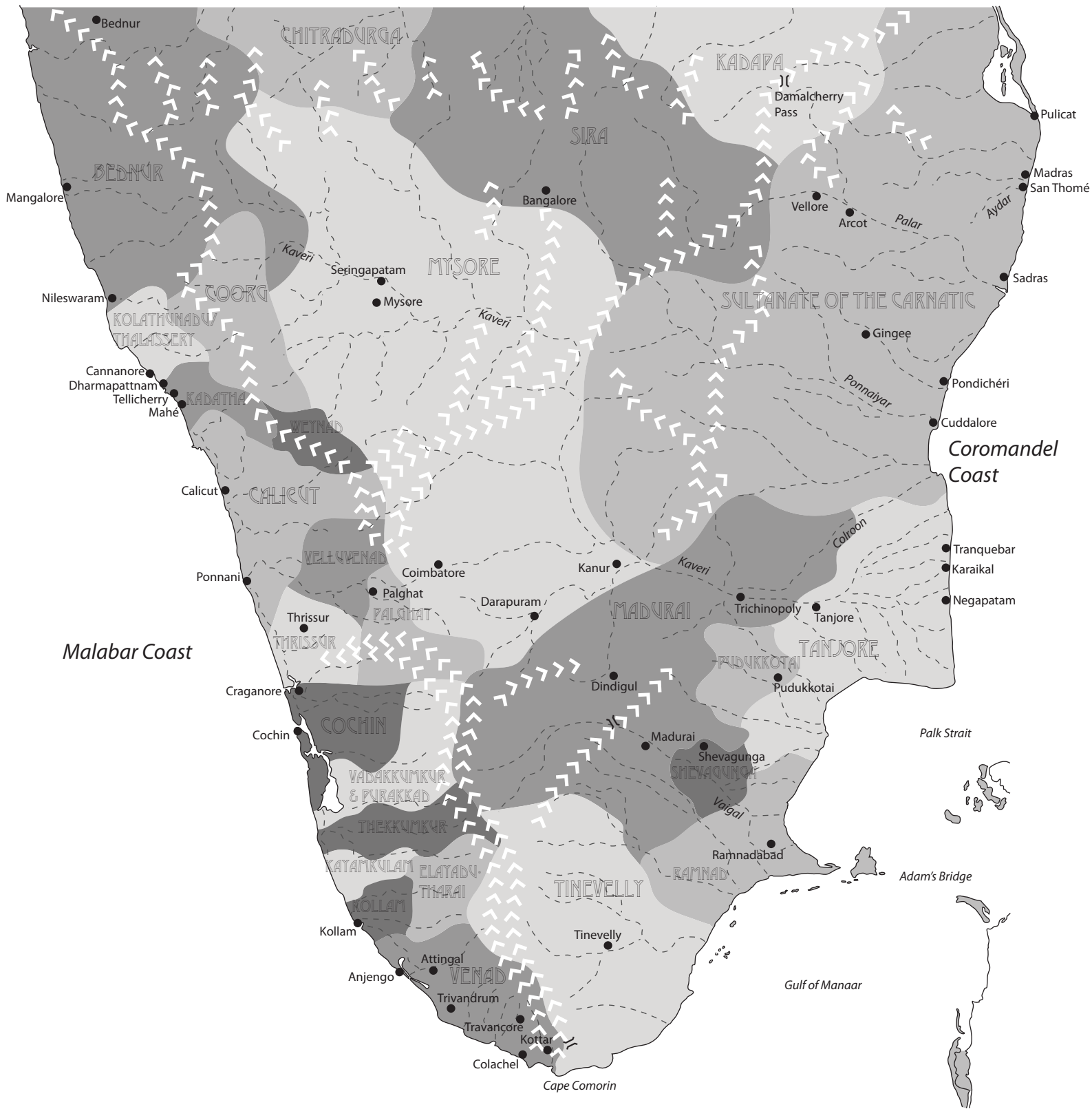
## Hyderabad



Hyderabad was a *subdar* of the Mughal Empire created by Aurangzeb out of the ruins of the Bijapur and Golconda provinces, which had themselves been created by the Mughals out of the wreck of the two sultanates of the same name. Their first governors had been leave to conquer the rest of southern India but they had overstretched. To prevent a total collapse the Great Mughal sent out a fix-it man, Mir Qamar-ud-din Khan, who created the new entity of Hyderabad as a viceroyalty,

directly subordinate to Delhi. It came to incorporate six provinces of the Deccan, and the emir (‘mir’ = ‘emir’) was appointed *Naib* (viceroy) of the Deccan, serving in that role from 1713 to 1721. After stabilizing the situation he was recalled north to perform other duties, but returned in 1724. Supposedly, he had tired of the intrigues of the court of Muhammad Shah and was going into self-imposed exile. It is strongly suspected he wanted to set up an independent kingdom. He settled at Aurangbad, the original capital, under the name Asaf Jah, a title given him by the Great Mughal.

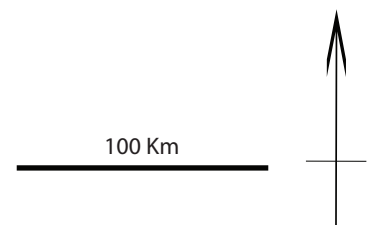
Qamar-ud-din Siddiqi came from a Persian family out of Samarkand. They traced their ancestry through a notable Sufi back to the Caliph Abu Bakr. (Anyone with pretensions to greatness made those sort of claims.) Living in Samarkand they no doubt also had direct ties to the Timurids. Qamar-ud-din’s grandfather, Abid Khan, took the *hajj* by way of the Deccan, where he paid court to Aurangzeb, who, as a royal prince, was then its Governor. The pilgrim received favour, and after his pilgrimage Abid took service with the heir to the throne, fighting in his wars and becoming his favourite. Abid married his son, Ghazi Uddin Khan, who also became a great general, to a daughter of an ex-Grand Vizier, thus placing the couple’s own son, Qamar-ud-din, at the heart of the Imperial Court. Ghazi Uddin was the man chiefly responsible for the conquest of the Bijapur and Golconda Sultanates under Aurangzeb, making Qamar-ud-din a natural choice when the region required a new governor. It probably helped that he was Sunni while the original governors had been Shia. The family managed to stay out of succession politics when Aurangzeb died. His death marginalized their influence, which kept them alive. In 1713 Great Mughal Farrukhsiyar came to the throne, and scouting about for someone to oversee the Deccan, dug up the



# SOUTH INDIA

## c.1740

Shaded zones show rough boundaries of the various states  
Dashed lines are rivers  
White angled strokes are mountain ranges



apolitical Qamar-ud-din, appointing him *Naib*. The title by which he is usually known, *Nizam ul-Mulk*, or the Nizam of Hyderabad, was also bestowed; it means Administrator of the Realm. The Nizam preferred his third title, Asaf Jah, which means Asaph the Wise, in reference to Asaph the Levite, an important minister under kings David and Solomon, noted for his psalms (in Hebrew the name means ‘who gathers together’).

Asaf Jah ruled at Aurangbad until Farrukhsiyar changed his mind and dismissed him. He retired to his northern estates. However, in 1719 the relatively long-lived Mohammad Shah took power, and in 1721 gave him his job back, though Qamar-ud-din remained present at Court. For some time the family’s political fortunes at Delhi had been managed by an uncle, the powerful Muhammad Amin Khan, but he died in 1722 and Qamar-ud-din decided he had better grab hold of the reins. At Delhi he was quickly made Grand Vizier, but the Imperial waters were full of sharks and to avoid being eaten alive in 1724 he quit and exiled himself to the Deccan, where he resumed personal control of his viceroyalty, establishing his capital at Hyderabad after some stiff fighting against one Mubariz Khan, the Mughal governor of three provinces, Golconda, Gujarat, and Hyderabad (the pair held overlapping jurisdictions; thus the conflict). It was thanks to the prior efforts of Mubariz that Qamar-ud-din was able, after defeating him, to take control of a relatively stable regime, which he would rule until his death in 1748.



Portrait: Mir Qamar-ud-din Khan Siddiqi, a.k.a. Chin Qilich Qamaruddin Khan, a.k.a. Nizam-ul-Mulk, a.k.a. Asaf Jah, a.k.a. Nizam I (1671–1748)

Though he was *de facto* an independent ruler, *de jure* Asaf Jah remained a subject of Delhi. He never crowned himself, always flew the Mughal flag, and ordered Friday prayers to be conducted in the name of the great Aurangzeb (and this was done until 1948). On occasion he came to the aid of the central authorities, notably against the Afghans and Nadr Shah, and warred constantly against the Marathas, though they forced him to pay the *chauth*. In fact, the Nizam lost every major battle he fought against the Marathas. Baji Rao I claimed to have reduced Hyderabad to a dependency. With Delhi unable or uninterested in intervention there was a some truth to the claim. The Nizam was forced to shift his capital farther east, to Golconda. Nonetheless, as will be seen in the narrative, his army did succeed in removing the Marathas from the southern state of Madurai in 1743, and he retained suzerainty over the Sultanate of the Carnatic. At its height his realm stretched from the Narmada River south to Trichinopoly, and from Masulipatnam on the Bay of Bengal to Bijapur in the West.

Asaf Jah was really very clever. What he had done was establish a second Mughal ‘magnetic pole’ that attracted the talent pool of the Court. His administration was eclectic, using not only soldiers and artisans, merchants and bureaucrats, from the North, but all manner of Deccan-based castes, including the Marathas, Tamils, and even indigenous tribal peoples. Technically, they all served the Great Mughal, but they did so far away from the chaos that was engulfing the North. This process was going on all over India. The Sultanate of the Carnatic is the state most germane to the narrative, but Bengal also became *de facto* independent, as did the Punjab. There was really not much choice. The Center was weak, lacking both the political will and the revenues to maintain the Empire. At least Asaf Jah’s way ensured continuity with the past. The situation was not that different from the condition of the Roman Empire after the Julio-Claudians died out.

The state of Hyderabad remained independent under the same dynasty until the end of the Raj, two hundred years after Qamar-ud-din died in 1748. His death had much influence on the rise of the British. His sons vied for power, along with the Marathas’ own Muslim contender, Chanda Sahib. The latter was also backed by the French, while yet another son was sponsored by the British. This sparked the Second Carnatic War, which the British won. However, it was not until the final collapse of Maratha power in 1805 that Hyderabad came fully within the British orbit. The very last Nizam was Mir Osman Ali

Khan, at one time accounted the richest man in the world. At Partition in 1947, Hyderabad chose to remain independent, which was a legitimate option, but the Congress reneged on the agreement, though with a good deal of justification. Elements of Hyderabad's Muslim population committed atrocities against their Hindu neighbours, in the idiotic hope of forcing the Nizam to join Pakistan (which would have created a real geopolitical mess). In response, Delhi invaded. The 'war' only lasted five days but an estimated 10,000 people died. Though he abdicated, a popular vote installed the former Nizam as their governor, which he remained until his death in 1967.

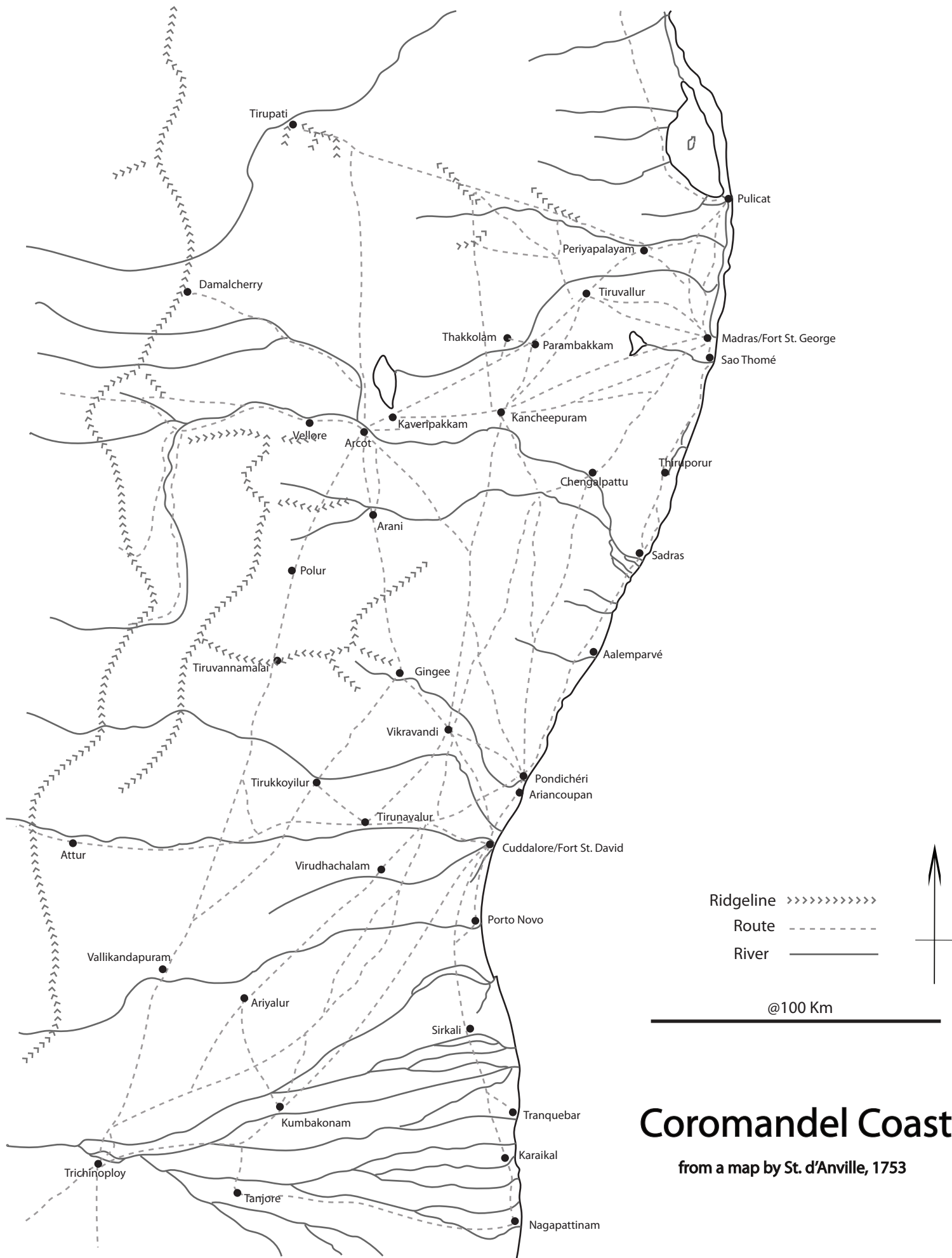
*[Ali Khan's wealth derived from the Golconda diamond mines. They and South Africa were for some time the only major sources of the stones.]*

## **The Carnatic and the Coromandel Coast**

What the British called the Carnatic is a misnomer. The word should apply to what is now the modern state of Karnataka plus the northern part of Tamil Nadu. The British confined the use of the name to the Carnatic Plain, or Lower Karnataka, that lies behind the coast of the Bay of Bengal. The high country in and beyond the Eastern Ghats was known by the local rulers as Balaghat and the plain as Payenghat. To further complicate matters, the ephemeral sultanates of Golconda and Bijapur respectively ruled Hyderabad Karnataka and Bijapuri Karnataka, dividing the land east-west so that both took in upper and lower sections of the country. And again, during the time of the narrative the 'Carnatic' was divided into Mughal and Maratha, a north-south split. Coromandel is the section of India's coastline, roughly 320 Km long, that faces Sri Lanka, stretching from the southern tip of the peninsula to Lake Pulicat, a short distance north of Madras (Chennai). The Coast has no natural harbours, so ports and trading posts were laid out wherever there were large markets and fairs. This also diffused the trade among several locations.

As will be revealed in the narrative, in the 18th Century Coromandel, as well as the greater Carnatic behind it, was extremely fragmented politically. Despite this, it was a prime source for mass cotton exports, to Southeast Asia from ancient times, and more recently to Europe. 'Mass' shipments, but there were no factories, it was all piecework done by individual families of certain castes. The raw cotton was brought from the interior by caravans of thousands of seasonal migrants. Since cloth manufacture in Europe was also piecework, Indian cotton had the edge then as it does today. Luxury goods included large pearl fisheries, and there was madder for red dyes and saltpetre for gunpowder. Conversely, the Coast did not take in much in the way of trade. This meant it was an almost exclusively cash economy, and had been so for centuries before Europe developed anything similar. Because there were few stable polities, then as now gold was the favourite means of storing wealth. But, there was little hoarding. The rich were always disbursing it in the form of gifts to friends, allies, and prospects, or donating it to the temples; they in turn used the money to build infrastructure or acted as banks. The temples also drew in vast wealth thanks to the large pilgrim traffic bound for Sri Lanka.

The vast amount of money floating around made the Coast a prime target for predatory states like the Marathas, while allowing local dynasties to buy loyalty from their otherwise recalcitrant feudal vassals, or alternatively, to buy off aggressors rather than fight them. For the European trading companies, it meant liquidity in daily operations and nice bribes (pardon, remunerations) for individuals. But by the 1730s the political situation began to be too chaotic for a cash economy to function smoothly. For the companies, profits began to sink rapidly and it became hard to source staples like cotton, while local rulers found it harder and harder to buy loyalty, let alone luxuries. The temple banks were not safe under the Mughals and their Muslim governors. Thus the rajas and *nawabs* turned to the companies for loans, with disastrous longterm consequences. The trouble was chiefly in the hinterland, on the Carnatic Plain and even on the plateau beyond the Eastern Ghats, for that is where most of the cotton was grown, some of it coming from as far inland as Coimbatore, at the foothills of the Western Ghats, closer in distance to the Arabian Sea than the Bay of Bengal. The southern advance of the Mughals had a ripple effect that destabilized local economies and this was exacerbated by their never-ending dispute with the Marathas. Both left trails of devastation in the wake of their armies.



# Coromandel Coast

from a map by St. d'Anville, 1753

And, there was more. Mughal rule was itself unstable. The Carnatic was a frontier, and the men set to govern it were often adventurers, either intent on founding their own kingdoms or on milking the land for all they could get before they were inevitably fired from their jobs. There were no true Mughals in South India, only mercenary appointees, clients, and proxies. Land taxes, for example, doubled between 1723 and 1733. Tolls were also increased, putting a crimp on long haul shipments. On the Coast, however, these problems paled in significance beside the ruination of the irrigation system. Since the region was in the rain shadow of the Western Ghats and only received water during the Monsoon, it was comparatively dry for much of the year. To solve the problem the ancients had devised an ingenious system of reservoirs (known as tanks) and channels. These still cover a tremendous area. But by the 1730s they were falling into disrepair thanks to the failing economy and the ignorance of the new Mughal-appointed overlords. By the middle of the First Carnatic War there would be outright famine. This is often blamed on Maratha inroads, and they did play their part, but it was neglect extending over decades that did the real damage.

This collapse of the economy may be regarded as one reason for the First Carnatic War, because it led to fierce competition between the French and British for very limited resources. It was also one of the key reasons why the Europeans began to involve themselves in local politics, in a way they had rarely done before.

## **Sira, Kadapa, and Chitradurga**

Now to turn to a trio of obscure minor states, products of the Frontier zone stretching across the Upper Carnatic. These three states played only a peripheral role in the coming narrative, yet their mere existence influenced the actions of others. All three lay between the Western and Eastern Ghats, well away from the coast. Kadapa and Sira had both been confirmed as vassal states by Mughal fiat and had then been made Maratha vassals. Whose vassal they were at any given moment depended on which of those powers happened to be in the ascendant. Chitradurga was in the same boat, but to a lesser extent. It was a much older and stronger regime.

The histories of the first two are similar in some respects. Like many territorial units in India, they had existed in some form or other for a long time. Usually, polities grew organically from a specific tax base — a collection of villages each comprising a manageable number of districts, possibly with some notable natural resource or significant temple complex to act as a focal point. New owners simply took over the existing state structure. If restructuring was done it was either through the imposition of an overarching administrative unit, as in the case of Hyderabad, or the accretion of odd bits of border territory comprising a few more villages or an extra district.

In the early 17th Century, before the coming of the Mughals, Sira and Kadapa were invaded and annexed by the second-tier Muslim states of Bijapur (for Sira) and Golconda (for Kadapa). The conquerors employed Maratha warriors who were quite happy to serve as mercenaries for Bijapur and Golconda and were afterward settled as military colonists. The Marathas like to make their own financial arrangements, and so Maratha accountants were imported, too. This meant the conquered territories soon had a military-fiscal middle-management class that was Marathi. When Aurangzeb conquered Bijapur and Golconda in turn he gave Sira and Kadapa new rulers too, and bid those men conquer the rest of the South if they could. Some accounts specify the new governors were a pair of Pathan adventurers, but that may simply be a loose term for foreign Muslims. When the Nizam ul-Mulk appeared on the scene he was made responsible for Sira and Kadapa as Administrator of the Deccan, but they continued to enjoy some autonomy, and had a back channel to both Delhi and the Maratha Confederacy — for their administrations were still Marathi in nature. Complicating matters further, they sometimes aligned themselves with the Nawab of the Carnatic Sultanate, who was also supposed to be under the Nizam's authority.

The Mughal *suba* or province of Sira was established in 1687 by Aurangzeb; it disappeared from the political map in 1757. The province, sometimes called Balaghat in reference to the fact that it lay in the Carnatic uplands, which were so named by the Mughals, was located south of the Tungabhadra River, on the border of Mysore, with whom there was periodic conflict, mainly over who got to collect what tax

revenues from which border villages. Officially, in Mughal eyes, Mysore, as well as the Nayaka regimes of Chitradurga and Bednur, were under Sira's suzerainty, but that rarely played out in reality. Bednur would have laughed at the idea. Two *subadars* (military governors) ruled Sira during the period covered by the narrative, Dilawar Khan from 1740, and before him, Tahir Muhammad Khan. For a time, Sira had some prominence, receiving royal patronage. But, Mysore was always nibbling away at its southwest border. The state only had seven *parganas*, or tax-parishes, and Mysore took one of the most lucrative. Ultimately Haider Ali would conquer all.

The Mughal *suba* of Kadapa, or Kurpa, or Cuddapah, was initially ruled by a mercenary serving at Golconda whom Aurangzeb handpicked (he may have switched sides). The man was also placed in charge of a neighbouring province called Karnul (Karnool) which had also been subjected to Golconda. His dynasty, named the Mayana, had more traction than Sira's, though it also had a more rapid turnover, but the records are very bad and no one is quite sure who reigned when. Kadapa played a significant part in the *Second* Carnatic War, during Hyderabad's own succession crisis, but did little during the period covered by the narrative other than acting as a speed bump for the Marathas during their great invasion of 1740. The province lay wedged between Hyderabad and the Carnatic Sultanate, astride the two main ribs of the Eastern Ghats, with the Penna River running through the middle of it from east to west.

Chitradurga was different. Lying north of Mysore, its dynasts were local men of the Bedar (Boya) caste, raised to the status of *nayakas* by Vijayanagara; yet another peasant group raised to warrior status. They were noted for their bravery and formed the core of a number of regional armies. In its day Chitradurga was a force to be reckoned with. After the fall of Vijayanagara, which Chitradurga helped to bring about, there was a 'period of warring states' that lasted two and a half centuries, and Chitradurga was constantly at odds with its many neighbours, not least of whom were the Nayaka kingdoms of Mysore and Bednur. Things calmed down slightly after the Mughals appeared. They created the province of Sira to the southeast of Chitradurga, but apparently decided the Nayakas, with their numerous hill forts, were not worth conquering. This was one of the sections of the country that had a lot of baronial *poligars*. So, they were encouraged to pay tribute to Sira but retained their independence. With the rise of the Marathas Chitradurga, like Sira itself, alternately aligned with that power and with the Mughals. Although the situation is unclear, it is probable that many in the government already identified as Marathi. But it would have been prudent to pay the *chauth* anyway.

Chitradurga came to grief during the period covered by the narrative. In 1747 rival *poligars* formed a coalition and defeated its ruler, Hire Madakeri Nayaka, at the Battle of Mayaconda. The death of the raja is an interesting illustration of how warfare was still practiced from time to time. Abandoned by his Maratha allies before the battle, he committed anyway and sought personal combat with his prime rival (whose name differs depending on the account). They rode elephants, and had the beasts' legs chained together by their servants to prevent them bolting — in some interpretations it seems the elephants were linked. At which the commanders proceeded to shoot at each other with bows from their howdahs. Hire Madakeri was wounded first and fell to the ground, and the enemy troops cut off his head. This counted as a defeat for his army, which retreated to the fortress of Mayaconda, where it held out for some months until relieved by his son and heir, Kasturi Rangappa Nayaka II.

The regime lasted a little longer, but would be crushed between Haider Ali and the Marathas later in the century. It was simple matter of backing the wrong horse. They thought the Marathas would triumph and secretly leagued with them, but Haider Ali was unstoppable. The capital, the 'impregnable' hill fortress of Chitradurga, was taken in 1779. The dynasty was allowed to live as prisoners of Mysore until the line died out.

## The Sultanate of the Carnatic, a.k.a the Arcot Sultanate

This particular sultanate was a relatively new creation, and would prove to be relatively short-lived. But, while it lasted it was a key element in the rise of the French and British to prominence on the Subcontinent. When fully formed, the province, most often known as the Arcot Sultanate, or simply Arcot, was bounded by the Krishna and Kaveri Rivers, north and south respectively, the Bay of Bengal, with the Kingdoms of Mysore, Sira, and Kadapa on the landward side. In fact, the greatest extent of Mughal power was achieved only in 1736, with Chanda Sahib's political games in Madurai. Chanda Sahib's, and the Sultanate's conquests generally, were more for their own benefit, but they worked under the mantle of Mughal supremacy to justify their actions. In the records the Sultanate is often partitioned into Mughal (north) and Maratha (south), reflecting the fact that the latter, though claimed, was never fully absorbed.



This region also had been under the Vijaynagara Empire, governed by *nayakas*, of whom the successor states of Madurai and Tanjore (see) were the sole survivors. Like the other governors, these had rebelled against the empire, bringing it down, only to become the prey of Bijapur and Golconda. Naturally, the various petty rulers did not form any sort of grand defensive coalition. They individually besought aid from the invaders to help them crush their rivals. By the middle of the 17th Century the two sultanates had almost completely eradicated Hindu authority in the Carnatic. Bijapur and Golconda were then in turn conquered in the 1680s by the armies of Aurangzeb.

Periodically the Marathas swept through the Carnatic. They had first appeared as allies of the sultanates, then as their enemies, then as allies of the Mughals, and then as their enemies. Thus there was a real mix of regimes in the Carnatic. The Marathas were represented by rajas installed at Tanjore, Gingee, Arcot, and other districts on the Plain. Madurai was still ruled by a Nayaka dynasty imposed from outside by Vijaynagara. Bijapur and Golconda were under Mughal management, while the petty kingdoms in the middle were tributaries of both the Mughals and the Confederation. Interspersed between these states were a host of petty rajas and *poligar* 'robber barons', creating a patchwork not unlike the Holy Roman Empire. A brief stability was obtained in the last decade of the 17th Century, with the Mughals holding the Carnatic plateau and the Marathas the Carnatic plain, ruling from Hyderabad and Gingee respectively. Gingee, taken by the army of Shivaji in 1677, had been the old Madurai capital of the latter's districts north of the Kaveri River before becoming an independent entity.

Aurangzeb's forces eventually drove the Marathas back down to the line of the Kaveri, which became the border of the new Sultanate of the Carnatic, with Maratha Tanjore and Nayaka Madurai to its south. His general, Zulfiqar Khan, a.k.a. Subahdar Muhammad Ismail, the son of his Grand Vizier, took Gingee in 1698. In those days it was a great prize, deemed the most powerful fortress on the plain. Aurangzeb gifted the place to Zulfiqar as its Nawab, along with rule of the Plain north of the Koleroon (the northern branch of the Kaveri), also charging him to continue the Mughal expansion southward. The Sultanate of Arcot (or Gingee, as it would be known at first) thus dates from 1698. Technically, it was merely a *faujdar*, a 'military district'. From the first it was made subordinate to Hyderabad. But, Zulfiqar and his father planned from the start to make Arcot independent just as soon as the Emperor died. They colluded with the enemy to prolong the campaign to take Gingee so that they would not be sent elsewhere, and agreed to split the Carnatic with their foes.

Zulfiqar Khan did not spend much time in the Carnatic himself after Mughal campaigning ended in that region, ruling instead through lieutenants. Besides being the son of the Emperor's grand vizier; he was also Paymaster General of the Empire, and under Bahadur Shah I became Governor of the Deccan. During his career he also served as Grand Vizier and was instrumental in elevating Jahandar Shah to the throne, which was the first time a royal official had played kingmaker to the Mughals. Zulfiqar Khan was an extremely powerful and influential man. He was Persian by blood, but his family had resided in India for several generations; his personal identity was 'Mughal', but he belonged to the 'Iranian' faction. And

so, he got caught up in the grand power plays of the Court, despite his best efforts, and ended up strangled.

His immediate successor (in 1700) was Daud Khan Panni, one of his lieutenants. British histories accentuate his foibles, particularly his drinking (yes, he was a Muslim) and his greed, because he did not like the EIC and put obstacles in their path. In 1702 he laid siege to Madras, then under the governorship of Pitt the Elder's grandfather. In reality he was a reasonably good governor by Mughal lights, having more successes than failures against the Marathas and strengthening Mughal authority in the Carnatic. Born in 1650, he ruled from 1711 to 1732. Daud made great use of *English* greed, putting many of the Company officers in his debt through the liberal granting of loans. This was a two-edged sword, for the English learned a valuable lesson and made it one of their most effective ploys against native rulers. Unfortunately, Daud Khan fell into the churn of Mughal politics along with Zulfiqar. In his case, the new Emperor, wanting to get rid of a too-powerful minister, sent the man to rule in the Deccan; Daud Khan was secretly instructed to intercept and kill him. But, in the subsequent battle, betrayed by a Maratha ally, Daud Khan was slain instead. That is how his lieutenant, Sa'adatullah Khan, came to be Nawab.

Sa'adatullah is regarded as the first 'real' Nawab of Arcot, and the founder of a dynasty, the Nawayath or Navayets ('Newcomers'). Born Muhammad Ali, he is said by some to have been an adventurer of Arab descent from Konkan, in the vicinity of Goa. There was a large Muslim community there, made up of Yemeni Arabs. The name of his dynasty lends strength to this view. Another origin story names them Persian merchants; but all the Muslim rulers cultivated Persian culture at their courts. A third option is based on the fact that there was a Konkani Muslim community living near Madras. These were Arab refugees from Iraq. Finally, some say he was a Rowther (Ravuthar). These were a Tamil tribe that had converted to Islam, and who were well regarded as expert horsemen. Some ranked as *poligars* or *zamindars*. Though Tamil, some *rowthers* also claimed Persian descent, because by that route there were connections to the clan of Prophet.

*[A branch of the same Iraqi refugee flood is said to have settled in the deep South; they were called Labbais.]*

Though he was Daud's subordinate, the Nizam of Hyderabad confirmed Sa'adatullah's appointment, even though at one point he served under one of the Nizam's enemies and was at that time an unfriend of the Nizam. He submitted to the Nizam when serving Daud, and they became reconciled. He had also served Aurangzeb faithfully and well, and had risen through the ranks on merit. There is a legend that he was originally rejected for service because of his poor physique, but a holy man devised a scheme to get him hired. He was to secret an amulet in his turban and present himself again among a crowd of other applicants. Meanwhile, the holy man bribed the inducting officer to ignore him while also passing word to the Emperor that a magic amulet was to be found on the lad under his turban, and that such an one was a worthy applicant. The subsequent discovery of the amulet thus present Aurangzeb with a miracle. The Emperor is supposed to have seen through the trick but must have decided Sa'adatullah was a man of enterprise. Interestingly, the Emperor's own account of the affair presented it as a different sort of miracle, he saying that on that occasion he had suddenly felt the need to recruit Sa'adatullah; it must have been the effect of the amulet!

Sa'adatullah moved the capital from Gingee to Arcot in 1716; the latter was a more salubrious location, if not as well defended. Vellore, the most powerful fortress upriver from Arcot, had been a Maratha base, but he had captured it in the years he served under Daud, eliminating the threat from that quarter. Sa'adatullah actively raided his Maratha neighbours and tried to remove the feeble British presence from Madras; his rule mainly featured petty wars with the various chieftains, who always tried to avoid paying their taxes. The Carnatic had been a lawless place ever since the collapse of Vijaynagara. In the main Sa'adatullah was regarded as a good ruler, intelligent, sensible, and efficient, as well as a gifted warrior. Even the panegyrists of the next dynasty praised his memory.

It was his successor, Dost Ali Khan, who kicked off the troubled times covered in the narrative. Sa'adatullah being childless, he made his nephew, Dost Ali, his heir. It demonstrates how little control Delhi had when an appointed ruler could choose his successor, but at this stage the situation was still regarded as irregular. Sa'adatullah, therefore, got the Emperor's private approval but never got official recognition from Delhi or from the Nizam, who was miffed at being ignored. There were other odd

features of the succession. To begin with, Sa'adatullah actually adopted two nephews as his heirs, both of the same brother, Ghulam Ali. One, Dost Ali, was to rule Arcot and the other, Mohammad Baqar, was to rule Vellore, a subordinate position but a lucrative one. But, apparently there was a third adoption, of a cousin, the son of Sa'adatullah's uncle; he was given the name Khan Bahadur. This man was also Sa'adatullah's son-in-law, and at one point Sa'adatullah was going to make him his sole heir. Khan Bahadur seems to fade from the picture, but when the old Nawab at last died there was still a dispute between the adopted brothers, each backed by a different faction. There was no civil war, but it was Baqar who was enthroned, not Dost Ali. However, at the coronation, as soon as Dost Ali had made his personal submission Baqar gave him the throne and left to take up the lesser post at Vellore. Faced with this switch the nobles paid homage to Dost Ali.

(Mention should be made here of one of the chief characters in the later dramas of the Sultanate, Murtaza Ali. He was the son of Baqar, and a son-in-law of Dost Ali, and he would inherit the rule of Vellore. But he was also an ambitious and unscrupulous troublemaker. During the period covered by the narrative he caused mayhem in the Carnatic, and during the Second Carnatic War he became a French puppet.)

Dost Ali ruled at Arcot from 1732-1740. In 1736 history records that he sent his son-in-law, Chanda Sahib, 'to conquer Madurai', the kingdom immediately to the South. If one peers into the weeds, though, things were a bit more complicated than that. First, 1736 was the year his rule was finally acknowledged by Delhi (though not by Hyderabad, his immediate overlord). Second, Chanda and a son of Dost Ali, Safdar Ali, were actually invited in by the Rani of Madurai, who was having trouble coping with a succession crisis. They were to be the neutral arbiters. But, the Sultanate did have designs on Madurai, using the Mughals' stated desire to conquer all India as far as Cape Cormorin to justify what was in reality a typical carving out of a kingdom for a needy family member. Chanda Sahib's machinations will be discussed later. In brief, he gained control in Madurai and for a few years the status quo was maintained, until, as will be discussed in the narrative, he overreached and was taken by the Marathas, departing the narrative, though not the world; he would return to the scene as a Franco-Maratha proxy in 1749.



*Dost Ali Khan*

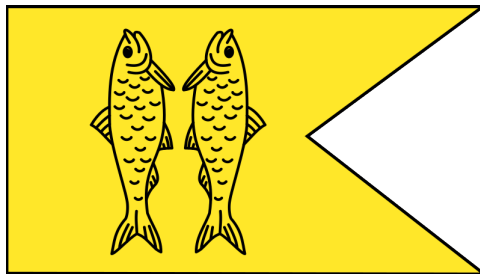
In the Maratha campaign that dealt with Chanda Sahib, Dost Ali was killed, along with his eldest son, at the Battle of the Damalcherry Pass, and Arcot fell, though only briefly. The campaign raised Maratha prestige higher than it had been for some time. Worse, it led to several years of instability in the Sultanate, until the Nizam installed an entirely new dynasty, that of Sirajuddawla Mohammad Khan-i-Jahan Anwâr-ud-dîn Khan (1744-1749). His family were Qannauji *shaikhs* from Uttar Pradesh — indigenous Indians who had long ago converted to Islam, and, like the *rowthers*, were cavalrymen. The term *shaik* (*sheik*) was not a caste mark or a clan, but a term of respect. Anwâr-ud-dîn was a high official in the Empire and also the Nizam's right-hand man. The latter initially made him Regent of the Sultanate for the young Sa'adatullah II, who was murdered in 1744. Upon that act the Nizam installed Anwâr-ud-dîn as the new Nawab.

Thus, Anwâr-ud-dîn was the Nawab the French and British had to deal with during the First Carnatic War. Mughal policy was to encourage foreign trade, and Anwâr-ud-dîn tried to remain neutral and act as arbiter — he forbade war within his territory, for example — but he had a preference for the more civilized French. However, as will be recounted later, when they reneged on a deal he sent a column of 10,000 men to attack them, losing badly at the lopsided Battle of the Adyar in 1746 and setting off a chain reaction that brought both French and British to dominance over the Subcontinent. After, Anwâr-

ud-din favoured the English cause. He died in battle against the French in 1749. This allowed the latter to install Chanda Sahib as Nawab; he reigned until 1752, when his and the French cause was defeated by the British and a rival belonging to the Qannauji dynasty was set up as their puppet.

## Madurai and Tanjore, and Chanda Sahib

Chanda Sahib is a critical figure for understanding several of the events in the narrative, but before discussing him, his victims should be examined. These were the kingdoms of that part of the Coromandel Coast lying opposite Sri Lanka. The bulk of the population here belonged to the Dravidian culture, like much of the South, though there were pockets of Arab Muslims and Christians. The ruling dynasties were Nayakas. They were northern imports, Telegu as opposed to native Tamils. Madurai, which had once had a large empire of its own, had been a key prop of Vijayanagara but had led the rebellious coalition against it.



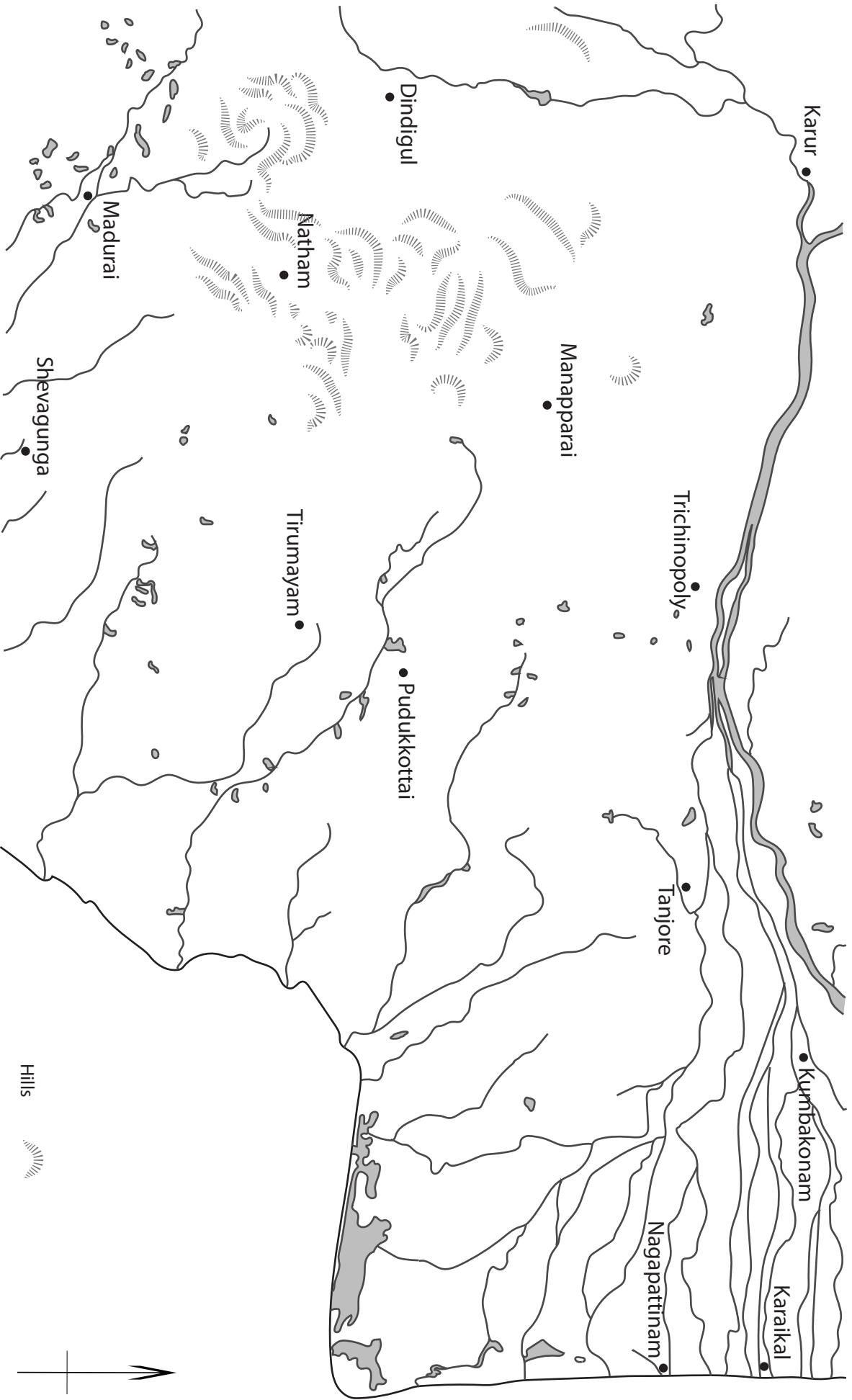
In the distant past Madurai had been the key player in the Southeast. After the fall of the Cholas the Pandyas took over and expanded it mightily. It became a sultanate around the time of Delhi's rise, but soon after shrunk just as mightily and became a province of Vijaynagara, though still under the Pandyans. The founder of its Nayaka incarnation was Visvanatha Nayak. His dynasty held sway from a pair of capitals, Madurai, in the heart of what would become the rump kingdom, and Trichinopoly (Tiruchirappalli) on its northern

border. Different rulers preferred one or the other location but both held the same prestige. This is important because it helps explain certain anomalies in the later sequence of events. Chanda Sahib would take Trichinopoly and claim it as his capital, while the remnants of the old regime held onto Madurai and claimed equal legitimacy from there. The Nayaka kingdom was sometimes called the Kingdom of Trichinopoly instead of Madurai. Each capital had always administered its own province; thus it was easy to break the state into its constituent parts. There was a third province to the South, Tinnevely (Tirunelveli), which was something like a border march, dominated by baronial *poligars*. Tinnevely became Madurai's third capital, but only after the others had been lost. Its true name, Nellai Cheemai, indicates it was originally a planned town for immigrants.

Visvanatha ruled roughly between 1530 and 1563. Supposedly he was the son of one of Vijayanagara's revenue collectors. This man, childless, had a vision while on pilgrimage and a son was born to him. Visvanatha then performed the heroic feat of cutting off a buffalo's head with one blow as part of a ritual, after which the raja promised him a kingdom if he served him faithfully, etc., etc. There is quite a bit more, including a duel between father and son for the throne of Madurai, Visvanatha acting as the champion of the Pandyan king and being adopted by him. The legend also incorporates the *poligars*, a collection of (traditionally) seventy-two petty rulers; the implication is that the Nayaka dynasty of Madurai installed them in their positions. Though demonstrating great autonomy, they did (usually) keep faith with the dynasty.

The Nayakas of Madurai ruled from 1529 to 1736, and were noted for their cultural developments. Their eponymous capital, a bustling metropolis, was the Heart of Tamil India. They were also open to foreign trade with the Portuguese and Dutch, who seem not to have been as 'pushy' here as they were elsewhere. The Madurai military was also fairly powerful; before Travancore's rise to greatness in South Malabar, Madurai troops were often sent to prop up that regime. Their chief rival before the coming of the Arcot Sultanate was Mysore, for in the early days they competed over much of the Carnatic and were fairly matched militarily. Madurai did not lose their lands north of the Kaveri River to the Mughals directly, but to the Marathas, who were themselves then partly pushed out by the Mughals.

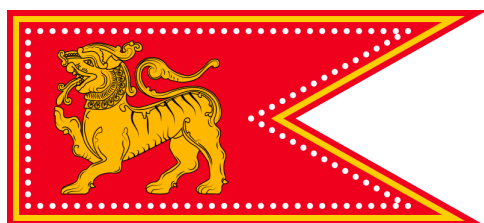
One political development for which they were noted was a turning away from Vijaynagara's warrior culture, perhaps seeing it as an import from the northern Persianate kingdoms which had in the end done the Empire no good, and although they kept the Persian trappings, returned to an earlier 'native' focus on conspicuous consumption, devoting vast fortunes to the temples, and spending their days in a



# Madurai & Tanjore

mix of ritual and the pursuit of a sensual lifestyle. They also gloried in their humble *sudra* roots and flipped the traditional role of the *brahmins*, placing them under the kings as mere administrators instead of spiritual guides.

Madurai's decline began in the later 17th Century. During that time the history is one of squabbling with near neighbours like Mysore, Tanjore, Travancore, and Ramnad, and far-reaching states like the early Maratha Confederation. The same powers occasionally allied with each other against bigger threats, but none trusted the other. About 1650 both Madurai and Tanjore became tributaries of Golconda and Bijapur, who at that time were advancing steadily south in somewhat friendly rivalry. The Mughals under Aurangzeb, after disposing of these two, then exacted tribute and fealty in turn from Madurai in the years around the turn of the century. Going forward into the 1710s and 1720s the Nawabs of Arcot made physical gains. And those were the early nawabs — the Nevayet line of Sa'adatullah Khan, regarding itself as independent from real Mughal authority, became even more expansionist.



Tanjore (Thanjavur) comprised the lands around the Kaveri Delta. The city itself is not in the delta, but on a barren upland, first irrigated in the 19th Century. South of the city is a region of tableland. The chief port was Nagapattinam, where the Dutch leased a warehouse and small fort. Exceedingly rich and fertile, and long-established, Tanjore had been a province of the Chola Empire, then came under the Pandyas of Madurai, and soon after became a province of Vijaynagara. Thus, a Nayaka

dynasty — not the same as Madurai's — had ruled since 1532 (or 1549), when the Vijayanagara viceroy at Arcot (ruling the province of Gingee) decided to go rogue. The author Bes notes that unlike some of the other successors of the Empire, Tanjore's rulers stuck closer to reality in their foundation myths, since they could claim legitimacy merely from being the lawful inheritors of an old, old kingdom.

Madurai conquered Tanjore in 1673, the kingdom going to a brother of Madurai's king, but he only lasted a couple of years. The current iteration of Tanjore dated from 1674, when Ekoji I (1675-1684) took it from Madurai, nominally on behalf of the Bijapur Sultanate. Ekoji was half-brother of the Maratha ruler Shivaji Bhonsle. Thus Tanjore was directly linked to the Maratha royal line. There was a very brief period where, supposedly, Ekoji ruled through a proxy before dispensing with him — a common motif — and ruling directly, beginning around 1676. In another common motif, Ekoji broke with Bijapur, while Shivaji nominally remained faithful and (also nominally) claimed overlordship over Tanjore. Though rivals, the twin Nayaka kingdoms had in the past cooperated on occasion against outsiders, and this remained the case when the Marathas took over Tanjore. Despite several attempts by its neighbours to restore the Nayaka line the Bhonsle House ruled Tanjore until 1855. Like Madurai, Tanjore was pressed by the Mughals and then the Nawabs of Arcot, and forced to at least pretend vassalage.

Madurai had three important vassal states of its own: Ramnad, Shivagunga, and Pudukkotai. These were ruled by dynasties that came from the warrior castes of the region, of which there were also three, the Maravar, Kallar, and Agamudayar. All three were regarded as a unified caste by outsiders, the only difference being where they lived. A Kallar could, as in the case of the ruler of Pudukkotai, be brother-in-law to a Maravar ruler of Ramnad. Originating as the armed retainers of the chieftains appointed by the Nayaka governors, some became fief-holders in turn, while others remained mere warriors. Some were also peasants. In other words, they were much like the Marathas and other military castes. 'Kallar' meant 'thief', and they were also bandits when times were hard. The *poligars* of Madurai, Trichinopoly, and Tanjore were Kallars. Those of Tinnevely, Dindigul, and Coimbatore (in Mysore) were styled Nayak, and those of western Tinnevely and Ramnad were Maravar. They were notorious for their independence, refusing to pay tribute or tax unless compelled by force of arms.

Ramnad was located at the point where the land juts out toward Sri Lanka, and its rulers were the Setupati, Lords of the Bridge, referring to the 'bridge' of islets connecting India with Sri Lanka, called Ram Setu or Adam's Bridge. The province lay on the chief (and very lucrative) pilgrim route for the temples of Sri Lanka. Thus, even before they declared independence from Vijaynagara, the Nayaka empowered the *poligars* of the region to fight endemic banditry and keep the pilgrimage route safe. As

Nayaka rule itself declined, the authority of his position led one of these *poligars* to declare himself king. His name was Sriman Hiranyagarbha Ravikula Raja Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Raja Raghunatha Deva Kilavan Setupati, or Raghunatha Kilavan for short. He remained loyal to the Nayakas, though he did pick up the odd bit of land from them. There was also a strong Muslim presence in the kingdom, including settlers, converts, and traders; they were tolerated while the Portuguese, and Christian missionaries generally, were given short shrift. Raghunatha Kilavan died in 1708. His successor had to deal with the inroads of Tanjore, for which Sivaganga was the prize.

Sivaganga (Shivagunga) and Pudukkotai were apanages of Ramnad. Both lay between Tanjore and Madurai. Pudukkotai, a Kallar, had been created by Raghunatha Kilavan for his brother-in-law. It regularly sided with Madurai against Tanjore, and would be the only one of the petty states of Coromandel to send aid to the Marathas when they were attempting to remove Chanda Sahib from Trichinopoly. Later, Pudukkotai became an ally of the British. Both Ramnad and Sivaganga were dominated by jungles that formed a natural stronghold.

In 1726 an illegitimate son of the Raja of Ramnad, named Bhavani Shankar, attacked his father in alliance with Tanjore (where he had been living in exile) after being recognized as the true raja by that regime the previous year. Their intent was to annex northern Ramnad, which included Sivaganga, and give the rest to Bhavani. But, Bhavani did not honour his promise — it included dividing his portion even further among three other pretenders — so Tanjore leagued with the original raja's brother and one of Bhavani's advisors (who had been badly treated by him) to properly conquer Sivaganga in 1730, establishing it as a cadet kingdom of Ramnad under Tanjore's guarantee.

The two petty kingdoms continued their squabbles intermittently, as Tanjore no doubt hoped they would. Mostly they fought with the help of the various *poligars* and bandit chieftains of the Maravar community. This is more than a side note. Sivaganga laid claim to the Setu throne of Ramnad and got the backing of Madurai, while Ramnad sought legitimacy from Tanjore. Each became involved in the major powers' wars and each dragged the major powers into their own wars. In the early 1730s Tanjore even sponsored Bhavani a second time when Sivaganga balked at paying Tanjore's fee for services rendered. Between 1735 and 1748, too, Ramnad's ruler was a minor and rule devolved onto the queen regent and the chief minister. The lad died in 1748, age 18, and there is a suspicion the death was not natural. This chaotic situation made it easier for the Sultanate of Arcot to expand into the region. Only Tanjore was capable of putting up any sort of a fight, and even then, only by hunkering down in their capital. But often Arcot was only called upon to act as arbiter — for a fat fee.

*[Bes (Heirs of Vijayanagara) concludes that a regime like Tanjore's had stability thanks to it being founded on an ancient polity in an agricultural landscape, where society was rigid. He cites Ramnad as the polar opposite. Though right next door it was a land of pastoralists and nomads, jungle-clad and infested with fickle bandits who were the only military resource that regime had.]*

## Mysore

Mysore is an odd duck. Most readers are probably more familiar with its existence than most of the other states to be mentioned in these pages, save the Mughals and Marathas. But, that is because of Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan. At the time of this narrative Mysore was a third rate power, yet it still managed to poke its fingers into many pies.

It was ruled by a dynasty that predated the Vijayanagara Empire, the Wodeyars. But they quickly became a vassal state (not surprising given that the settlement of Mysore was very close to the imperial capital at Serigapatnam). There were originally some 33 villages in Mysore, contributing a mighty force of three hundred warriors. Expansion began after the Aravidu dynasty of Vijayanagara moved their capital to Chandragiri and left Serigapatnam in the care of a governor. Incidentally, the use of the title 'Sultan' predated the rise of the Muslim regime of Haider Ali. It was deliberately used to claim direct descent from Vijayanagara.



The Wodeyars were the first of the Empire's vassals to stop paying regular tribute. They gradually took over control of various villages and towns as imperial power collapsed, but about 1638 they bumped into the Bijapur Sultanate and after some bickering had settled the relationship, turned their attention south. Erode, on the middle Kaveri, they took from Madurai. In the Southwest they fought with the Bednur Nayakas, who were likewise expanding, and repulsed them. To survive encroachment from the Marathas and Mughals they made alliances with both; by the 1720s they were playing each against the other. The Mughals tended to be favoured because Mughal power gave them additional prestige in a trickle-down effect. But, since they gave tribute to the Mughals they were regarded by them as a vassal. Complicating matters, Arcot and Sira both also demanded tribute from Mysore, in the Mughal name, while in the Southeast there were border disputes with Madurai, whose Kallans and Maravars constantly raided along that border. Meanwhile, Mysore began contemplating obtaining access to the sea. This dream would take decades to accomplish; it involved tough campaigning against Bednur and Coorg and would bear no fruit during the period covered by the narrative.

In fact, at this time the regime was extremely weak. Chamaraja Wodeyar VII was the first in a string of ineffectual rulers. He allowed his army commander (*dalavayi*) and the man's brother, who was his prime minister (*sarvadhikari*), to hold the reins. That family would rule for three decades with the Wodeyars as figureheads until the rise of Haider Ali, who ushered in a new, if brief, Muslim dynasty. Krishnaraja Wodeyar was the ruler during the period covered in the narrative.

Though descriptions of it might be attributable to Haider's time, Mysore apparently had a fairly efficient administration, even if the ministerial family was more corrupt than usual. It was organized either on the Mughal model or that of Vijaynagara, more probably the latter. There was even a postal service. Taxes were based on the quantity of cultivation rather than on the land itself, because the population, at least in the beginning, was comparatively small. The regime was usually tolerant of other faiths, and the dynasty had changed its own brand down through the centuries. Like Vijaynagara, the elites had embraced the fashionable Persian culture, but they stuck to a strict, classical Hindu caste system, and as the Marathas rose in stature they began to 'return' to Hindu dress and customs — though in reality such were Hindu-ized Persian customs.

## The Malabar Coast

*"He saw, moreover, Calicut, strange gorgeous city of thatched houses and half naked men, of cocoa palms besides the beach, of gold and jewels, of elephants and pepper. Especially pepper: Pepper may not mean much to us, but in that age, it ranked with precious stones. Men risked the perils of the deep and fought and died for pepper."*

*Yeshuratnam, Rajas of Malabar, p.4*

People have traded in spices on the Malabar Coast since the dawn of time. The Romans had an entrepôt there, which Pliny supposedly visited, and so did the Ming Chinese. Indeed, it is estimated that for every shipment of pepper going to Europe China imported a hundred shipments. The name Malabar is derived from the Arabic/Persian 'Mala-Bar', or Hill Country, and is a translation of the Tamil word that means the same thing. The Indians who coined the name were not looking at it from the sea, but from the landward side, and from the other side of those hills. Thanks to the presence of the Western Ghats, the Southwest corner of India tended to function in political isolation from the rest of the Subcontinent, and thanks to its commercial ties was more in tune with developments in the rest of the world. There was periodic migration into the region, bringing some cultural ideas, and there was some land trade in and out, and there was always pressure from the northern and eastern kingdoms. But, getting into Malabar with an army was hard. It was not a place one sent armies. In the mid 18th Century the House of Venad, located at the southern tip of the Subcontinent, had strong relations with Madurai. The Bednur dynasty in the vicinity of Mangalore was periodically victimized by the Marathas and the Mughals. And, in the center of the coast, Calicut suffered occasional inroads from Mysore. But that was about it as far as 'domestic-foreign' politics were concerned. Within the confines of the Coast, there were enough political entities to fill a continent.

Malabar can therefore, more or less, be examined in isolation from the Maratha-Mughal rivalry and the antics of the Europeans in the Carnatic. There were a handful of irruptions through the Western Ghats

during the period covered by the narrative, but Mysore's war of conquest under Haider Ali comes later. The European trading posts were naturally linked to the wider world, but their personnel were only tangentially interested in events elsewhere. Especially, the question of what would a defeat do to their standing on the Coast, and how many resources were Head Office planning to divert elsewhere? This Commentary will focus on two regional wars: that between Cochin (and by extension the VOC) and Travancore, and an earlier fight between the Canarese and their neighbours to their south. The two wars had little direct effect on each other, despite the relatively short distance between their epicentres. For a European model imagine a war between Portugal and Spain while France fights Germany on the Rhine; extending the parallel to the Maratha-Mughal conflict would be to add the Ottoman fight against the Habsburgs. Overlapping ripples, but little direct consequence.

Malabar in a specific sense means (and meant) the southern half of what is now the state of Kerala. At times the whole of Kerala was known as Malabar, but for the purposes of this Commentary the more narrow sense is used. Northern Kerala was called South Canara; North Kanara today is part of the state of Karnataka, but North Kanara falls outside this study. Physically, Malabar is a region of contrasts. It has the highest peak outside of the Himalayan zone (Anamudi) and farmland that lies below sea level. Thanks to the Southwest Monsoon it is one of the wettest parts of India, with a mean annual rainfall of over 100 cm; monthly averages during the monsoon frequently go over 20 cm. Temperatures can climb into the 40s (Celsius), but up in the mountains, which rise above 2,500 metres, there can be snow. The Western Ghats are a sizeable range and intercept most of the monsoon rains. There are only a few passes through to the eastern side that are suitable for traffic.

The land comprises three distinct zones: the rugged eastern highlands, rolling hill country, and the flat coastal lowlands. The latter is a mix of lakes and lagoons, brackish rivers and networks of small canals; rice is the staple crop. Eight percent of India's waterways lie in Kerala. The coastal belt used to be covered in mangroves and 'classic' jungle, but most of the trees are long gone and the land has been partially drained. The champagne country is where much of the pepper and other spices are grown. In olden days the plantations were accessed by the various rivers, too small for navigation by large vessels but passable with small boats and canoes, and for those rajas who wanted some of the perks of European trade, or for Europeans not wanting to be beholden to a local middleman, domination of both plantations and the rivers was key. The highlands are a mix of dense jungle and temperate alpine woodland. In a broad sense the land slopes fairly evenly down from east to west, but in some places the mountains come down almost to the sea and in others the land shoots up abruptly.

Malabar was not an urban environment. Most people, including the nobility, lived a rural existence, abiding in family compounds. A cluster of peasant compounds would comprise a scattered community that could be called a village, for want of a better term. The local headman would have the nicest compound, unless he was an absentee landlord. The upper crust lived in grander compounds, styled palaces. More often than not the communities and palaces were associated with a temple complex, for the rajas were priest-kings and the peasants existed not only to till the land, but to service the temples. Many of the temples and palaces were fortified, though not extensively. They were simply larger, and more stoutly built. Some rajas did build permanent forts — small ones — and river lines were frequently fortified in time of war. But these were mud-brick affairs, surrounded by bamboo thickets and moats, that could easily be torn down when not wanted.

There were only a handful of towns, and all lay on or near the coast. Each served as an entrepôt for one of the principal ruling dynasties, and they were cosmopolitan enclaves of international trade. They were usually run by Arab families, who collected the customs dues on behalf of the maharaja who owned the town, but there were Jewish and Christian quarters, too, and the warehouses of a dozen different foreign nationals, from Persian to English to Chinese. At the present day roughly half of Malabar's population are Hindu, and the rest are Muslims and Christians. The proportions were similar in the past.

The trading ports were heavily fortified and could act as places of refuge, but the raja would live outside, perhaps within a day's journey. Communication with the other towns was by sea, which naturally gave the Europeans a stranglehold on the economy. Until modern times there were no roads to speak of in the interior, except for a handful of east-west routes leading to Coromandel and the Carnatic plateau. All the

coastal communities, various castes of fishermen and the *mappilas*, had fleets of boats that could be armed, but they were <usually> no match for ocean going ships.

Encompassed within Malabar and South Canara were the following actors:

1. Five 'foreign' entities — the Arabs, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and the French. All these were primarily merchants and traders. Some had weak or strong imperial designs; others had none.
2. The 'Big Four' Nair (or Nayar) kingdoms — from north to south, Kolathunadu, Calicut (modern Kozhikode), Cochin (modern Kochi), and Travancore. The Nairs were both the ruling caste of the whole region and the landed gentry, sharing the same customs and habits, and the ruling families were all intertwined. The kings also intermarried with the brahminical caste to give them a higher, priestly status, for they claimed divine right to rule. However, authority was diffuse. The only powers with any notions of centralizing control were the Dutch, who ruled Cochin as a protectorate, and the Maharaja of Travancore, India's answer to Frederick the Great. Besides the Big Four there were many — twenty plus — small political entities on the Coast who were something like vassals to the big four, when they chose to be. The Nairs have sometimes been compared to the Mamelukes or the Samurai. The latter is probably a closer match; it was customary to have severed-head viewings after a battle. Say a mix of Mameluke politics and Samurai behaviour.
3. The Ikkeri Kingdom of Bednur and its cadet House, Coorg. These were Kanarese people, with the most prevalent community/caste being the Beders, who originally came from the northeast. There were Nairs among them, as well as other castes and communities common to that part of India, such as the *mappilas*, but the rulers were Nayakas, who, it will be remembered, were drawn from local chieftains to be governors for the defunct Vijaynagara Empire. Coorg was a small mountain kingdom in the interior. Bednur was a middle-weight state as far as the Subcontinent was concerned, but a powerhouse locally, and much more unified than its neighbours.

## The Kingdoms of Kerala

There were about 20 different polities of some significance in Kerala, maybe 40 'princely' families, and over 500 (!) different castes and unique communities. It was a mess. But, if culturally distinct from the rest of the Subcontinent, it was culturally uniform up and down the Coast. Warfare was endemic, but localized. Very rarely had anyone tried to invade from the North. This meant there were long periods when trade flourished — external trade, for there was little infrastructure to promote domestic production. The petty kingdoms generally amounted to strips of territory extending inland from the coast, along or between the rivers, since these, though few were 'navigable' in a strict sense, were the primary means of bringing commodities down to the coast. The hill kingdoms of the interior tended to encompass mountain valleys instead, meaning they usually ran northwest to southeast. Like so many other locations in India, the rulers came from a caste that had been elevated by an ancient empire to act as governors and generals and clung to power after the empire collapsed. In this case it was the Chera. To the North were the Chola, and to the East the Pandya. The Chera lasted in one form or another from about the late 3rd Century AD to the 12th Century. Originally founded on the Kanara plateau, when the Chola and Pandyan kings rose they pushed the Chera south, and onto the other side of the Western Ghats, though some of the elites were absorbed, allowing for the claim of ancient ties between the successors of the Chera and the other kingdoms. Many of the rajas of Malabar claimed descent from the Chera, or claimed to have been appointed to rule by them, particularly the rulers of Travancore in the far south. No single polity emerged after the collapse of the Chera, but a common culture remained. The Vijayanagara Empire managed to extract periodic tribute from the region, but not regularly; only the Ikkeri Nayakas of Bednur in South Canara were appointed as its governors, and they controlled lands in the interior. Madurai, the successor of the Pandyans and likewise a Nayaka kingdom, had fairly strong ties with Travancore, to the point that the dynasties may have intermarried occasionally.

No single polity emerged, but over time power accumulated in the hands of four dynasties, each of which had a turn at trying to rule the whole region. The rest became, in the loosest possible sense of the word, 'vassal' states, often cadet branches of the same family. They squabbled, and involved their overlords in disputes with other overlords. Apart from the Big Four, the most prominent minor states

were Kottayam, Kadathanad, Kurumbranad, Beypore, South Parapanad, Walluvanad, Palghat, Betunad, and Chavakad. The Muslim and European presence was a political factor, but they were always outsiders.

Some general statements can be made about these polities. The individual state was called a *nad* — thus, Tamil Nadu, for instance. But *nads* came in many sizes, and *nad* also simply meant a principality, in the medieval sense of a prince's domain. The word is also translated as 'chiefdom'. It could refer to a very small area of land, and in fact is technically defined as a collection of clan villages, known as *desam*. Each *desam* had its own headman, called a *desway* or *jelmiwar*; the exact term used indicated the amount of chiefly right he enjoyed. For most people, the *desam* was their entire world, and the ruler of the *nad* itself, the *naduvazhi*, was the paramount lord of their existence. Actually seeing a raja passing by on his elephant might be a once in a lifetime treat. This clannish insularism extended to caste relations, so that although every village had the same set of castes, there was no caste solidarity, only loyalty to the clan's *nad* and an intimate knowledge of one's place in the pecking order. In each *nad*, a given caste had its own special peculiarities that enjoyed some variation.

As for the *naduvazhi* or headmen, they were something akin to a European baron. But, the *naduvazhi* were not part of the higher nobility, and might not be of noble blood at all. They were administrators of the *nads*. Something like the *ministeriales* of the early Holy Roman Empire — freedmen who over the centuries could acquire noble status but did not start out that way. The title was heritable. Like European barons they had both a civil and military role. They were vassals of the higher class of rajas, who were known in Kozhikode as *samantans* but were more generally called Nair Madampimar — the 'upper crust' — comprising the rajas and the even higher caste *brahmins*.

Nearly the entirety of the nobility, from maharaja down to yeoman farmer, belonged to or claimed to belong to the same caste: the *nayars*, or *nairs*. 'Nair' is a name the Europeans applied to all the warriors of the Malabar Coast. They called themselves Lokar. The *samantan* rajas and the lesser *nairs* regarded themselves as distinct castes. Actual origins are disputed. There is a claim that it comes from *nayaka*, using the original meaning of 'leader', while others think it has to do with the Naga snake cult.

Only some of the rajas actually ruled a tract of land. 'Raja' was a social rank. Those that did rule the land could be regarded as 'dukes', and, in a similar manner to Germany during the Early Medieval period, the 'first among equals' of said 'dukes' would constitute the maharaja of a particular power bloc. Of course, a dynasty would last longer if the ruler could advance some claim to ancient lineage, or a priestly role that elevated him above mere mortals. Such exalted beings did not govern directly, they were too busy carrying out priestly functions to ensure the gods never became angry (or were otherwise engaged with important matters like hunting excursions). Administration was what the *naduvazhi* were for. Some *naduvazhi* also retained the status of independent chiefs, whom the rajas had to conciliate from time to time. And, some *naduvazhi* were actually *samantans*, or claimed that status, while others were descended from conquered indigenous chieftains; these last tended to be more independent-minded, and as the reward for obedience acquired a ritually higher rank and usually retained more real power. This was necessary because the *naduvazhi*, whether vassal or free, supplied soldiers to the rajas and always maintained their own bands of armed retainers.

High society was matrilineal, and polygamy was often practiced, though not universally. Men were of less account in the bloodline than women, and the chroniclers report that some rajas had no idea who their father was. In theory, any male of a ruling house could be the king of their polity, but he would usually be a son of the Matriarch. Under her, rights were devolved through the female lines, in a system called *marumakkathayam*. A person's standing within the family depended on his birth relationship to her. Other senior males might be generals, or prime ministers, or priests — to enhance their status. Inter-marriage with the brahminical caste was a defining feature of the *samantans*. (Not everyone believed the nobility's claim to be *kshatriyas*, but there could be no question of the brahminical connection.) Interestingly, amongst themselves the *brahmins* practiced the more usual patrilineal succession. The *brahmins* were priests, but also civil servants. They had been a separate line of administrators drawn from the temples by the ancient emperors to work in parallel with the *samantans*; each acting as a check on the other. The native-born Mabudiri Brahmins were regarded as being above kings in social rank, but

Tamil Brahmins and other foreigners from the North had a more questionable position. In practice the rajas seem to have used their intermarriage gambit to seat themselves in second place on the pyramid. That, of course, is hotly disputed, even today.

Each village was a self-sufficient commune, hence trade within the country was minimal. A village was a spread out affair, covering between one and four square miles. The landlord *naduvazhi* or *jenmis* held the land as a sort of fief, but if they obtained permission they could sell it. They could also govern it in absentia. Sometimes a village had no landlord at all. There was no 'common land'. Instead, each family worked its own plot. The village often had a special role to perform that went with the *naduvazhi*'s holding, like servicing a temple or running a plantation. Spices — pepper, cardamom, ginger, and the like — were grown specifically to be sold to foreigners. Sometimes, latterly, the plantations were foreign-run, but most often they were owned by the rajas, who leased a small section for the trader's warehouse.

The landlords, who could be rajas, chieftains, or lesser appointees, kept to themselves, their extended family being known as a *tharavad*. All members claimed descent from a single woman. Extended families lived in compounds, with a tank — that is, a reservoir — in the middle. The compounds might be walled, but often had bamboo thickets to protect them. There would be a shrine nearby, overseen by a family member, or in the case of a high noble, a temple with a staff of priests and functionaries. The *naduvazhis* and villages would be administered from the compound. Because the households of the extended family were arranged around the tank, they were distinguished by the cardinal points of the compass. Thus, when a source writes of the Northern Prince, they mean the family who lived on the North side of the water tank, not necessarily someone ruling the northern portion of the family's domains.

Even the most powerful and respected of the rajas rarely had direct authority beyond his compound and had to rule through others. But, though this makes them sound weak, in reality they had great moral authority. Beyond the fact that they were the bridge between gods and men, they were expected to uphold society by their conduct. A raja had no need to inflict horrendous punishments; they were supposed to enforce obedience through personal example. If they flouted the laws of the land their people were legally entitled not to obey them. Conversely, the people would obey their decrees willingly so long as they saw the rajas submitting themselves to the same laws. Naturally this is theory, not practice, but if the rules of the game needed to be enforced a third party could be brought in to arbitrate. This could be the raja of a neighbouring state or his respected minister, or even a European officer of one of the trading companies.

## The Nayaka Kingdoms of Bednur and Coorg (Kodagu)

The Ikkeri Nayakas were briefly discussed in the section on Vijaynagara. They ruled what is now northern Kerala but was then South Canara, plus the mountains east of Kolathunadu abutting on Mysore. Canara and Canarese are European terms. In the language of the local Canarese — Kannada — the word for coastlands sounds like 'canara'. This part of India was as culturally distinct as Malabar, and almost as isolated. The dominant culture of both Malabar and Canara was broadly Hindu (Eaton's Sanskrit culture), but there were differences, some of them quite deep, and the languages were not the same. For the people of Malabar had lived in that land for centuries, and indeed some elements were indigenous, while the Canarese, or at least the upper castes, were northern immigrants.

*[There were actually three main local languages (excluding old tribal tongues) spoke within the two kingdoms: Kannada, Konkani, and Tulu. Kannada was the lingua franca, Konkani spoken in the North, and Tulu in the South.]*

The Founder was a self-made chieftain of Telegu peasant stock. 'Peasant', but like many such castes they had a warrior component, in this case the Vokkaliga. The dynasty also had intimate connections with the Balija or Banajiga, a powerful caste of warrior-merchants (*now there is a unique character class for aficionados of role-playing games*). These had an exclusive trading guild that also rose to prominence under the Empire, with contacts as far away as Southeast Asia. Sometimes they worked as assassins.

Vijayanagara gave the Baliya authority as chieftains alongside the Vokkaliga. Both groups were Veerashaivas Hindus, devoted followers of Shiva. Despite this they were noted for being tolerant of other religions, as well as for producing wondrous temples in the style of Vijaynagara. They were of the *Lingayat* tradition, which downplays caste distinctions. The dynasty was variously called Keladi or Bednur after its changing capitals, and scholars call them the Ikkeri, because that town is where they emerged from the shadows, though it seems that they first gained authority from Vijaynagara while ruling Shimoga, on the eastern side of the mountains. Europeans often called them Canarese, but calling them after their current capital was the most common practice on the Coast. Interestingly, their origin myths are similar to the Empire's, and, as usual, the ruling dynasty was intermarried with the brahminical caste, just in case its claims to divine origin were insufficient.

The Maharaja of Bednur ruled over a loose collection of Vokkaliga chieftains who called themselves Nayakas, being of the same original community as their king. Beder immigrants were also prevalent, many serving as warriors. Some were Hindu, some Jain. Some were just district chiefs, some claimed to be kings based on ancient lineage, with an array of subordinate chieftains of their own. Some were loyal vassals, some took pains to demonstrate their independence, and some were actively hostile to central control. Thus, as in Malabar, they went to war as coalitions, and when there was no external threat, fought amongst themselves. But, thanks to the authority vested in them by the vanished Vijaynagara, the Bednur kings had greater authority than their peers in Malabar.

Their heartland lay between the coast and the Western Ghats, but their possessions straddled the mountains. On a modern map the kingdom included the districts of Shimoga, Mangalore, and parts of Chikkamagalur and Hassan, plus bits of neighbouring districts. Upon full independence from the Empire in the mid 17th Century, the ruler of that day expanded his power east of the Ghats and up and down the coastline. At its greatest extent the kingdom lay between the Gangavalli River in the North to the Chandragiri in the South. This brought the regime into conflict with Kolathunadu, Mysore, and the Bijapur Sultanate, all three of them powerful opponents, and later rulers temporarily lost some ground, despite being able men. They also had to deal with the inroads of the Portuguese and Dutch, which they handled quite effectively. Raja Shivappa Nayaka (1645-1660) succeeded in <almost> completely expelling the Portuguese. He preferred the long-established Arabs.

Although the coastal plain was relatively isolated, there was some contact with the Marathas and Mughals, starting in the 16th Century. Kanara was not quite beyond the latter's reach, and the Ikkeri Nayakas themselves had influence as far east as Sira. Their neighbour Chitradurga was also a Nayaka state periodically within the Mughal orbit. Certain Ikkeri Nayakas visited Delhi and were allowed monastic property there in the reign of Akbar. In the mid 17th Century the Nayakas offered tribute to the Great Mughal in return for military aid against the Bijapur Sultanate, which at that date was still expanding after the fall of the Vijaynagara Empire and had recently made Bednur a tributary. The relationship with Delhi was renewed in later decades when the Mughal captains in the Deccan sought to encircle the Marathas by extending their influence to the Arabian Sea south of their heartland. Apparently the relationship soured, for at the end of the 17th Century the Bednur Nayakas successfully repulsed a Mughal force in the Shimoga district, which was territory disputed among the Marathas, Sira, Mysore, and the Mughals. When on the outs with the Mughals they allied with the Marathas, which made them enemies of Mysore.

During the period covered by the narrative there were two rajas, Somashekara Nayaka II (1714-1739) and Kiriya Basavappa Nayaka (1739-1754). The first was a dynamic ruler. He did to the Dutch what his ancestor did to the Portuguese, and during the 1730s led a campaign against Kolathunadu which will be described below. He also fought the Mughals twice, in 1724 and 1734, the second time at the behest of a neighbouring raja. These will have been fights against the Nizam of Hyderabad or his vassals, not the Mughal army proper. Somashekara won both contests. But, he died childless in July 1739, and rule passed to a nephew without the so-typical succession struggle. (Usually, the courtiers would have had a field day putting up rival puppets, but Somashekara's *cachet* and the fact that his heir had been in the wings for two years prevented any excitement.)

Somashekara's successor was peaceable, or faced too many other threats, so that Bednur made no bold plays during the 1740s. After the invasion of Kolathunadu a treaty was signed and honoured, as will be described. In contrast to the Malabar Coast the Canarese people enjoyed a long period of stable rule. However, the Nayakas fell into financial difficulties and their end came swiftly. In 1763 Haider Ali of Mysore conquered the House of Bednur; access to the sea had been a dream of Mysore's for centuries. In 1799, Mysore in turn fell before the armies of the EIC, who split their kingdom into two administrative districts.



There were two important subsets of the Bednur House, the Ikkeri and the Haleri. Though the first bear the official name of the dynasty this particular group were independent chieftains who enjoyed special privileges, gained when the capital was moved for a time from Keladi, a mountain town, to Ikkeri, about 20 Km to the South. The dynasty later moved north again, to Bednur, but the Ikkeri chieftains remained. Similar coalitions existed in Malabar, such as the Iruvazhinad Nambiars. They were much like the *zemindars* and *poligars* of the Carnatic in function and outlook.

The Haleri were a cadet house of the ruling dynasty, and they founded the autonomous Kingdom of Coorg (Kodagu), deep in the heart of the Western Ghats, between Mysore and the hinterland of Malabar. Coorg fell to Mysore at the same time as Bednur, but retained a political presence into the British period. Legend has it that a member of the Ikkeri royal family named Vira Raja, for some unspecified reason, fled from his home district of Halerinard disguised as a monk. With the help of his spiritual followers (whether he had a real religious background or was just scamming them is not made clear) he succeeded in taking control of the village where he was staying, then the district, and then the whole region. The capital was moved to Mercara, where one of Vira's successors built a fortress and a palace. A single raja ruled during the period covered by the narrative: Chikka Virappa (1736-1766).

As with Bednur, Coorg made no play during the 1740s, but played an honourable part in the troubles of the 1730s, and under a previous raja there was much strife with Mysore, one notable campaign taking place in 1724. In that war Coorg abandoned the guerrilla tactics it was known for and seized six fortresses in Mysore — the object being to gain the tax revenue from the surrounding villages. This was a severe financial hit for their enemy, and they were counterattacked in force, but though Mysore beat Coorg in every battle the latter ultimately prevailed, for three reasons. First, Mysore had also to keep an eye on the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Sultanate of the Carnatic, and the Maratha Confederacy. Second, the regime at Mysore was inherently weak. Both these factors meant that near the end of the struggle its army was pulled back and Coorg forces could raid almost at will. Third, Coorg's army avoided pitched battle, preferring to raid when on the attack and fight a guerrilla campaign on the defence. Mysore's forces penetrated Coorg territory more than once but they were a Deccan-style cavalry army and foundered in the jungly hills. In one campaign they reputedly lost 15,000 men, mostly to ambush, and a follow-on campaign was a fiasco because after meeting absolutely no resistance the entire army panicked and fled without cause, suspecting yet another massacre was waiting for them just around the next bend in the trail.

## Kolathunadu



The most northerly of the four Malabar power blocs was Kolathunadu — the country of the Kolathiri dynasty, or Kolaswaroopam. On old maps it is often called Chirakkal and a common name for their state was the Chirakkal Kingdom. The Kolathiri claimed descent from the Chera kings of old, but Yeshuratnam (*Rajas of Malabar*) thinks they were just the usual warlord types:

*‘As Hamilton says: “Malabar was probably conquered at a very early era by some king from above the Ghauts, who established the priests and pagodas, and governed the province by a theocracy of Brahmins, which for their own convenience*

*established the Nairs, in the same manner as the Velmah Dhorahs were introduced into Northern Circars. In process of time the Nairs appropriated the title of Rajahs, and continued to govern Malabar as deputies of gods who occupied the pagodas, until Hyder’s invasion in 1700...’*

*[Rajas of Malabar, p.7]*

Other research suggests they are descended from the local Mushika dynasty that ruled at Mount Ezhi or Ezhimala, north of Cannanore, and that going even farther back they originated with the Bunt people, a Tulu speaking group from Kanara, who still served the Canarese as warriors. In favour of the Kolathiris’ ancient claims, they are described by no less a traveller than Marco Polo, who described it as a fully independent kingdom with its own local language, and a source of much pepper and ginger. The capital in his day was at Karippadu, a little to the east of Cannanore. They got their start there, and Cannanore was their entrepôt, just as Calicut was for Kozhikode or Cochin for that kingdom. However, by the 18th Century Cannanore had been *de facto*, if not *de jure*, lost to a *mappila* dynasty, the only Muslim state on the Coast.

The Kolathiri did well during the expansionist phase of their history. At its greatest extent their kingdom stretched from the Netravati River at Mangalore south to Korapuza (just north of the city of Calicut) and east across the plain and into the foothills of the Western Ghats. They got some help from the Portuguese, until the latter transferred operations to Cochin. Most of the petty rajas around them were vassals; their chief rivals were the Canarese to the North and Calicut to the South. The Kolathiri also controlled a powerful temple complex, Madayikkavu, at the town of Valapattanam, just 5 Km north of Cannanore.

The dynasty had in fact been the most powerful of the Big Four, but Yeshuratnam describes the Kolathiris’ current situation as something akin to the English Wars of the Roses, made worse by the coming of the Europeans. Thanks to the matrilineal system a raja had two succession problems to deal with: first, provide for legal heirs who were the children of various female relatives, and second, provide for his own heirs of the body, who had no legal claims but plenty of filial ones. The Dutch commander van Gollenesse wrote in 1743:

*‘[the country] has been so much ruined by internal dissensions and wars that this country, formerly so powerful, is no longer a chief kingdom, except in name’.*

When the English first arrived, toward the end of the 17th Century, they found Kolathunadu split into five warring factions, each headed by a prince of royal blood. The actual raja was styled the Kolathiri. He was supposed to be the ‘eldest’ member of the House, so naturally, at the time of the present narrative the raja was a minor, with a Prince Regent also known as the Udayavarma. In reality he was the most ‘senior’ member, but remember, that was based on matrilineal succession. Then there were the Nalamkur and Anjamkur. These seem to have been loyal to the raja; they were constantly in attendance on him. The Thekkilamkur was heir apparent. Finally there was the Vadakkilamkur. His people were the ‘northerners’ (i.e., their palace was on the old family compound’s north side). It was the Northern Prince who originally gave the EIC permission to set up a factory at Tellicherry (Thalassery), between Cannanore

and what would become the French factory at Mahé. In addition, there was the Kingdom of Arrakkal, otherwise Cannanore, and the House of Nileswaram, bordering the Kingdom of Bednur, which was an 'adopted' branch, after a fashion, and none too loyal. Confusingly, the branches were also given territorial names, such as Udayamangalam, Palli, and Chirakkal. This apparently confused even the Kolathiri. Nileswaram was dangerously unreliable because the House had ties with Calicut, but the chief rival of the Prince Regent and the Raja was the Thekkilamkur, a.k.a. the Southern Prince, or Southern Regent, who ruled from Puthupattanam in the south of the kingdom.

Things became even more unstable for Kolathunadu at the turn of the century, going into the 1710s and 1720s. The Dutch were then expanding northward, and the French had put in an appearance. This led to proxy wars between the trading companies, a phenomenon not found elsewhere in India until after the First Carnatic War. As a general rule the VOC followed a proactive strategy and sought to monopolize the pepper trade everywhere, whereas the EIC preferred to cut the best deals on whatever the locals were prepared to sell. The French CIO fell somewhere between. But, stiff competition and the chaotic situation forced even the EIC to try its hand at manipulating local politics. The fact that rivals of the Vadakkilamkur were jealous of the excise taxes he was raking in, and therefore leagued with either the Dutch or French to open up the situation, did not promote peaceful relations. Kolathunadu saw numerous skirmishes, sieges, changes of allies, assassination attempts, under-the-table arms deals, and the involvement in battle of 'foreign advisors'. Normally, whenever one of the trading companies loaned assistance, it gained more concessions as a *quid pro quo*, weakening the faction it currently backed.

## Cannanore

Cannanore (Kannur) had long been an important second-tier trading town. Located near the old Kolathiri capital, it served them in the same manner as the other coastal cities, as a trade hub run by the merchants on behalf of the rajas. But, thanks to Kolathunadu's inherent instability, the Muslim trading classes who ran Cannanore were able to secure far greater autonomy, though technically they remained subordinate. The rulers were the Azhi Rajas or Ali Rajas, and under the name of the Arakkal Sultanate they were the only Muslim kingdom in Kerala. (Azhi Raja means Lord of the Seas; Ali Raja means Noble King.)



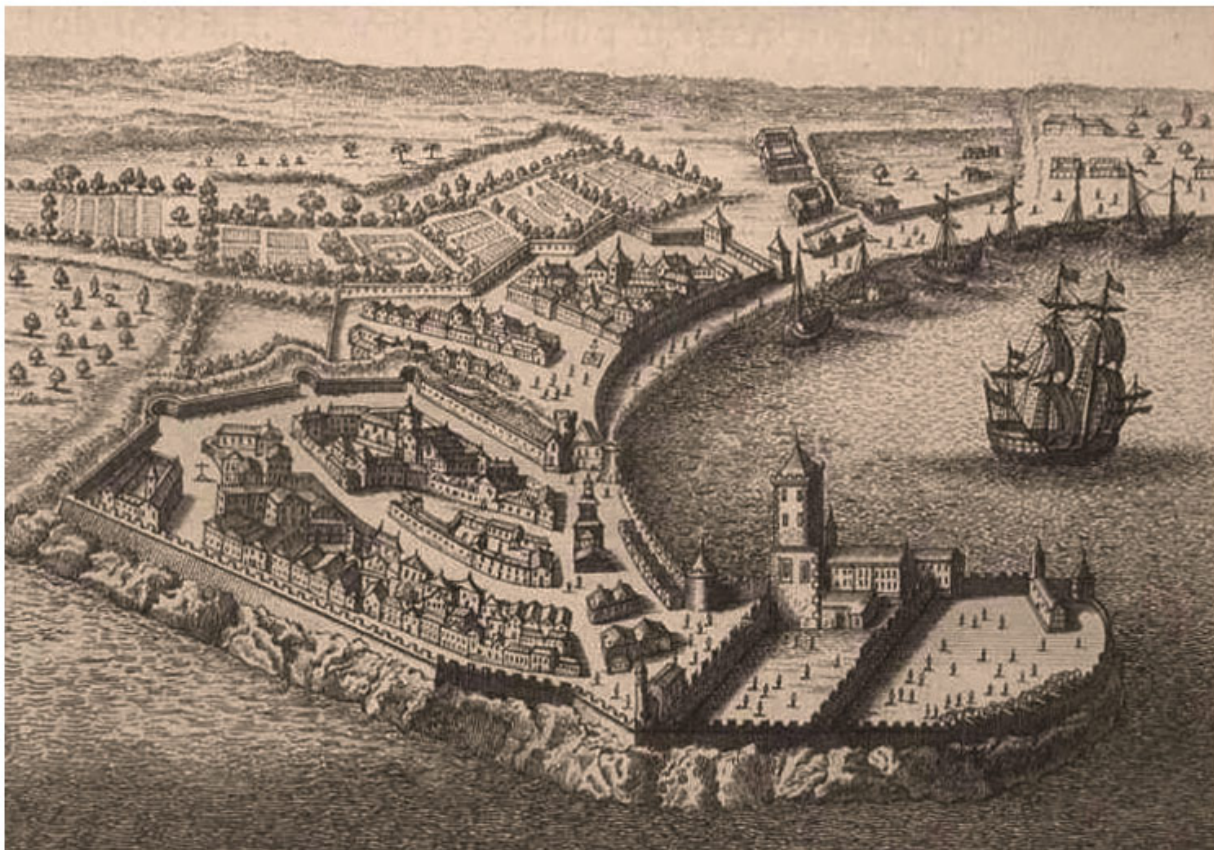
In the 17th Century, Arakkal and the Chirakkal Kingdom of the Kolathiri shared control of the town, but the Ali Raja had the better position. For one thing, the VOC sold him their fort, which gave him a secure base. For another, the Arakkal Sultanate also ruled over the Laccadive Islands (the natives submitted to him as protector against the Portuguese) and at one time the Maldives, too. They also expanded their territory in a small way on the mainland, obtaining a claim as far south as Thalassery. This made the Ali Raja a not insignificant naval power. He could also call on the *siddi* pirates of Bombay when the need arose. During Medieval times even Byzantium recognized the Ali Raja and his Queen (the Bibi) as the Sultan and Sultana of Malabar and called them Friends of Rome. The Ali Raja was different from the *nair* ruling elite in another respect. Getting their start as merchants instead of as war leaders and bureaucrats, the royal family of Arakkal were not too proud to soil their hands with Trade. By the start of the 18th Century Cannanore was fully independent, and gleefully provoking civil war among the Kolathiri to keep things that way.

The Sultan's origin story is debated. Some say the family descended from an Arab trader who had been given the position of Admiral (Lord of the Seas, the same title as the Zamorin of Calicut) by the last Chera emperor. Another legend states their founder was a member of the Chera royal house who went to Mecca and converted to Islam. The Dutch believed they were descended from a Kolathiri woman of royal blood who had lost caste and was gifted to said trader, a very common occurrence. Or, they were descended from a *nair* government official who converted to Islam and gained independence due to being out-caste. The fact that the Ali Rajas also used a matrilineal system of inheritance, unlike the *mappilas*, lent weight to this idea, as did their blending of Hindu and Muslim customs. (For example, it was traditional to keep a lamp burning in a window of the palace facing the sea; this could either be

interpreted as burning a candle for the seafaring pilgrim founder, or as a devotion to the goddess of wealth.) Modern research has led to the more prosaic opinion that they emerged from a *mappila* community evicted from nearby Dharmapattanam Island in the 900s, who rebuilt their lives at the site of Cannanore. Certainly the Ali Raja maintained a claim to that island, which, in the 1730s, led to a multi-dimensional fight for it between them, the EIC, the CIO, the Canarese, and the Kolathiri.

Initially the Sultan maintained good relations with the EIC; the *mappilas* had long hated both Portuguese and Dutch, but these English newcomers seemed gentler. Relations rode the typical rollercoaster, depending on who was on the throne, what minister was in favour, or what accidental insult had been offered. Sometimes the French received favour, and sometimes even the Dutch, when the latter were willing to supply them with arms. The Ali Rajas also became adept at manipulating the family antagonisms of the Kolathiri. The latter's chronic factionalism allowed this to happen, but at the same time they resented it, and at one point offered the EIC control of Cannanore if they would help depose the Sultan, causing a major dustup in the 1720s. The EIC deployed troops, but mainly to protect their warehouses, while the Kolathiri laid siege to the town. (The local EIC factor was overstepping his bounds by doing even that much.) The *mappilas* went on the warpath, massacring Hindus and being massacred in turn. The death of the incumbent Sultan by poison did little to cool things off, and in fact the entire process would be repeated in the 1730s.

But, the death of that Ali Raja did mean a minority and a regency under the Bibi of Cannanore, or, to be more specific, two queens in succession, Ali Raja Bibi Harrabichi Kadavube (1728–1732) and Ali Raja Bibi Junumabe I (1732–1745). It is curious that they used the male Ali Raja title. The next Sultan, Ali Raja Kunhi Amsa II, ruled from 1745 to 1777. His successor was also a Bibi. Bibi Junumabe proved herself an able negotiator and a wily opponent.



Cannanore

By 1730, after some partner swapping, the EIC, by then acting as arbiter, managed to secure a peace treaty between Cannanore and the Kolathiri, but only after the latter failed to take the citadel despite being supplied by both the Dutch and the French. This was in 1731, just in time for a Canarese invasion. The invasion meant the heavy indemnity levied on the *mappilas* for their bad behaviour was waived because they were the only ones aggressive enough to halt the Canarese. The new war was not a good thing for Cannanore. The *mappilas* suffered defeats, the Ali Raja was still a minor, and the Europeans were casting about for anyone who would protect their factories and giving arms to all and sundry. But, the EIC, fearing the Dutch, French, and Canarese were ganging up on them, leagued with the Bibi, even offering to give up Dharmapattanam Island (which they just barely clung to). This led to the Bibi gaining control of the island and allowing the EIC to maintain its factory, and critically, the forts they had erected. Which put Cannanore at their mercy. But that was for a later date.

During the time of the First Carnatic War the whole of northern Kerala remained quiet, except for the irruptions of Mysore, which were directed against the Zamorin of Calicut, and a futile extortion raid against French Mahé by the Marathas. Long after, when the EIC had gained control of the whole coast, Cannanore was just another city, though the Ali Rajas still ruled in full regalia until 1909. They even retained a portion of the Laccadives (conquered from them by Haider Ali and then possessed by the EIC). The last Ali Raja, fittingly another Bibi, died in 2006 and the royal line went extinct.

### **Kadathanadu and Kottayam**

Lying between Kolathunadu and Kozhikode, Kadathanadu, or Cartanadu, was a vassal of Kolathunadu with a strong degree of independence. Perhaps better to say it was within Kolathunadu's orbit, rather than use the loaded term 'vassal'. Along with Kottayam (see) this was the heartland of the Nairs, and the people were fiercely proud. The rulers were by tradition descendants of Polanad royalty, Polanad being a small kingdom adjacent to Calicut which the latter absorbed, driving its royals into exile in Kolathunadu. They married into the Kolathiri line, were accepted as *vzhunnayar* (that is, ruling caste *nairs*) and were given lands at the southern end of the kingdom, between the Mahe and Kotta rivers. Their capital was at Cattuvaynattu. They were well positioned to obtain important contacts with all three of the European trading companies, but particularly the EIC and CIO.

Like most of the petty kingdoms in Malabar, Kottayam stretched inward from the coast along river valleys up into the foothills of the Western Ghats. The rajas claimed to be *kshatriyas*, but more recently they claimed descent from a chieftain who built a fort at Puralimala, south of the Valapattanam River among the foothills; thus they called themselves Puralisas, or sometimes Purannattu because they ruled the *nad* of Purai. The dynasty name was Purannatt Swarupam. But, the core of the kingdom lay at Kottayam, not far from Thalassery. They also held sway over Wayanad or Wynad, a mountain kingdom to their east, and to the Northeast their loosely defined border butted onto Coorg. The Iruvazhinad Nambiars, a group of semi-independent chieftains, were closely allied with them. Kottayam also claimed to be the true owners of Dharmapattanam Island. Like the Kolathiri, the family was divided, with two bloodlines at Kottayam and a third at Pazhassi, some distance north of the capital. The dynasty was thus quite influential in the region and could call on a significant feudal host when required. Interestingly, they did not practice matrilineal succession — though that did not stop the dynasty being nearly as unstable as the Kolathiri. Today the dynasty is best remembered for one of its rajas who did much to advance the performing arts style known as Kathakali.

## The Kingdom of Kozhikode or Calicut of the Zamorins

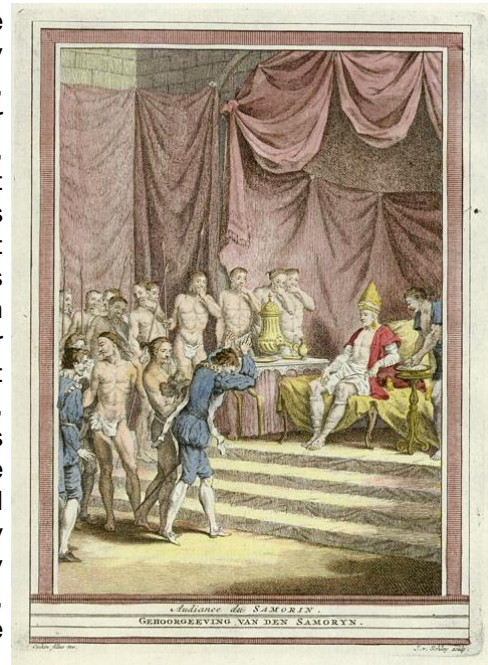


When ranking the states of Malabar the Zamorin of Calicut comes in second, behind the Kolathiri. They might have made first place, but they refused to commit to alliances with the Europeans, which meant they had to rely on their own resources. Although, to be fair, at the time this narrative starts, Kolathunadu was in shards and Calicut had risen, though not for long. Perhaps better to say Calicut could not remain in the lead; its power ebbed and flowed. Calicut had its finger in both Kolathunadu and Cochin's pies, serving as a major distraction in both the former's conflict with the Canarese and the latter's coming conflict with Travancore. For this reason the kingdom is

important in the context of the story. But, for itself, during the 1740s Calicut did not play a central role in either of its neighbours' wars. The only fighting it did was against raiding parties from Mysore.

The name 'Zamorin' is a title, supposedly meaning King of the Seas (*Samutiri*). He was a legendary figure in Europe, like Prester John, with a reputation for fair dealing. Yeshuratnam (*Rajas of Malabar*) thinks this is propaganda. His studies show a regime that consistently lied and manipulated both the foreign traders and the state's neighbours, working actively to destabilize the latter and alternatively gouging the foreigners or rescinding deals without warning. The Zamorins incurred heavy debts and refused to pay them off. Their chief aim was to maximize profit so they could pay their armies and expand their state at the expense of their neighbours. The only people who got a fair deal from them were the Arabs, who had been in-country so long they were impossible to dislodge. Like a woman, the Zamorin kept the Europeans at arms-length, and kept them guessing. Which is admittedly a sensible strategy.

In most sources the Zamorin is only called The Zamorin, as if he were an Immortal One, but three men bore the title during the period covered by the narrative: Mana Vikrama (1729-41), a shadowy individual from the Kilakke Kovilakam (Kilakke family compound) between 1741 and 1746, and from 1746 on, Putiya Kovilakam. The change from Vikrama to Kovilakam signifies a change in family branch. The dynasty as a whole was known as the Samoothiri, and their kingdom was originally called the Samoothiri or Nediyruppu Swaroopam. It was centered on Nediyruppu, southeast of the modern city of Kozhikode and a bit to the east of Calicut International Airport. They styled themselves *samantha kshatriya*, implying a probably non-existent connection to the *kshatriya* caste. Their specific caste was Eradi, a subset of the Samantan Nairs, which in plain English means they belonged to the ruling elite of the broader Nair caste. Most scholars say they were not a distinct caste, but some think they were a distinct ethnic group, partly because, unlike some of the other Nairs, they participated in Vedic rituals which theoretically put them above even the *brahmins*. Like the Kolathiri the dynasty had a five-fold division yielding potential heirs to the throne, but in Calicut the family remained relatively united, possibly because unlike their neighbours (particularly Cochin to the South) the line of succession was set in stone, not gradated by degrees of privilege or closeness to the Matriarch, but based solely on age.



*An audience with the Zamorin*

It used to be said that a given Zamorin only ruled for twelve years, after which he held a great feast and then committed ritual suicide in public, in a rather gory manner. Another tale tells how that custom changed to a great festival, at which, under cover of continual noise, members of the public were dared

to try sneak into his quarters and assassinate him; if they succeeded they would become the new Zamorin. Supposedly one such event occurred in 1695, but the would-be assassins were all killed, though one managed to strike him. Possibly the Zamorin in question was bored and came up with an amusing distraction that almost backfired.

Calicut first expanded by acquiring the Nilambur Kingdom of Kovilikkam as a vassal state. Which would indicate that the Nilambur family eventually came to rule the whole kingdom, a not uncommon trend. The chief river of Calicut was the Chaliyar; Nilambur lay on the upper reaches, in a basin formed by the surrounding foothills of the Western Ghats, and next to one of the few passes through the mountains. Thus from the start the Zamorins were thinking of trade. But, their rise to prominence only came with the founding of Calicut, City of Spices. It is difficult to discover an exact date for the foundation, but it was done in historical times, and it was a planned city. That stretch of the coast had been used for trade ever since people settled it, but there is no Western account of Calicut itself until Ibn Battuta's visits in the mid 14th Century. Scholars opine it was founded a century before. A century after Ibn Battuta's account Calicut is described as a bustling city with a circumference of 13 Km. Zheng He's Chinese expeditions at the start of the 16th Century reported seeing traders from around the world congregating in it. The Samoothiri, or Eradi, had long sought access to the sea and obtained the land through conquest from the Polanad Kingdom, which at the time was a vassal of Kolathunadu. After founding the city the Zamorin moved his capital there. An alternative version of events says that the Chera kings granted the land to the Eradi as a reward for loyal military service.

The Arabs dominated Calicut town, under an official called the Shah Bandar Koya, until the Portuguese arrived at the end of the 15th Century. Decades of conflict followed. The Zamorins and the Arabs liked their arrangement and saw no reason to let the Portuguese in. Ironically, they were supported for some time by the Venetians, acting in concert with the Mamelukes of Ottoman Egypt. The Venetians, who got their spices through Arab middlemen, were annoyed that the Portuguese were trying to undercut them by going straight to the source. Ultimately the Zamorins had to deal with the Portuguese once the latter had cleared the seas of all rivals, but as soon as the Dutch appeared, the Zamorins enlisted their aid. A pattern begins to emerge.

Once the Dutch had supplanted the Portuguese the Zamorins got rid of them by calling in the British. Since no one followed the British, the Zamorins simply kicked them out. Well, not quite. Mistreatment by the Zamorin led them to move the bulk of their operations elsewhere, but they maintained a trading post at Calicut. So long as the other European powers were around, one of them had to be available for use as a lever against the others, and the British seemed to be the most tractable. They were not as interested in gaining local dominance, and even shut down their operations from time to time when trade dried up, instead of madly pumping the pump handle and trying to cause a civil war just to make arms sales. In some respects Calicut did give good deals. They only laid duty on pepper and the EIC was willing to buy and sell pretty much anything. The EIC was also the most helpful of the companies in dealing with piracy (especially when the Zamorin had good relations with the pirates but need to curb their activities somehow).

Calicut maintained a policy of expansion throughout the regime's existence, and even after the coming of the Europeans when the general destabilization of Malabar caused them to contract, they still sought every opportunity to regain what they had lost. In the days of the Arabs, control of the wealth of Calicut gave the Zamorins the resources to conquer or subjugate the whole coast, from Kollam (Quilon) to Kolathunadu. In some cases, notably the subjugation of neighbouring Valluvanadu, expansion was at the prompting of the foreign traders — not Europeans in that case, but the Arabs. Though Arab mercenaries and Nair warriors powered their rise, the Zamorins also gained a reputation as arbiters, so that those they could not conquer were still influenced by them. They sent embassies as far as Herat, in Afghanistan. The war with the Portuguese lost them much revenue and also the town of Cochin, which the Dutch took over from the Portuguese, instead of handing it back to Calicut as they had agreed.

The Dutch Wars, fought between England and Holland during the later 17th Century, were felt in Malabar. At first, the EIC was more willing to support Calicut against the Dutch and Portuguese, but sometimes the Dutch gained the upper hand in the wars; sensing this, the Zamorin would cool on the English,

fearing to lose a better customer, for the VOC paid premium customs dues. In 1666 the Zamorin's troops stormed into the merchants' quarter of Calicut and took the EIC personnel hostage in hopes of obtaining a large loan for his current war against the VOC. That particular Zamorin had a particular dislike for the English, but his successor was more friendly. The EIC did their bit by replacing the more objectionable personnel at their factory. Longterm, however, the Dutch Wars had no lasting political impact in Malabar. As would be the case with the First Carnatic War, the connections between European rivalries and the rivalries of the trading houses were never the same thing. It was *status quo ante bellum* for the Europeans and business as usual for the locals.

*[Those with a cynical view of the EIC will not be surprised to learn the notorious Captain Kidd once worked security at Calicut before going rogue.]*

## Valluvanadu

Valluvanadu was mentioned briefly above, but though only a minor player it had some significance. It was probably the most powerful of Kozhikode's 'vassal' states. Territorially the state was quite large for the region, comprising a section of country about the same size as Calicut, in the same latitude, but completely cut off from the coast. The ruling dynasty was the *Arangottu Swaroopam*, and the ruler the *Valluvakonathiri*. The competition they engaged in with the Zamorin before he achieved dominance was not specifically territorial. Instead, they tussled over who would exert patronage over a very important festival, the *Mamankam*, held every twelve years at Thirunaya on the banks of the broad Bharathappuzha River, upstream from the port of Ponnani (the location of the Zamorin's favourite palace). The festival was a medieval fair, and a moneymaker, but also a key religious event for the Samoothiri and one of the primary ways the Zamorin could demonstrate his power and wealth. At some time in the distant past the Samoothiri had captured the town from the Valluvakonathiri with much bloodshed, leading to a cycle of revenge that refused to die out. Haider Ali put a stop to the 'heathenish' festival in 1755.

## The Kingdom of Cochin



During the period covered by this narrative Cochin and the VOC were joined at the hip. But Cochin was an ancient place. Before Calicut rose there was the Perumpadappu Swarupam — Cochin (Kochi). But, it declined as the former rose. Kollam (Quilon) was where the merchants and travellers of the Classical periods in Europe and the Far East visited. For them, it was India. But Cochin, too, was a major source of spices. In its heyday the state extended from Ponnani and Pukkaitha in

the North to Porakkad in the South, and as far inland as Aanamala. Until 1341 the capital of the kingdom was at Craganore (Kodungallur), but in that year a devastating flood created the island of Vypin, giving the location one of the best natural harbours on the coast; Cochin town was founded as the new capital and the chief entrepôt of the kingdom, and the kingdom was renamed Cochin.

Attacked by the Zamorin decade after decade, losing even their ancient capital, the rulers of Cochin sought help from the countries who traded with them, the Arabs, the Portuguese, the Dutch, and even Ming China, signed treaties of alliance with them at one time or another. But, the Arabs favoured Calicut, while the price of Portuguese friendship was too high — on the one hand drawing the ire of the Zamorin and on the other yielding up concession after concession to keep the deal sweet. Ultimately, Cochin declined into an outright Portuguese protectorate that the latter used as a base to attack Calicut. Calling in the Dutch only swapped them for the Portuguese; Cochin remained a protectorate, and the Dutch were much more proactive. They engineered internal coups and, rather than fight the Zamorin, gave Calicut lands appropriated from Cochin. Indeed, they initially established themselves thanks to an internal feud between members of the Cochin royal family.

A chief bone of contention at the time was the small kingdom of Tanur, who were vassals of either Calicut or Cochin, depending on which way the wind blew, and who played the two superpowers off against each other. Craganore was another knotty problem, really a problem for both the VOC and the Raja of Cochin. Acquisition of Craganore, and its fort, San Angelo, had been one of the goals of the VOC



PLAN DE LA VILLE DE COCHIN

and Calicut's alliance of convenience against the Portuguese. According to the Zamorin, the VOC had agreed to capture it and give it to him. According to the Company, the Zamorin stiffed them on the concessions he promised so they held it as collateral. From the 'native' angle, the Zamorins claimed to be of higher caste than the rest of the Nairs, but at the same time the kings of Cranganore, from whom the current rajahs of Cochin claimed descent, were grudgingly recognized by the Zamorins as more ancient and thus of higher rank than themselves. This led the latter to regularly seek marriage partners from the House, and in turn gave the fight between Cochin and Calicut the rancorous nature of a family feud.

During the period covered by the narrative there were two rajahs in Cochin, Rama Varma VI to 1746, then Kerala Varma I. Both were Dutch puppets who left the VOC to govern their kingdom while they relaxed with their hobbies. Unfortunately for the Dutch, one of Rama Varma VI's favourite hobbies was stirring up trouble with his neighbours, just so he could watch the Dutch put out the fires. Yeshuratnam (*Rajas of Malabar*) gives an example of VOC-Cochin relations, the Mangad Inheritance. This was a dispute within the ruling family of one of Cochin's small vassal states, where succession was passing through an adopted princess. The VOC were asked to arbitrate in the dispute but were not informed of the adoption angle, so they made a mess of things. Very amusing for those who had been in the know, like the Raja of Cochin, and very bad for relations with neighbouring states. The affair did end with the VOC gaining the authority to propose all political adoptions in the future. Rama Varma also oppressed his own people, mainly, it seems, just because he felt like it, saying the Dutch were making him do it. A little logical thinking will show that the VOC had no incentive to ruin the economy in this manner, though they could certainly be arrogant and pushy — they had found it the only way to get any respect. Of Rama Varma, Yeshuratnam found this quote in the VOC's records:

*'a man of little or no judgement, and was despised by his predecessor [who was a man called by his own people 'the charcoal burner']. His whole bearing and conduct betoken his inferiority; he is rude and unpolished, extravagant [sic] in his conversation, irresolute in council, and violent in behaviour: not only do his courtiers and grandees esteem him but lightly, the Company too have little hope of getting any good out of him'*

*Principal Rajas, p.47*

Although the VOC ran the country through their Governor, the raja still had his own council, including a prime minister. In Rama Varma VI's case this was a man named Ittikkella 'Komi' Menon, who was no better than he was, described as both greedy and malleable. There were two princes floating around as potential successors, whom the VOC were obviously considering as replacements. But they described the first as a carbon copy of Rama Varma and the second as utterly dissolute and prone to 'causing disturbances'. The man they hoped they could work with, the older and wiser minister Paliath Achan, was virulently anti-Dutch. Because removing the raja would only make things worse the VOC propped him up, and Malabar's iteration of the Churn intensified. Only after Rama Varma's death did the situation ease somewhat.

The trouble with Travancore also came during the reign of Rama Varma VI. It will be described in due course. Luckily, Cochin was out of immediate striking range, but its proxies suffered badly.

Dutch rule of Cochin continued until 1795, when the French Revolution changed the political dynamic; the EIC defeated the Dutch at Cochin and became the new overlord.

## **Cochin's Allies**

Like the other major states, Cochin, too had 'vassals' or 'allies'. At least, they were neighbours with whom the royals of Cochin were tied by marriage and with whom they sometimes worked in concert. These included but were not limited to: Kayamkulam, Tekkumkar, and Kollam, plus the lesser states of Vadakkumkar, the Eladathu Swarupam, and in the hinterland, their 'frenemy' Palghat.

Kayamkulam and Tekkumkar were powerful enough to act with some autonomy. At one time the latter had controlled much of the southern tip of India, but it had by the time of the narrative dwindled to a

narrow strip of land wedged between Cochin and Kollam. Tekkumkar was strong enough to be an independent actor in the 1730s coalition against Travancore; it was conquered by the latter in 1749.

Kayamkulam, or Odanad (the Land of Boats or Land of Bamboo), was a coastal kingdom south of Cochin on the border of Vadakkumkar, with palaces at Eruva and Krishnapuram (both near the town of Kayamkulam, which was the commercial hub). There was an older capital, Mavelikkara, that remained a spiritual center. The border with Vadakkumkar ran smack through the center of a temple complex, which led to complications. Established sometime in the 11th Century (it is guessed) Kayamkulam was influential enough for it to be a coalition leader against Travancore, and it would be an inheritance squabble with Travancore in 1739 that put the match to the Dutch-Travancore War. In 1746 Travancore overwhelmed the kingdom, annexing more than half its territory.

Kollam is extremely important to the narrative of the Dutch-Travancore War. It was an ancient port, mentioned in the Bible, and was long thought to be a possible location for the Biblical 'Tarsish'. It became the capital of the Later Chera Empire, from whom the rulers of Venadu — that is Travancore — claimed direct descent. Occupied by Cochin, it fell under the sway of the Portuguese in the mid 17th Century and the Dutch inherited it, tacking onto Cochin's possessions. Naturally, Travancore resented Cochin's control of it. In the mid 19th Century the British reversed matters by officially annexing Kollam to Travancore, along with the rest of Kerala; Travancore being by that point a loyal ally.

Eladathu, or Elayadutharai, or Ilayidathu, Swarupam was the House that ruled over Kottarakka, the Land of Palaces of the Kings of Chera. Given that Marthanda Varma, ruler of Travancore, claimed Chera lineage, this made them a natural target alongside Kollam. In 1739 the dynasty was represented by a princess. Ousted from her palace and taken prisoner by Travancore, she escaped and the Dutch reinstalled her; she joined the 1739 coalition against the invader. The kingdom would quickly fall to Travancore; the dynasty died out in the 19th Century.

## The Kingdom of Travancore

The Kingdom of Venadu, or Travancore (Thiruvithamkoor), began as the weakest of the four major Malabar kingdoms but ended ruling most of Kerala, though admittedly under British suzerainty. Its rulers claimed descent from the kings of Ay. The Ay ruled all the lands of Malabar from Kollam south to Kanniyakumari, at the very southern tip of the peninsula. North of them the Chera ruled, and north of them, the Chola. In the dawn of the world the Chola kings drove the Chera south to Kollam. Here the Chera intermarried with the Ay. The empire they created was known as the Chera Empire, and the Ay were technically vassals, but they held much more autonomy than regular vassals. Like many Indian empires, the Chera was more a loose feudal confederation of chieftains. In this case the blood lines of the Ay and Chera pretty much merged into one, but with two distinct *swarupams*, or royal houses, each with its own capital: the Venadu (or Chriava) *swarupam* at Kollam and Thrippapur *swarupam* at Thrippapur (Travancore).



(To add to the confusion, there is also a geographical region, or *nad*, of Venad, located southeast of Kollam. This was one of the Ay's principalities. In the histories, 'Venad' and 'Travancore' are used interchangeably, but usually refer to the dynasty, not the places.)

Of the two *swarupams* Kollam was the direct royal line; Travancore the traditional heirs apparent. But there is evidence that as the centuries wore on the rajases of Travancore became more and more separated from their roots. Certainly the family intermarried with other noble houses. In fact they may have had stronger connections to the Pandya kings of neighbouring Madurai. Travancore and Madurai often allied. In 1601 the Travancore royals moved their capital to Padmanabhapuram, in the center of the country, remaining there until well into the 18th Century.

By the start of the 18th Century, the two halves of the kingdom had gone down very different paths. Kollam had long been a Dutch protectorate, tacked onto Cochin. Venad was a weak dynasty surrounded

by hostile noble families all jockeying for power. Only an army from Madurai had saved it from complete destruction.

*'The country was honeycombed with petty chieftains [8 Ettuvittil Pillamar or noble Houses], who collected around themselves bands of brigands, subsisted on pillage and plunder and harrassed [sic] the king and his people by turns, frustrating all attempts to establish order or any settled form of government.'*

*Principal Rajas, p.51*

And then, seeming out of nowhere, a saviour arose, Dasa Vanji Pala Marthanda Varma I. The son of a Queen of Attingal, he came to the throne in 1723, age 17 (born 1706), and achieved real power by 1729, ruling with an iron fist and consummate diplomatic skill until his death in 1758. According to one Dutch commander: *'an able and untiring prince, but very cruel and so conceited and arrogant that he aims at nothing less than the supremacy over the whole of Malabar'* (*Principal Rajas, p.51*).

## The Militaries of India

Just as there was no Indian nation, there is no template for a single way of war on the Subcontinent. Broadly, one can speak of North and South, militaries influenced by the practices of Persian and Central Asia against the organic 'Sanskrit' ways. The northerns favoured cavalry armies and the southerns favoured infantry. In both cases *l'arm blanche* was glorified. There were firearms and cannon aplenty, but they were despised tools, only backup weapons for the true manly warrior.

Until shortly before the present narrative, warfare had been decidedly feudal in nature. States like the Mughals had military bureaucracies and a logistical tail, but even they relied on warrior levies. However, things were beginning to change, as most states increased the financial element of their militaries, mainly because wars were so endemic and were increasing in size and tempo, so that more and more mercenaries had to be hired — remember the Deccan 'military bazaar'. There was the de facto 'state banking system' of the temples, but although enemy temples might be plundered, they were supposed to be off limits. More common was extorting tribute from neighbours, clients, or even vassal chieftains by threatening military action against them. Later, under European guidance, the Absolutist methods of Europe, particularly direct taxes to pay the army, would begin to be used, but for now, this was the best that could be managed.

## The Mughal Army

*To fight with artillery was a stripling's pastime, the only true weapon was the sword*

*Prince A'zam Shah [quoted in Irvine, p.57]*

Little is known of many of the Indian militaries, but the Mughals can serve as an example for the cavalry-based ones. An army with Mongol roots could be nothing else but a cavalry army. For social reasons alone any man who could beg, borrow, or steal a horse would do so and enlist himself under some notable warrior. In the Ganges Plain and the Deccan this was the best kind of army, but in the mountains of the North and the jungles of the South it was virtually useless, unless commanded by a leader of exceptional skill who knew how to make the best use of his specialist allies.

It is impossible to be sure of the size of the Mughal Army — in any case it depends on the period. Meticulous records were kept, but they apply mainly to the actual household troops, and it would be dangerous to simply count the pay slips. Paper strengths never match reality. It should also be noted that every worker in the imperial court fell under the category of 'infantry'. That broad definition of 'infantry' also applied when the army was on campaign. As for 'ethnic' auxiliaries, one can make estimates, but no more. Uniforms were not worn, though the Household troops dressed in red and everyone wore their clothes in the fashion required by their caste. The emperor Aurangzeb is said to have had 200,000 cavalry. This number is repeated for the reign of Shah-jahan, with the addition of 8,000 *mansabdars*, 7,000 *amhadis*, and 40,000 foot, including artillerists. These numbers are not impossible, though probably inflated. The French Army in the same period sometimes approached 200,000, and the

Mughal numbers are for their entire empire. Irvine suggests reducing the infantry by 20% and again emphasizes that it included everyone who was not on horseback. The Mughals themselves mentally quartered the numbers recited in the court ballads. It might also be that they were counting horses, not horsemen. The Tatars, for example, went on annual raids against Muscovy with 80,000 horses, but only 20,000 had riders, the rest being remounts. Aurangzeb could also supposedly count on 185,000 'princely' horse — that is, allied or vassal troops — plus an unnumbered district militia. The latter, frequently made up of Hindus, would only be required for service while the army was passing through their region and might act as camp guards or general labour. There were also the *kumaki*, a catchall term for various tribal auxiliaries.

Akbar made additional reforms, which did not stand the test of time. The Army was given a twelve-fold division, to allow each segment the honour of standing guard duty at Court for one month each year. Each segment was split four ways for operational purposes, but also seven ways to provide for daily guard rotation. This explains the 12,000 matchlock men and the 7,000 *amhadis* that formed part of the household troops. But the *mansabs* and their men were never organized into anything like brigades or regiments. They presented themselves on parade or mustered on the battlefield as war bands, whether 50, 1,000, or 5,000 strong. An exception was made for very large units, which would be divided among sub-commanders, often by 'nationality', such as one-third Mughal, one-third Persian, and one-third Rajput. They fought for their lord, and to win honour, like medieval knights, to the best of their individual abilities rather than the ability of the unit. It was the same for the auxiliaries. Only the artillery formed a professional corps, but despite their acknowledged usefulness the gunners were looked down upon as inferiors, for they did not ride.

There were four main branches in Akbar's military: *amhadis*, *dakhilis*, *mansabs*, and irregular corps. The first were the elite soldiers of the imperial household, 'gentlemen troopers'. These were often officers waiting for a *mansab* appointment. The closest European match to the *dakhilis* would be the royal regiments of the French army, raised by the state, to contrast with the *mansab* 'colonel's regiments' raised by individual noblemen. The *mansabdars* could be considered akin to knights, mamelukes, or samurai. They were the officer corps — the bureaucratic grading system was called the *mansab* system — but also had retainues. They also rated personally as fighting troops, being the best mounted, best armed, and best armoured men in the army.

The *dakhilis* were better paid than the *amhadis* 'gentlemen in waiting' but did not receive as much as the *mansabs*. Their leaders, of course, paid well in order to attract recruits. They were also considered the most reliable units. The *dakhilis* cavalry included some 'elite' formations such as the *Wala Shahi*, a sort of Companion Cavalry, and the 4,000 men of the *Tabinan-i Khasa-i Padshai*. These units were commanded by high ranking *mansab* officers. Other *mansab* officers were given command of some of the regular *dakhilis* because they were not



permitted to raise their own units. The irregulars included a wide variety of types: contingents sent by allies, the forces of vassal rulers, and the troops of Hindu *zemindars* — semi-autonomous feudal lords, who offered military service in lieu of something worse. Initially the non-standard forces were grouped by tribe or nation, but later all sorts of men would sign up under the banner of famous names. Eaton provides a breakdown of the *mansabdars* by ethnicity as of 1656: 28% Iranian, 25% Turkish, 7% Afghan, 10% Indian Muslim, 18% Rajput, 10% Other. Anecdotally, the Afghan presence may have increased significantly by the time of the narrative; the histories are full of references to 'Pathan' (Pashtun) adventurers and mercenaries.

Drill was nonexistent. Every cavalryman was expected to train himself in horsemanship and skill at arms, endurance, and general fitness. Sometimes this was done at home, and sometimes at various martial arts schools. The Turks, for example, liked wrestling, while the Hindus showed off their trick ponies — there was a favourite argument between members of the Persian School, who believed in using powerful, heavily armoured horses in a straight charge, and the Indian School, who believed in using less noble but more nimble mounts that could be trained to turn on a dime or rear up so their rider could strike at the rider of an elephant. The 'Persians' claimed such training ground down a horse's spirit, and sneered at the inferior 'country-breds' of the South. The 'Indians' in turn laughed at the sluggish behemoths in their full armour, who could barely turn out of the way of an obstacle. The debate was never resolved. The Mughals favoured 'heavy horse', mounts bred on the Central Asian steppes, clad at least partially in armour, with armoured riders equipped with every sort of weapon that might prove useful in a fight, including swords, lances, axes, maces, and ranged weapons. Their most famous enemies, the Marathas, rode weaker and lighter horses and ran rings around them — unless they were caught. A Mughal charge was almost irresistible. As for 'armour', it should be noted that in the hotter clime of India quilted cotton cloth was often substituted for mail or plate. It was more comfortable and gave almost as much protection against slashing weapons. Turbans, too, tightly wound, were very hard to hack through and impervious to stabbing, and some men wrapped their whole heads in tightly bound cloth, leaving only eye slits. Though riding chargers, the Mughal cavalry still made great use of the bow and also firearms, as did their opponents. The chief takeaway from all this is that these men were warriors rather than soldiers.

To reiterate, anyone marching with the army on foot was considered 'infantry', of which the matchlock men were the only true example. Irvine, quoting Orme, says, 'seldom would 50,000 stand before 20,000 cavalry', and,

*'the infantry consisted in a multitude of people assembled together without regard to rank and file: some with swords and targets, who could never stand the shock of a body of horse; some bearing matchlocks, which in the best of order can produce but a very uncertain fire: some armed with lances, too long or too weak to be of any service, even if ranged with the utmost regularity of discipline. Little reliance was placed on them. To keep night watches and to plunder defenceless people was their greatest service, except their being a perquisite to their commanders, who received a fixed sum for every man, and hired every man at a different and less price. In short, the infantry were more a rabble of half-armed men than anything else, being chiefly levies brought into the field by petty zamindars, or men belonging to the jungle tribes.'* [pp.161-162]

Some foot soldiers had inherent value. The best marksmen came from Bengal and the Ganges Plain, while the Rohillas of Rawalpindi were accounted tough and reliable; they were frequently sent into the South to become military colonists. Regarding the matchlock men, this body was organized into five grades, was based at Delhi, and was and commanded by an officer called the *daroga*, who was also commander of all the Foot. Foot bowmen were common, even crossbowmen, but the bulk of the weapons carried were spears, swords, and daggers. Bows were regarded as better than firearms on the scores of reliability, accuracy, and the ability to mass-fire; matchlocks, either of 4' length or 6', trumped flintlocks on reliability. There were a variety of castes who had a hereditary duty to serve as night watchmen and camp guards, and these made up a large proportion of the Foot when on campaign, along with the *bumi* or Hindu militia, who were regarded as less dependable than the black slaves, the *siddis*, who acted as a police force. Apart from general labour and 'bulking out' the numbers, the chief

use of the foot was in siege warfare. One estimate of the number of truly effective Mughal 'infantry' is no more than 15,000.

Irvine provides the names of several popular types of foot troops. There were the *nagas* or *gusains*, a kind of Hindu dervish who went about naked but were well armed. They hired themselves out to worthy commanders, sometimes in bodies of a few thousand. There were the *alighol* or *ghazis*, Rohilla Pathan (Pashtun) hillmen used as shock troops. And, the *najib* irregulars who fought with both swords and firearms. These were too proud to serve as sentries and confined themselves to bodyguard work. Then the *pathabaz* swordsmen of the Deccan, who used a rapier-like weapon. The *barqandaz* were the emperor's matchlock men, but the term could be applied to other firearms users. *Bargis* (also *rawat*) was a slang term for the Hindu *kunbi* caste, who were originally farmers but developed a taste for fighting. From such as these arose the Maratha warriors. Arab troops were prized. There were two main groups, the *siddis* who were not actually Arabs, but descended from Bantu slaves brought over from Zanzibar, and the *hadhramauti* from Yemen, of whom there may have been as many as 10,000. These last persisted until the end of the Raj. The slave soldiers — by the time of this narrative mainly ex-slaves — were, like the Mamelukes of Egypt and Syria, the backbone of the various militaries in the Deccan. Loyal only to their master, when he died they would be freed, and take up service wherever they could find it, not just as rank-and-file soldiers, but as commanders, even governors. The Deccan also provided something like 30,000 *kala piyadah* ('black foot soldiers'), who were Tamil matchlock men. These travelled long distances with their families in tow, seeking work with various armies. Eaton details the career of one African, Malik Ambar, who became Emperor Jahangir's nightmare:

*Born in 1548 in the pagan countryside surrounding the Ethiopian highlands, he turned up in the slave markets of the Red Sea, was taken to Baghdad and sold to a prominent merchant who educated him, converted him to Islam and changed his name from 'Chapu' to 'Ambar'. From Baghdad he reached the Deccan in the early 1570s, having been purchased by the peshwa (prime minister) of the Nizam Shahi sultanate of Ahmadnagar. When the peshwa died in 1574/5 Ambar was freed by his master's widow and became a freelancer. He also acquired a wife. For a while he served the sultan of Bijapur, who gave him the title 'Malik', and in 1595, having acquired a contingent of his own troops, he entered the service of a Habshi commander in the Nizam Shahi state. In 1600 its capital, Ahmadnagar, fell to Mughal forces — but not the countryside, which teemed with troops formerly employed by the sultanate. Foremost among those picking up the pieces of the fragmented kingdom was Malik Ambar, whose cavalry swiftly grew to 7,000 men. Upon finding a prince of Ahmadnagar's royal house, he promoted the youth's cause as the future sovereign of a reconstituted Nizam Shahi state. He also married his daughter to him and presided over his coronation as Sultan Murtaza Nizam Shah II (r. 1600–10), who for the next ten years would reign as the first of Malik Ambar's two puppet sultans, with Ambar himself actually managing the state as peshwa and commanding its armies. Ambar's repeated successes against Jahangir's forces — and the source of the emperor's frustration, as revealed in the miniature painting — lay in his mastery of guerrilla tactics. Avoiding pitched battles against the Mughals' formidable armies, Ambar harassed Mughal supply lines, launched surprise night attacks and drew imperial forces into wooded hills and rugged ravines where they could be ambushed by light cavalry.*

*Between 1600 and 1627, when Malik Ambar held undisputed control over the Ahmadnagar sultanate's military and civil affairs, the kingdom acquired a distinctly African character. By 1610 he commanded an army of 50,000, a fifth of whom were Africans.*

*Eaton, pp. 290-291*

*['Habshi' was the usual name for such men.]*

Akbar again is credited with enhancing the artillery arm, coming up with a number of innovations, such as a 17-barrel gun, the *arghun*, that could be fired with a single match and cleaned with a single 17-rod swab, 'pack guns' that could be disassembled, and also proper field cannon — until his day most cannon were large and nearly immobile. The Indians, Akbar included, never mounted their guns on carriages, preferring to use sleds pulled, or more often pushed, by elephants. Given the size and weight of the pieces this was probably wise. The pack guns could be carried by ox or elephant; some could even be mounted on platforms and fired from the backs of the latter. Later on they developed the



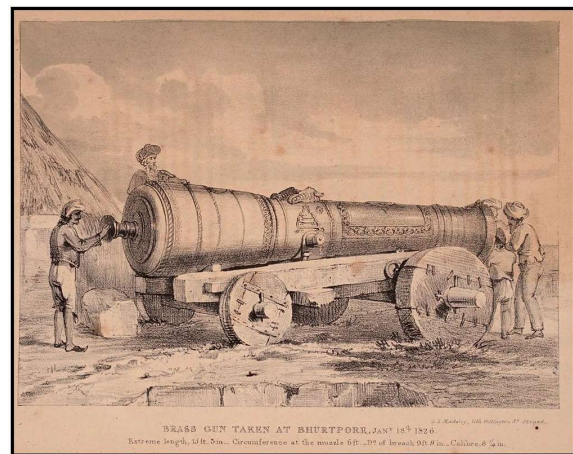
*rahkala*, a cannon on a cart drawn by oxen. The field guns came in two forms, the *dhamaka* and the *ramjanaki*; there was no standardization of calibre. *Ban*, rockets, were also employed, and these also came in two varieties, the ones that arched high and exploded, and the ones that hissed along the ground like snakes and frightened the horses. Some had a range of 1,000 yards, and racks were developed to allow groups of ten to be fired from the back of a camel. Chancy weapons, they could be effective, particularly since Indian armies took no precautions to store gunpowder safely. They were used to announce the start of battle and for 'final protective fire' at the gun-line.

For siege work there were mortars, the *ghabarah* and the *deg* (the former might actually be the name of the bomb itself). Grenades were also used, the *huqqah-i atish* earthen pot and the sling-launched clay *handi*.

Bronze cannon were preferred. They were easier to cast and less brittle than iron. (Indian iron handiwork was excellent, but the metal itself was not the best, and craftsmen often had to import ingots from elsewhere.) But, in some places iron, or even wood, was used, strips of the latter bound with iron forming the barrel. Such guns either exploded or they did not; they had the advantage of structural flexibility, like bronze, without the expense of bronze, but the bindings might be inferior. Cast iron cannon only came into vogue when Europeans began selling them. The European guns were regarded as inferior, even by the Europeans, but it is not clear if this is because they were 'export' models or because the Indian gun foundries were just that good.

By tradition, Babur had taken personal command of the artillery, and this tradition persisted. The guns belonged to the Imperial Household, commanded by a *mir-i atish* or *darugha-i tup-khana*. Though less prestigious than the Cavalry (being lumped in with the Foot), the *mansab* system also applied to the artillery, sub-commanders being called *hazari*. Most of the master gunners were originally Ottoman Turks, but there were notable Arab and Indian gunners. Europeans, including a host of Portuguese renegades, were also prized, and highly paid for their expertise.

Bigger was always better as far as the later Mughals were concerned. They would prefer a gigantic cannon that could only be fired once a day, or that could not be fired at all, with a fancy name and showy decorations, to a utilitarian 6-pounder. Actually having a cannon that did damage was less important than showing off just how wealthy the Great Mughal was. It came down to culture. Cannon had a mystical quality, guns had personalities. The artillerists were high priests who could call down the thunder of the gods. The average rate of fire for the average fieldpiece was one round every fifteen minutes. A siege gun might fire once every forty-five minutes, but the really large cannon did only fire once or twice a day. Swivel guns firing large calibre shot or 3-4 pound balls — the pre-modern equivalent of a '50-cal' — proved more effective. Many Central Asian armies deployed large contingents of camels with one or a pair of these mounted. The beasts would be made to kneel and be hobbled, and the gunners would crouch behind them. They could be used as a rapidly deployed blocking force. The use of long barrel *jezails* or Ottoman trench guns from horse or camel back was also common, but these were usually carried by individual warriors who preferred such weapons. Similar guns were emplaced on fortress walls.



On the battlefield it became a standard tactic to create one long grand battery. In its most elaborate form, the cannon would be mounted on earthen platforms with a ditch in front, with mantlet-protected matchlock men in the intervals and chains holding the guns together. At a minimum there would be ropes to present a front through which no enemy cavalry could pass. Gaps would be prepared for the reserve cavalry to sortie through. Something similar would be done for a siege camp, but in a siege the cannon were often emplaced on huge platforms or wooden towers, from where they could shoot into the fortification or town.

No discussion of the Mughal Army would be complete without the elephants. When first encountered they were simply another obstacle Babur had to deal with, but they were soon adopted as a useful tool, and for prestige reasons. Most 'serving members' were females. Some males were trained to fight, but the war elephants of the ancient world no longer existed. Occasionally they were used as mobile pillboxes with armour and howdahs carrying archer and matchlock teams, and it was said that one elephant was worth 500 horses (1,000 horses if properly supported) but their two main roles were as construction equipment and as rally points and observation platforms for the commanders. Aurangzeb estimated that three or four elephants could shift a mortar that would otherwise need a team of 500 men, but each of them would eat as much as 15 camels. The Maharaja on his elephant in the thick of battle was an imposing figure, but, 'In the day of battle they ride on elephants and make themselves a target for everyone.' This was a fact not confined to the Mughals. Every Indian pitched battle became a struggle to reach the other side's command elephant. There would be great rewards for the man who could dare to strike the beast or its rider down, and ending the rider essentially meant ending the battle; once he was gone his army had no reason to remain — remember, these are not nations fighting, but mercenary warriors from a handful of castes and races. The 'people of the land' were not involved, and there are records of farmers calmly tilling their fields on the other side of a hedge from where a major battle was taking place. There are also records of men dismounting from their elephant so they could mount a horse and join the pursuit, only to have their men believe they had fallen, thus losing the battle. It should also be said that for many of the rank and file the horse they were sitting on amounted to their entire wealth; they simply could not afford to have it killed, and so quickly dispersed when the fight was obviously futile.

Logistics were left to the individual. The Emperor or the commanding grandee would of course have his household and baggage train, and men to oversee it — even the harem accompanied the Emperor, protected by a fearsome group of amazons. The artillery train was a part of this, and there were arsenals and foundries (*karkhanas*) associated with a system of depôts (*thanah*) dotted all over the empire that could be drawn upon when needed. There was also a vast train of dromedaries, bactrians, oxen, and elephants, but again, this all belonged to the Emperor. For the rest, there would be smaller households, client groups, gangs who had enlisted together, and bands of friends. These were expected to provide for themselves. Even the rudimentary medical services and kitchens were reserved for the Household. Though pillaging did occur, especially when the army permitted the *pindari* bandits to attach themselves to the campaign, the lands the army passed through were not usually stripped of their possessions, except in the 'enemy' South (but the peasants of the South always hid their stuff anyway). Locals were to be paid for their services, and most supplies came from the immense military bazaar that followed the army. (Of course, the bazaar might be sourcing the *pindaris'* loot...) To avoid conflict among various contingents there were often several bazaars, each allotted to a particular group, which could provide the proper needs for a particular caste. It could be argued that the Mughals ought to have developed a regular commissariat, but the system they cobbled together appeared to work in their eyes, and anyway, what would all those poor migrant workers do if they were not needed on campaign?



## Campaigning

Mughal campaigns were subject to rigorous and elaborate planning. Against an enemy with superior mobility (that is, the Marathas), seize his forts, isolate him, and dismantle his communication networks. Against a purely static enemy, bring overwhelming force to bear. Roughly six months at most were available for campaigning in any given year, because of the monsoon. (This was true pretty much everywhere.) Only once is a campaign in the rainy season recorded; it was apparently a nightmare. Roads were few, so the river network (in the North), and even the sea, was used to transport supplies. The troops seem to have remained on dry land — no amphibious operations. The Mughals never did develop a blue water navy. In Bengal they had about 750 vessels at one point, mainly galleys, but those were for getting about the Ganges delta and fending off Burmese and European pirates. On the Arabian Sea side the *siddis*, some of whom were seafarers, had a base at Janjira Island, south of Mumbai, where they launched raids against the Marathas.

Because the Army was weighted toward heavy cavalry, campaigns would if possible be limited to open ground. A good line of march was considered to be one along the base of the hills, where there was plentiful water and defensible positions. The army would be preceded by a cavalry screen and a mass of pioneers to clear the routes, and also by heralds to proclaim the immanent arrival of the Great Mughal, which it was hoped might be enough for rebel towns to throw open their gates rather than resist. Some historians thought this futile, but the French kings did the same, and it often worked. Very often a campaign was a royal progress — mainly for show, and the collection of tribute. Gangs of workmen sent out by local officials would assist with river crossings, clearing campsites, and the like. Curiously, bridge-building was not much practiced, but fords would be cleared by hand. That old standby, the inflatable bladder raft, which could carry 80 men, was employed. River crossings tended to be slow affairs, with a lot of sitting around and arguing while a handful of lowly ‘articles’ did all the real work.

Behind the cavalry screen came the advance guard, protecting the train. The guns were so slow that they had to set out first, or they would still be in the last camp by nightfall. Coming back from a campaign, however, the train went last, protected by a rearguard. The Imperial Household, with such things as the treasury, kitchens, hunting establishment, and flocks and herds, came next, and then the main body, along with the Emperor and the harem, all protected on the flanks by infantry. The rearguard was accompanied by light artillery. At a respectful distance came the camp followers and the provision merchants. The whole looked like a vast city on the move, but march discipline was apparently pretty tight, the pace regulated by the slow beat of a drum and regular head counts taken (which could be disappointing low). Surprisingly, the average rate of march was about the same as in Europe — 13 miles per day — though some tremendous marches were recorded by pure cavalry forces. *Qazaqi* light cavalry were sent to harass the enemy — the word ‘cossack’ is derived from *qazaqi*. Much use was made of spies, too, who might worm their way into the enemy’s heart before the campaign even opened. And, inevitably, there was treachery.

Akbar’s reforms set the standard for camp discipline: a rectangular tent palace in the center, with an adjoining circular one divided into 12 segments for the guards, plus an audience hall, outside of which the nobles pitched their tents in a regular fashion all around, and their men around them. A burning

beacon on a pole was used as a rally point. The bazaar men would set up near to the people they expected to cater to. The artillery would be emplaced and sandbagged facing the expected direction of the enemy's approach, guarded by a ring of footmen within bow shot. Officers checked the defences regularly. Sometimes field fortifications might be constructed. These could be a simple ditch and rampart, or a *zareba* — a cut thorn hedge. The ramparts might be significant, and be topped with artillery on platforms. Camps were selected for availability of water first, then of firewood, and then for defensibility. The night piquets came from the advance guard and the security arrangements were the responsibility of the local *kotwals* (district police officers), who conducted regular patrols. That was the theory. In practice, Irvine says little heed was paid to what the enemy might be doing and that the piquets were mainly posted to prevent theft, not warn of the enemy's approach; camp discipline was slack and it took a long time to make ready for business.

## Battle

The best battlefield was deemed to be a flat plain, with no stones, neither too dry nor too sandy, nor marshy, with hills nearby and a good water supply. If a battle was to be fought, an officer called a *bakshi* would draw up the plan and present it to the commander for his approval the day before. The plan would detail who would command what, and where. Great care had to be taken, because, as in Europe, certain troops had a claim on the posts of honour. While night attacks were practiced, they were never formal affairs, and the preferred style was a set-piece battle in broad daylight. The textbook deployment was a center composed of footmen and cannon with a cavalry wing on either side and an advance guard in front. The latter could be used to probe and provoke, or lure the enemy between the wings. As the Mughals adopted more native customs the layout was elaborated so that each wing had its own advance guard, rearguard, and screen, and might compose two lines. The center was turned into a fortress, with the guns entrenched as described above. There were even designated provosts to round up and turn back runaways. This was in the days before the Army became a mercenary crew.

Battle either commenced with a rocket attack to disrupt the enemy followed by a quick charge, or with an artillery duel. Such duels might last several hours before anything else was done, though they could be used to occupy the enemy's attention while a portion of the army laid out a snare. Early in the battle a forlorn hope might be offered as a sacrifice, or bodies of troops might lay ambushes along the enemy's approach route. During the artillery duel also, individuals might ride out and challenge the enemy, seeking personal fame. A general action would commence when the commanders judged the artillery was having no further effect.

Less common than a double envelopment were successive charges of each cavalry wing in turn, repeated as necessary. Mounted archers and camel gunners would pepper the enemy and through them would charge the heavy horse, ploughing deep into the enemy formations, the missile-cavalry peeling around to the flanks to keep the pressure up. When spent the wing would try to bring itself out of the melee and reform, to allow the second line, or the other flank, to repeat the process. The cavalry of their enemies tended to be nimble but easily exhausted. The trick was to pin them in place. One common tactic was the *qazaqi* (referencing the light horsemen), a loose order advance followed by a rapid withdrawal, which was not so much a feigned retreat as a probing attack. This was the Timurid way, but Indian battles in general tended to become giant swirling skirmishes rather than the rugby scrums favoured by European armies of the period. Coordination was difficult and plans dissolved rapidly. In battle, men fought for their own honour and the protection of their personal lord and paymaster. There were no drills, only the admittedly formidable fighting skills of individuals. The bards still composed epics about Indian battles, long after it had gone out of fashion in Europe.

In theory there were several means of communication, from aides dispatched from the commander to flags, drums, and horns; since there were no uniforms the men were given passwords to shout out during the fighting. But an Indian battle was chaos — not the controlled chaos of European battle, but pure unadulterated chaos. Fighting would last until evening, the regular pounding breakers of the Mongol tide gradually subsiding to eddies and swirls of foam. Unless, of course, the enemy broke, or never lost cohesion at all. In that case either a pursuit would be launched or the Mughals would endeavour to slip away after last light. No attempt was made to save the guns, they were simply spiked and abandoned.

Since the Center held the cannon and the infantry it might be assumed it merely served as a bulwark, but there were occasions when it advanced, guns still roped together, with mantlet screens and all. An advance of two miles in this fashion is recorded for one battle. At the appropriate time the heavy cavalry burst through the sally points immediately into the enemy line.

Given the chaos and the utter lack of group discipline it was common for some random occurrence to turn the tide. Indian armies did not secure their powder and an explosion might cause panic. Or, the flight of the camp followers from some group of horsemen who had broken through might spook nearby troops and cause a cascade effect. Most common of all, the sudden disappearance of the commander from his elephant would start a general rout. Because this was such a common occurrence it became the chief aim of the armies to bull their way through to the enemy general and bring him down. Everything else became incidental. A common counter was the use of body doubles. In later days the European troops learned to shoot the commander's elephant with a 4-pounder. But in any case he could be sniped from his mount, or be tackled by some daredevil riders. The elephant itself might be attacked from beneath by dismounted horsemen, or hacked at by men standing their horses on their hind legs. It might also happen that an act of bravery by the commander could be misinterpreted. Fighting dismounted was a particular tactic, known as *utara*. It had several uses. It might be to spare the horses, or for bravado, but it was often done at the moment of crisis. On more than one occasion a commander who committed *utara* was mistakenly assumed to have been killed, routing his army in the moment of greatest peril or even imminent victory. Irvine names a half dozen major battles where this event won the day for the other side. To quote Irvine (quoting Orme):

*'In order to be conspicuous, the leader rode on an elephant, preceded by others bearing displayed standards. Nothing was more common than for a whole army to turn its back the moment they perceived the general's seat empty. But Europeans having these forty years past (1745-1785) gained many a battle by only pointing a four-pounder at the main elephant, Indian generals have abandoned the custom and now appear on horseback, nay have learned to discipline their troops and to have an artillery well served.'* [p.235]

[In Hindu armies one act of similar desperation was for the warriors to tie their kilts together.]

Surprisingly, battle casualties were usually not heavy, even for the loser. The men had the good sense to run away first, and they <hopefully> still had a horse at their disposal. The enemy would also stop to plunder the camp. Why capture and try to ransom some indigent trooper when they could help themselves to the commander's silk robes and gold drinking cup. Whoever held the field next morning proclaimed victory. After which, in yet another custom that calls to mind the samurai wars of Japan, there would be a viewing of severed heads.

## Sieges

The science of siege warfare was highly developed, but it ran along somewhat different lines than in Europe. As a broad generalization, fortifications on the plain were placed on artificial mounds surrounded by wet moats or manicured swamps. In hilly or rocky terrain they were placed atop almost inaccessible heights — European observers noted the pointlessness of trying to conduct a formal siege against such places, given the expense in materiel and manpower. It was easier just to bribe the commandant. On the plains, the walls were often made of mud brick placed atop stone foundations, and built high. Elaborate outworks were not used. The goal was to prevent an army from approaching close enough to begin a siege by emplacing the defensive cannon on high. If depth of defence was required, a second or third wall of increased height would be constructed, or there would be flanking towers and covered overhanging galleries. Mud brick was not so easy to demolish as one might think. It absorbed impacts. And, if it did crumble, it was absurdly easy to replace. A common tactic when a garrison did not expect to hold was to raze the fort and rebuild it once the enemy had gone. Supplementary defences included bamboo thickets that could absorb shot and delay the work of sappers, and cactus hedges that could reach 20' in height. Both of these were prevalent in the South. The hill forts were not always so elaborate. Indeed, they might only be rude enclosures surrounded by boulders, protected more by skilful siting than labour. In all cases, however, a secure water supply was essential.

Though the Indians manufactured gigantic guns they never developed a good method of using them the way the Europeans did, erecting batteries and gradually shifting them closer until they could create a breach. Cannon tended to remain at long range, periodically lobbing the odd shot that would thud into the wall without much effect. The preferred method of breaching was mining, and Indian armies were skilled at both it and countermining, employing all sorts of stratagems — ambush parties, flooding, noxious vapours, bags of poisonous snakes. The alternative, if they could get close enough, was to batter down the doors with the help of elephants. Doors were often studded or spiked to prevent this, but the attackers countered by giving the beasts metal faceplates. There are records of metal doors being heated to prevent battering. Scaling the walls was less common but did occur, and would be assisted by showers of arrows sent by archers concealed behind mantlets. The defenders were more likely to use firearms, as smoke obscured the situation and the attackers had more need to take careful aim. Some sieges saw the construction of ramps and static or mobile towers. Trenches were not so common, but there is a record of one trench made for a breach assault that was wide enough for ten men and deep enough to hide an elephant. If these techniques failed the besiegers fell back on the blockade. Some sieges went on for years. Conversely, if the garrison saw that they had no chance, they would defy the enemy long enough to salve their pride, then sneak away.

## The Maratha Military

The Maratha Army existed in two basic forms during its history. Originally it was a unified force, almost purely 'ethnic' Marathi (whatever that means) in composition. That went out with the ascendancy of the *peshwas*. By then each *sardar* commanded his own feudal host, drawn from whatever resources he had to hand, and not excluding European mercenaries. Common ethnic groups were Arabs, Sikhs, Rajputs, Sindis, Rohillas, Pashtuns, and even men from Ethiopia.



During the 1680s the full army was estimated at 40,000 cavalry (mostly light) and 50,000 foot; there was also a navy, which was something unique. Under Shahu I the cavalry is estimated to have increased to 100,000, but may have included many mercenaries, such as the *Pindari*, who were bandits for hire; it certainly included vassal contingents. The rank and file did not like multi-year campaigns, leading to an ever growing use of mercenaries. A more sustainable number is estimated to be 45-60,000. Smaller numbers are given for later decades, and may refer only to the core. Also, by then the Maratha Empire was falling apart and the separate militaries fought each other. One set of figures for the 1760s, against the British, numbers 11,700 men, of

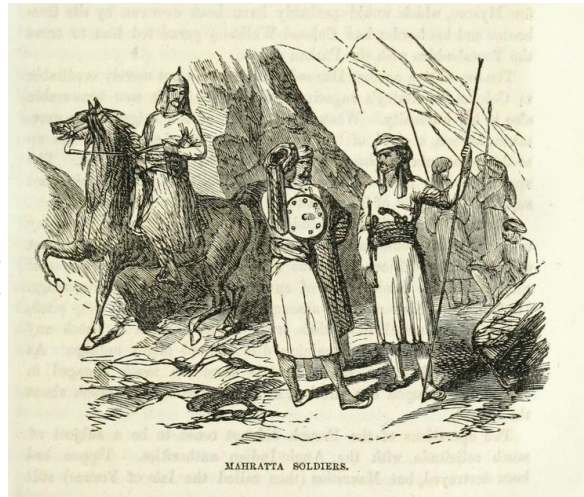
whom only 1,500 were mounted, plus 2,000 Arabs, 3,200 Rohillas and other mercenary fighters from the Northwest, 4,000 likewise from the Deccan (possibly *Pindari*), and 1,000 Europeans. For the 1780s there an example of 1,000 to 1,500 '*gardi*' — sepoys trained in the European manner — 2,000 to 2,250 horse, and 6,000 *Pindari*. An estimate from 1787 lists 80-100,000 horse, 10,000 foot, and 40-50 guns. But, most of the troops in that list are assumed to be on internal security duties and/or be potential recruits from the various independent hill tribes. The picture painted is one of an army in a perpetual state of development, from mounted war-bands coalescing into a host, through a professional army hardened by campaigning and diversified into various specialists, to a 'late empire' conglomeration of a small core backed by mercenaries, feudal levies, and adventurers. In the beginning, the infantry was good; by the end it had reverted to the status of camp guards.

Like the Mughals, the Marathas used four kinds of cavalry: the *gurad* ('guard') or *Huzurat*, that acted as bodyguard for king and *peshwa*, and was equipped with firearms; the *silledar* line cavalry who brought their own mounts; the *bargir* militia horse who rode horses provided by the State; the *pindari*. The *silledar* were 'line' horse, but they were also contract soldiers, mercenaries. The *bargir* were what might be described as 'royal regiments'. They were perhaps more reliable but only served on active campaigns.

The *pindari* were brigands on the cossack model, who in a novel twist paid the army commander for the right to plunder. Initially they were the smallest group, but as the empire grew and costs mounted, they became the dominant element. They typically operated in bands of 2-3,000.

Other non-Maratha mercenaries were also hired in greater and greater numbers as the decades passed. With the Confederation raiding into the North year after year in search of plunder (pardon, the *chauth*) their armies stopped bothering to return before the rains. This led to a dearth of cultivators in the Maratha heartland, because any *kunbi* peasant with ambition would label himself a Maratha and sign on for a campaign. In an attempt to fix the problem, the *peshwas* began hiring Pathans, Arabs, and Rajputs to fight for them, and their generals did the same.

Unlike the Mughals, though the cavalry was the backbone, the infantry was often of good quality, though in the period covered by the narrative it was still under development. It was famed for its speed on the march. Some of the best troops came from the Dhangars or Donigars, a Marathi caste that specialized in herding, but who proved their worth on the battlefield. The future Duke of Wellington once wrote, 'You must never allow Maratha infantry to attack head on or in close hand-to-hand combat or your army will cover itself with utter disgrace'. The improvement of the foot stemmed from the fact that the Marathas eschewed heavy cavalry. Their horsemen, therefore, were only good for raiding, scouting, or pursuit. The stock footmen were the *Mavales* (*maules*) tribesmen from the Western Ghats; the Konkan region provided



*Hetkari* musketeers. Under the early empire attempts were made to create a rational organisation for the infantry, but it is unclear how long this lasted. In theory, the *Hazari* corps was organized into bands of 100 or 150, split into 2-3 companies that were themselves composed of 5 squads (*Jumla*) of 10 men each. There were in turn 7 *Hazari*, meaning it amounted to about 1,000 men and constituted a single regiment.

The artillery was a branch that the Marathas worked on. They always had a lot of cannon, mainly to defend their fortresses, but initially it was just as useless as the guns of other states. With European training they began using them in the field, though still only after the manner of the Mughals; they also copied the camel gunners. The verdict is a mixed one, but it would seem that by the end their artillery was reasonably effective, at least in mass.

Campaigns usually lasted no more than four months out of the year and allowed six weeks more to muster the army. Though famed for their rapid marches it seems they averaged 30-40 miles per day. This is good, especially compared to the world-wide standard of 13 miles a day, but it is just the speed that any men on horseback would have without a baggage train. Tactically, the cavalry would try to swing wide and get in behind the enemy, going after the camp. As soon as the enemy showed signs of wavering, the Maratha cannon would open up and their infantry would charge. Wellington judged that hunkering down in camp was no good, as the Maratha artillery was too powerful. In his opinion the only solution was to attack first. (Which is what he did at Assaye, succeeding at a heavy cost.)

## The Maratha Navy

Unusually for an Indian state of this period the Marathas possessed a proper navy, which was quite effective. They hired Portuguese sailors to instruct them and even spied on the Europeans to see what might have been omitted from their training. A naval base was established at Vijayyadurg, which included a dockyard. Leaguings with the *siddis* (who on other occasions were their enemies) the Marathas twice defeated the EIC's attempts to remove them from the coast, and conducted successful piracy against the Company.

In India, most communities that had any sort of warships used galleys. These were good for inshore work but useless on the high seas. Though mostly equipped with archers, they did carry forward-firing cannon, which could be dangerous in close waters, but were no match for ships carrying as many guns as an entire siege train. There seems to have been no incentive, presumably for cultural reasons, to copy European warships. For many Indians, crossing the ocean invoked ritual pollution, and naval warfare, as well as overseas trade, was left to the Arabs, the Europeans, and others of similarly low caste. But, the Marathas were different, perhaps because they prided themselves on their *shudra* origins.



MAHRATTA GRABS AND GALLIVATS ATTACKING AN ENGLISH SHIP.  
(From a picture in the possession of Sir Ernest Robinson.)

[Frontispiece.]

They used three kinds of ships, the *grab* (from the Arabic *ghurab*, or 'raven') the *gallivat*, and the *pal*. The first used a native-style prowed-galley hull in combination with European rigging, and might displace as much as 400 tons. The *gallivat* displaced between 20 and 150 tons, but usually under 50. The *pal* was a copy of a European man-o-war. All mounted cannon in broadside. *Grabs* used 6- and 9-pounders, sometimes with a couple of 12-pounders on the main deck as bow chasers. (And yes, the Europeans sold them the guns, and ammunition.) The *gallivats*

mainly used swivel guns, but the largest might have a six or eight-gun broadside of 2- or 4-pounders. As the name suggests, primary propulsion for the *gallivat* was also by oar, usually 40-50 rows. The navy had perhaps 10 *grabs* and 50 *gallivats*. *Pals* seem to have been unusual expedients, and were perhaps captures.

The main tactic in a naval fight was to board from the stern of the other vessel, using the bow-chasers for support, while trying to avoid the enemy's superior broadside. If chased themselves, or hard pressed, they would flee into the coastal mangroves or take shelter under their forts. Strategically, they operated in small squadrons rather than a grand fleet, the *grabs* accompanied by auxiliary *gallivats*.

The Marathas did not range far, but dominated the coast between Mumbai and Goa. They took care to fortify every anchorage and river mouth, and demanded the *chauth* from all vessels travelling through their waters. However, their ships, which were only capable of using land breezes, never ventured far from the coastline. By the mid-18th Century, the Navy was in decline. A lot depended on the quality of the admiral in charge, and while Admiral Kanhoji Angre had been extremely able, his successor, Admiral Tulaji Angre, got into a dispute with the *peshwa*, to the point that the latter allied with the British to quash his unruly subordinate. Interestingly, the Angre clan, which lost their hereditary position, later reclaimed it and ended up as autonomous vassals of the British.

## The 'Mughal' Provincials

The armies of Hyderabad and its vassals in the Carnatic are not well documented individually. Some campaigns are known and some figures given, but it should be assumed they fought like the Mughals, but in an ad hoc manner, given that they relied even more on mercenaries and non-Muslim troops.

Qamar-ud-din's army, for example, was structured like a Mughal host, strong on heavy cavalry, strong on artillery, less mobile than the Marathas but more than a match for his smaller neighbours. At the same time, the Nizam could not call on the resources of the Empire and was forced to hire a hodgepodge of mercenaries and use local talent for his commissariat. In the 1743 siege of Trichinopoly Hyderabad deployed 80,000 horse, 200,000 foot, and over 200 cannon, which was regarded as impressive, but it did not accomplish much, and the garrison commandant was actually bought off. Some of the cavalry were *zanjis*, descendants of slaves brought from Zanzibar. Not all the infantry were useless either, as they included Arab swordsmen and musketeers from Yemen and Oman.

As for the lightweight states of Sira, Kadapa, and Chitradurga, details are very scant. It can be assumed their core was a feudal host provided on demand by various *poligars* and lesser chieftains, and augmented by mercenaries as finances allowed. As a rule of thumb a petty state of the Carnatic or Deccan could field 5,000 horsemen, who would be a mix of Beders, Marathas, Muslim mercenaries, and *poligars* with their entourage.

During the rebellion against Chitradurga's ruler in 1747 it is likely his army disposed of more than 20,000 men — because the relief force at Mayaconda must have been large enough to deal with the rival *poligars*. They, however, were probably not more than 20,000 themselves, since Hire Madakeri chose to attack despite his Maratha allies being bribed not to fight. There were 5,000 of those. If, say the enemy had 10-15,000, then 25,000 would probably have been sufficient to fight them and even 20,000 would have been adequate, especially since the clan chiefs of a medieval Indian army were always looking out for number one. The relief force might have numbered another 15,000. Perhaps less, since a besieged army could sortie effectively even if the relief force was fairly small.

These *poligar* armies were 'knightly' in composition. Infantry might have been some use in the fortresses but the battle of Mayaconda was probably fought entirely on horseback. There is no mention of cannon, or even firearms, but since matchlocks were common enough and knights — all-round warriors — fight with every weapon they can procure, there were probably some firearms. The fortress will have had lots of cannon. The key warrior caste for Chitradurga was the Bedars, the stock from whom the rulers also came. These had originally been nomads who emigrated to the region from farther north. When he conquered Chitradurga Haider Ali had the Bedar deported to Mysore and incorporated into his army, where they served him well against the British.

As for the other two states, the size of their forces is unknown, but seem to have been smaller than Chitradurga's. The composition was probably similar. Kadapa may have had 10,000 men when it was overrun by the Maratha Confederacy in 1740 — and its Maratha element may not have been all that reliable.

Arcot's army had some encounters with the Europeans, but is still not well documented. It was another cavalry army. The *mansab* system was in force. Local warrior castes would have served, including the various *poligars* who ran their little kingdoms in the region, but there were probably a higher proportion of mercenaries — Arabs, Pathans, and other men from the North. There may have been some variation when the dynasty changed, for if some of the old clan lined up with Hyderabad to replace their despised kin, others remained loyal and would have been reluctant to serve the new master. That new master, Anwár-ud-dín, deployed 10,000 men to face the French at the Adyar, but that was only his vanguard. For comparison, in 1740 Chanda Sahib, when he faced the Marathas, had roughly 3,500 men under his direct command, plus 400 sepoy obtained from the French. There were some decent foot warriors in the region; this was Tamil country, and the French (and later the British) found good sepoy material among them. However, it is more likely the sepoys on this occasion were *mappilas* from Malabar, large numbers of whom were recruited at Mahé.

Arcot's military performance was mixed, with an embarrassing loss against the French and a crushing defeat by the Marathas, but the army remained resilient. It is safe to say there was always enough material to create a new army when the old one had been destroyed. There were a number of warrior castes in the Carnatic: the Guri or Paiks, who lived around Vizagapatnam; the Kallars and Maravars (though these mainly served in the armies of Coromandel) who were guerrilla fighters and bandits; the Kannadiyans or Gaulis of Arcot; the Rachevars or Razus, a high caste group from Arcot and Kadapa; the Muchatra, who served mainly as watchmen; the Bondili, whom the French also employed as sepoys. Europeans had yet to serve the native states in large numbers; sometimes Portuguese are mentioned, but they were usually Christianized natives. Prized mercenaries were the Rajputs, the Pathans, the Arabs, and the various black slave-soldiers or ex-slave communities like the *zhengi*.

## The Army of Mysore



There is also little information about Mysore's army prior to Haider Ali. His army has been deeply studied, but it was a new creation. Still, he did not create it out of nothing. For what it is worth, he fielded roughly 80,000 regulars. His predecessors will have copied their neighbours, using a mix of Arab and northern mercenaries, *poligar* 'noble horse', and levies. One thing Mysore has always been noted for is the quality and quantity of her rockets. Since they used Mughal forms for their administration the army probably had a similar structure. Heavy cavalry may have been hard to obtain but they would do their best with the horses they had.

Besides interfering in Malabar during the 1730s, Mysore fought a short war against the Zamorin of Calicut in 1745, after an invitation to champion the cause of neighbouring Palghat. Three battles were fought but there is virtually no information. However, in 1756 a similar campaign employed 2,000 horse, 5,000 foot, and 5 guns, and in 1766 some 12,000 troops were used. The numbers suggest there was a greater reliance on infantry, or at least they had enough diversity of troop types to have them available for mountain fighting. Two warrior castes the rulers relied on were the Kannadiyan and the Vedan, the latter serving as tribal auxiliaries, but the best fighters were the Bedar or Boya, who could serve as irregulars or on the line; in peacetime they were bandits. Both they and the Kanarese Bants served Bednur as well. These last were originally a village militia and offered their swords to the highest bidder.

## The Militaries of the Coromandel Coast

Here the nature of the armies begins to change. Coromandel was not subjected to Mughal rule until the 1730s, and then only loosely and very briefly. And again, data is lacking. The armies relied far more on infantry. Horseflesh was of poor quality when compared with the Deccan, let alone the Mughal stud farms. This probably explains why Chanda Sahib's small cavalry force won consistently against the local armies. But, much of the land back from the coast was jungly. The Maravar and Kallar people were regarded as fearsome guerrilla fighters. They never fought pitched battles but were skilled in the art of ambush. Ramaswami (*Principal Rajas of Malabar*) quotes a source (pp.44-45):

*'It is certain that the Muhammadans during their invasion [in the 17th Century] dreaded these Kallans much more than the king's armies. None is so capable of a coup de main as they. Uniting skill and agility to courage, they went out of their woods in small bands, dispersed the country in disguise, and were always ready to unite at the first signal. Is it a question of lifting a horse? The Kallan requires only an instant to run like lightning, rush the horse and carry off his prey. Without any bridle he commands him and drives him where he desires; nothing can detach him from the horse; one can say that with him he is no more than one same being. Soon, surrounded by a hundred adversaries who rush on him, he dashes like thunder across their ranks and disappears in the midst of a cloud of dust. The same audacity coupled with the same skill accompanies the Kallan when he goes to pillage the camp of a sleeping army.'*

He goes on to cite a case in 1734 where 50 Kallans beat off an army of 10,000 when it attempted a punitive raid on a single village. The quote does indicate that there was some decent cavalry, however.

In 1736 there was a major campaign during Madurai's civil war that involved an army of 80,000 men on one side. On the other hand, a century before, when Madurai was at the height of its power, with lands stretching right up the coast, it is recorded that the army was 'expanded' to only 30,000 men. That was in 1635. Those numbers were sufficient to beat back Mysore, to chastise Travancore for failing to pay tribute, and to punish Ramnad for ignoring Madurai's 'boy' in a succession crisis. In the struggles of the 1730s Tinnevely, Ramnad, and Tanjore each had its own contingent; power here was based on the towns, so every town probably had its own tiny army.

As to artillery, there will surely have been some prestige pieces in the rajas' armies, but the arm does not seem to have figured prominently even in siege combat. Firearms were not favoured. In that climate and that terrain the bow was a much better weapon.

One other caste/community should be mentioned, the Paravars, the pearl divers of South India, some of whom anciently rose to become the Pandyan kings of Madurai — but by the time covered in the narrative they had sunk back to the status of coastal fishermen. They competed with the Nairs of Malabar for trade with the Europeans, and allied with the Portuguese and later the Dutch against the Zamorin and his Arabs. Their range was from Malabar round to Coromandel; many of those on the East coast were Catholic, at least in name, and bitterly resisted Dutch attempts to convert them to Calvinism. Although they were not a warrior group, it is possible some served in the Nair Brigade of Travancore, which recruited both Christians and Muslims.



## The Militaries of the Malabar Coast

*The nairors [Nairs] are the keepers of the weapons and are trained in their use from childhood. [...] They are very strong and agile in fencing and wrestling, and prove themselves to be real masters at this. They use their weapons all their life. Like brave Europeans, they charge in ranks, and they ably use bow and arrow, muskets, but also artillery. [...] They go to battle naked, with only their loins covered. [...] When fighting their enemies, they often find their biggest advantage in flight, as they cannot be overtaken: they jump and fly quickly over fences and dams, through shrubbery, swamps, ponds and wilderness, and then suddenly charge again from the other side. With their shields they are able to protect themselves remarkably well and they do more harm slashing and stabbing than shooting, as their aiming is very poor which often makes their bullets fly into the air. They don't easily retreat, but stand upright like poles, or bravely advance through fire, sword or barrage. By using opium they go quite mad and beside themselves.*

*Wouter Schouten (Oost-Indische Voyages pp.193-194)*

Details are less clear for Malabar's forces than they are for the Mughals and Marathas, because the subject has not been as extensively studied. The military of Kerala was not exclusively of the Nair community, but they formed the backbone of each state's army and were a cross between a yeomanry militia and knights. Nairs of high rank were required to keep a personal retinue of between 500 and 1,000 warriors, and they would bring them whenever the raja summoned his nobles on campaign. Most fought on foot. By law, every male Nair had to undergo military training. As in the rest of India this was not done at a 'regimental depot', but individually, in martial arts schools called *kalaris*, headed by a *desavazhi*, who was under the supervision of the senior Nairs. The emphasis was on physical toughness, agility, and skill with the sword and bow. If classed in European terms they would be light infantry.

Menon (*A History of Travancore*) describes them in terms that make them look more like European soldiers, or sepoy, but he was writing retrospectively long after the Raj was instituted. The Maharaja of Travancore did create that sort of army for himself, which he augmented with feudal levies, and did stiffen it with mercenaries from Coromandel, but in the beginning it cannot have been much different from his neighbours. He was, however, an innovator, and with the help of a Dutch officer, de Lannoy, created an experimental brigade that fought in European manner. Composed mostly of *mappilas* and

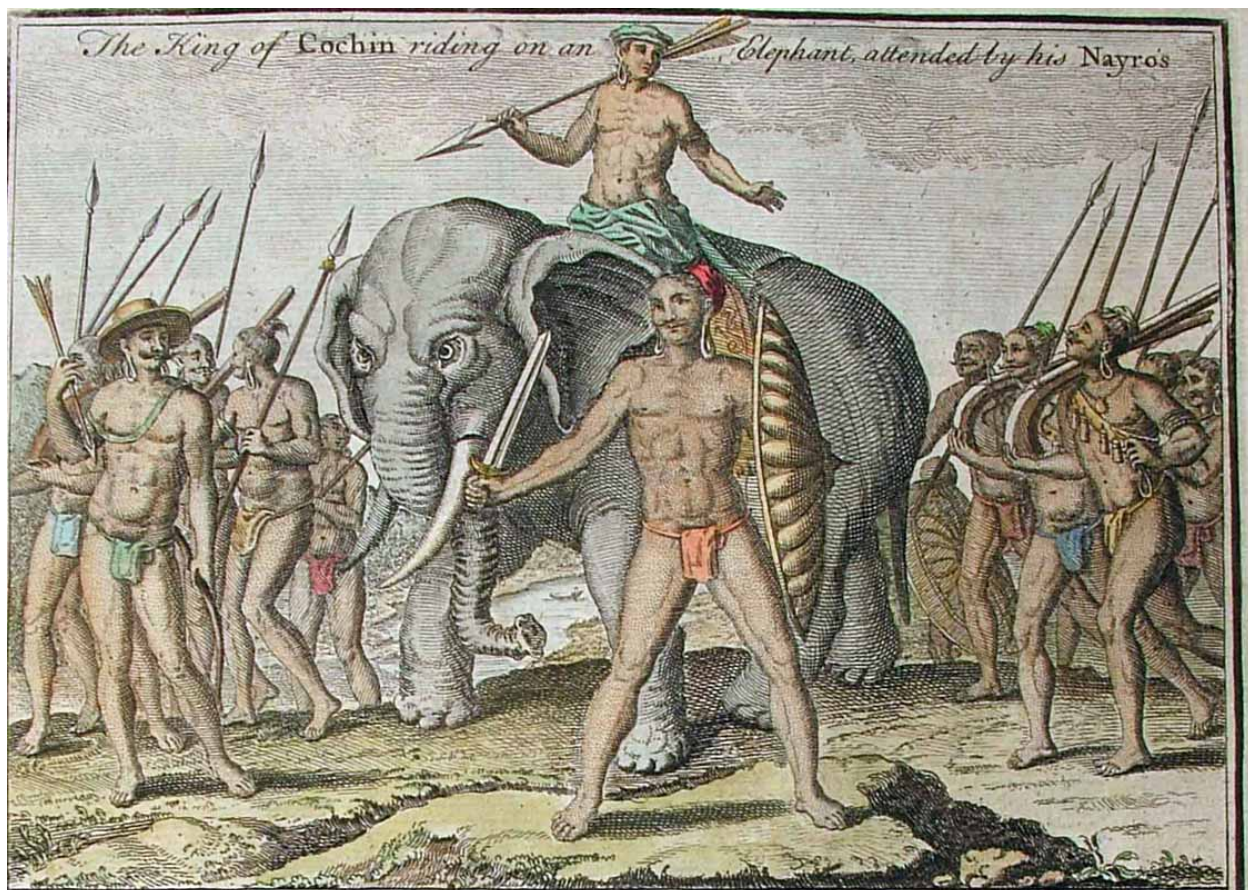
Syriac Christians, it was handy for dealing with situations where a Hindu army might balk, such as gunning down sacrosanct *brahmins*. The brigade still exists.

According to the British General, Hector Munro, who fought against the Nairs in later times:

*One may as well look for a needle in a Bottle of Hay as any of them in the daytime, they being lurking behind sand banks and bushes, except when we are marching towards the Fort, and then they appear like bees out in the month of June [...] Besides which they point their guns well, and fire them well also.*

Munro also stated:

*The Nairs are the gentry, and have no other duty than to carry on war, and they continually carry their arms with them, which are swords, bows, arrows, bucklers, and lances. They all live with the kings, and some of them with other lords, relations of the kings, and lords of the country, and with the salaried governors, and with one another. They are very smart men, and much taken up with their nobility... These Nairs, besides being all of noble descent, have to be armed as knights by the hand of a king or lord with whom they live, and until they have been so equipped they cannot bear arms nor call themselves Nairs.... In general, when they are seven years of age, they are immediately sent to school to learn all manner of feats of agility and gymnastics for the use of their weapons. First they learn to dance and then to tumble, and for that purpose they render supple all their limbs from their childhood, so that they can bend them in any direction... These Nairs live outside the towns separate from other people on their estates which are fenced in. When they go anywhere, they shout to the peasants, that they may get out of the way where they have to pass; and the peasants do so, and, if they did not do it, the Nairs might kill them without penalty. And, if a peasant were by misfortune to touch a Nair lady, her relations would immediately kill her, and likewise the man that touched her and all his relations.*



Their main weakness was their lack of drill and heightened sense of self interest, which made them feeble 'line infantry', though excellent skirmishers. Being a feudal militia, they could rarely stay in a coalition long enough to repel an invasion. One is reminded of the Scots Highlanders.

The Nairs were the chief warrior caste, but not the only one. Both the Muslim *mappilas* and the Syriac Christians served as soldiers on a basis of equality with the Nairs, receiving similar perquisites, such as titles and grants of land; they were regarded as their own castes. Prior to the 17th Century there was much intermarriage between the religions, and Christians were even given access to Hindu temples (and adopted many Hindu customs). Because of the growing presence of the European trading companies, many of these amicable arrangements died off, but the Maharaja of Travancore continued to favour the Christians in his realm, including Catholic coastal communities. (There was bad blood between the Syriacs and Catholics, but both groups opposed the Dutch Calvinists.) Many low caste Hindus converted to Islam, while retaining various older customs, such as matrilineal succession; their chief distinguishing features were the wearing of caps instead of turbans, and the wearing of beards. Much of the time the *mappilas* served as garrison troops, but there are records of them on campaign, especially as bands of matchlock-men. Again, the coming of the Europeans, especially the Portuguese, changed the local dynamics, and the Muslims became much more militant in reaction to the Portuguese crusading mentality — they called them 'Franks' rather than 'infidels', evoking the Crusades of legend.

One interesting group were the *chavers* (*Cavettu Pada*, or in Portuguese, the *Amochi*), men who devoted themselves to Death. Though they could be employed as assassins they were not of the *thug* community. The latter were glorified bandits, the *chavers* were gentlemen. Also, these were not small bands. In one encounter during the 1500s there were 4,000 of them. Mostly they acted as 'forlorn hopes', rushing the enemy in hopes of breaking up their formation, and if the raja was slain they would fight to the death, or go on revenge missions against the enemy country. They were sometimes employed as escorts for travellers. No bandit would attack a caravan escorted by psychotic killers. They even served the Portuguese during the 16th Century, and there are records of them in the entourages of Christian archdeacons. The *mappilas* sometimes underwent the same rituals. As a reward for their sacrifice their families were granted tax-free lands, which obligated the next generation for compulsory military service.

Unlike other parts of India, riding a horse was not a means of demonstrating higher status. Moreover, the horseflesh was poor stuff when compared to that of the Deccan, or even the Carnatic, though the mounted Nairs fought reasonably well as skirmishers. Mercenaries could be had — Europeans or Arabs or Pathans — and the *mappilas* (being Muslims) regarded themselves as a fighting elite, but they were unreliable, treating themselves as allies rather than subjects of the rajas. Some of the jungle tribes also served on certain campaigns. Often oppressed by their neighbours, they might be employed as beaters and trackers when the local raja went hunting, and if the relationship was friendly he might seek their help in war. Some of these were the Kuricchan from Wynad and the jungles north of Calicut, and the Kanikar or Kanis of South Travancore; both were skilled in jungle warfare.

For artillery and siege materiel, there were some cannon, usually kept in the fortresses, but siege artillery *per se* was not common. There were few major fortifications in Malabar. Plenty of temple complexes could resist attack, and there was usually a fort associated with the raja's palace, but only the towns that the Europeans controlled were heavily fortified. As elsewhere on the Subcontinent, the art of mining was a besieger's first resource, and that was not so useful when dealing with a stone fortress on a swampy island. Naturally, elephants could be found in their usual roles.

Until the 1760s there were virtually no roads in Kerala, so campaigns tended to be short-ranged. Also, fighting was usually suspended during the five months of the rains.

Some details are available for Calicut's military which can serve as an example for the rest. It was run by a few select royals (or the occasional man of ability) under the Zamorin's authority. The *kuthiravattattu nair* was the General of Horse, and also the army's chief instructor. The *dharmothu panikkar* had charge of the Foot. The *cherayi panikkar* (the 'proficient-in-arms') was Commander-in-Chief. Like the Zamorin, these men also fulfilled religious duties. Under them were officers ranked by the number of men they were notionally required to levy, similar to the Mughal model: commanders of Five Thousand, One

Thousand, Five Hundred, and One Hundred, who were either *naduvazhi* (chiefs) or petty rajas. The highest positions went to royals or favourites, while the rest were hereditary chiefs who enjoyed a certain freedom of action. Though the bulk of the army was levied as needed there were standing garrisons in the principal towns. A distinction was made between swordsmen and musketeers. The rank and file of the former were *panikanmars* of the Thiyyar caste, sometimes called Illathu. These were one of the three main Nair caste divisions. The musketeers were drawn from the *mappilas*. Since musketeers were of greater value in fortifications, and since much of the urban populace was *mappila*, they are likely to have formed the bulk of the garrison troops. They had their own designated commander, the *thinayancheri elayath*. As always, numbers are hard to come by. The Zamorin supposedly aided Kolathunadu against the Canarese with 40,000 men in the 1730s. They made a poor showing but this was blamed on an inept commander. Calicut also possessed a fleet during the 17th Century. It survived the Portuguese but not the Dutch. The Admirals of the Calicut Fleet were the *kunjali marakkars*. This was a rank derived from a family name and seems to have been a hereditary position. The ships were crewed by the *mappilas* — the Nairs wanted nothing to do with the ocean. In some places the Maraikkayars, who were Tamil fishermen, also served. At its peak, Calicut's navy dominated the coastal waters from Ceylon to Goa, working in small squadrons of 4-5 galleys.

Travancore's army began from the same template, but there were two key differences. First, as a perpetual aggressor it became a much more militarized state, the economy harnessed to the needs of the army. Second, the acquisition of the Dutch advisor de Lannoy led to a heavy emphasis on artillery, fortification, and drill, the EIC supplying much of the materiel. By the end of Marthanda Varma's reign his army may have numbered 50,000 men, converted from a feudal levy into a standing force whose members received tax concessions and a pension. The religiously-minded Maharaja also instituted a policy of employing *brahmins* in the high command. This prevented lower caste Nairs from arguing with their commanders. Special communities like the Mukkuvar fishermen were employed as needed; the Mukkuvar gave good assistance against the VOC at Colachel in 1741. Unlike some of the other states, *mappilas* were not used much, if at all, outside of de Lannoy's special brigade. There were few of them that far south, and Marthanda Varma preferred to employ Syriac Christians as his trading middlemen. As for the Horse, he hired Maravars and Pathan mercenaries from Madurai. These were a staple loan force, but after the collapse of their kingdom it is probable bands of exiles took service with Travancore.

There is not a lot of detail about the forces available to the Bednur Nayakas, either. Like the rajas of Malabar they mainly employed infantry, Vokkaliga of the ruling caste in the higher ranks and Beders as regular soldiers. The cavalry would have been Vokkaliga, since they were the landed gentry. Tactics seem to have been similar to those employed by the Nairs — that is, the methods of light infantry or feudal levies. There is no indication that they had much artillery. Bednur fielded 30,000 men when they invaded Kolathunadu in 1732. Similar numbers were present for the repeat performance in 1737. Sixty years earlier they fought the great Aurangzeb to a standstill under a famous queen, Chennamma, using guerrilla tactics. Their sister kingdom Coorg appears to have relied heavily on bows and melee weapons, with few firearms and no cannon to speak of. Their fighting castes were the same, with the addition of various jungle tribes. Cavalry was almost nonexistent. Despite this, all their neighbours feared them, including the Europeans. To this day the men of Coorg make up the bulk of Army recruits drawn from Karnataka. Bednur also possessed its own coastal navy. It was strong enough to effectively blockade Kolathunadu but completely unable to engaged the Europeans.

The Muslim Kingdom of Arakkal (Cannanore) had only a small army, but for its defence in the 1720s it mustered some 14-15,000 fighters. Cannanore also had a navy, crewed by Arabs. Having their origins in commercial shipping and piracy, their style of ship combat, using the ubiquitous galleys of the Arabian Sea, was hit-and-run. If conditions were favourable, they would always try to board. Cannon were regarded as dangerous toys. They also preferred to sail in small groups like the ships of Calicut, finding large fleet manoeuvres impractical. Except for their neglect of cannon, they were quite similar to the Canarese sailors and the *siddis* of Bombay. Since the kingdom also possessed the Laccadives their sailors were not afraid to take to the high seas.

## The Trading Companies and Other Foreigners

Though a number of European powers set up shop on the coasts of the Subcontinent, including of all people, the Danes, down through the centuries there were only five major players. In order of appearance they were the Arabs, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and the French. The Chinese, also, had ancient connections with a few places, notably Cochin, but at the time of the narrative their footprint was almost invisible.

### The Arabs

One should start with the Arabs. They are, or were, almost indigenous inhabitants of the Subcontinent, engaging in trade there since at least 1000 BC, and probably long before. They became the middlemen for the Mediterranean world, up to and including the Ottoman Empire and the Mamelukes of Egypt, and for the Persians, and for the peoples of Southeast Asia. Not all the Arabs were Muslim. There was a strong Orthodox Christian presence 'around the horn' on the Coromandel Coast and that community has ties to this day with the Syrian Church. And, there were Jews, who also arrived long, long ago. The deepest Muslim and Christian roots were sunk on the Malabar Coast, particularly in Calicut (Kozhikode) and Kolathunadu (Kanur), where the first traders married into the local merchant castes — a strategy adopted by all subsequent arrivals except the stand-offish English; it really was the best way to conduct business. The rajas built cities for them, Mangalore and Calicut, Cannanore and Kollam, where they could engage in their grubby business at arm's length. This also helped limit the spread of Islam, though in the 17th Century there was a push by the Sufi movement to convert the locals which had some success. The Arabs of Malabar came mainly from Yemen, Oman, and the other Gulf States. The same groups also settled in Gujarat (the Northeast corner of the Arabian Sea). In Malabar, they, and more especially their recent converts, were known as *mappilas*. Some Muslim Arabs settled on the Coromandel Coast, mainly followers of a persecuted sect, but those became salt traders, pearl divers, and fisherfolk. The Arabs of Malabar were more integrated than elsewhere in India, but still lived in separate communities. The integration may be due to the fact that the earliest Arab traders were not monotheists. Among themselves the Arabs honoured the Prophet's Quraishi clan but otherwise dealt on equal footing regardless of clan.

Under the Mughals, the Arabs, and the Persian and other Central Asian people in their employ fared well, but there was a backlash when Mughal power declined. The pattern would repeat several times. Under the Raj the Muslims were again favoured, and again there was a backlash, which was much worse than before because for the first time the faiths were turned into badges of identity. However, outside the bounds of the Mughal Empire, particularly in Malabar, though Hindu and Muslim periodically clashed, their Hindu 'hosts' seem to have regarded the Arabs as a sort of expatriate community and merely cordoned them off. As traders they were invaluable and needed to be placated. According to a modern census there are roughly 50,000 Arabs remaining in India.

For the purposes of this Commentary, it is the *mappilas* and *siddis* who will periodically grab the limelight. The *mappilas* have already been mentioned. They made up roughly 20% of the population of Malabar and dwelt in the towns, where they controlled all merchant activity. If a regime had a navy, the *mappilas* would run it, too. There is no equivalent group elsewhere in the South. The *siddi* 'Arabs' were a more recent phenomenon. They were a part of the influx of Bantu-speaking slaves from Zanzibar. Their name derives from *Zanj*, or 'Swahili'. Not all were slaves. Some were free sailors, and even merchants. Hyderabad prized them as cavalymen, and there was a separate community in Gujarat, arriving there as a gift from the Portuguese to a local prince. Those did not remain slaves long, but turned to piracy. Even the Portuguese feared their navy, which ranged as far south as Malabar, where they had good relations with the Muslim rulers of Cannanore. The largest contingent of *siddis* settled in what is now the state of Karnataka, north of Kerala, again probably imported by the Portuguese; many were Christian and others became Hindus. Whatever their official religion, the *siddis* retained many of their African folk beliefs. Like the Arabs they preferred to keep to themselves, but could be roused to aid their coreligionists.

## The Portuguese

*Throughout this vast tract of land 'the will of the Portuguese was the supreme law. Earth and sea acknowledged their sovereignty... No nation or private person dared to make voyages, or carry on trade, without obtaining their permission and passport'.*

*Quote from Koshy, The Dutch Power in Kerala, p.10*

By the mid 18th Century the Portuguese were a spent force. They had been given roughly a century's head start on the rest of the Europeans, with only the Arabs for rivals, and had made the best of it, establishing a trading empire that would only be surpassed in size by the British.

When compared with the other trading companies, Portugal's model was an old one, though from the point of view of the Malabar Coast, Portuguese methods were new, innovative, and altogether unpleasant — trade at gunpoint. The Portuguese did not set up companies. Their exploration was a state-sponsored effort and its chief mechanism was the dispatching of heavily armed expeditions from the mother country. The mindset was that of the Reconquista, and the <very> long range goal was the destruction of the holy sites of Islam by coming in through the back door — not colonization or trade. The fact that so many local governments were happy to trade in spices, and that gaining the contracts took the trade out of the hands of Portugal's rivals and allowed the Crown to pay for renewed crusading efforts, was simply a bonus. Some permanence had to be acquired so that crusading momentum could be maintained, but all their bases were held on sufferance from the local powers. In practice, those left behind when the expeditions sailed for home laden with spices would hold out grimly against the pressure of the neighbouring states while trying to collect enough goods to make the next expedition worthwhile. They did leave a mark in India, establishing a not-insignificant Christian presence and communities throughout the Subcontinent, but these had mostly gone the way of Alexander the Great's Greek colonies in Central Asia — become half-castes in the literal meaning of the word. Portuguese names often pop up in the chronicles of the time, usually acting as middlemen or diplomats for hire, and they also formed a notable military caste, selling their expertise to the warlords just like the other warrior castes. However, Goa was now their only official territory, a place they would hold until evicted by force in 1961.

Though Surat in Gujarat was the ancient Silk Road terminus that everyone used, Cochin had an even older claim and it was here the Portuguese first set up the *Estado Português da Índia* — the Portuguese State of India — under Viceroy Francisco de Almeida. They were invited to do so by the Raja of Cochin, who offered to make his realm a protectorate in 1505. He must have been pretty desperate. Vasco da Gama's first encounter with the Indians was at Calicut, in 1498, where he and its ruler, known as the Zamorin, acquired mutually unfavourable opinions of each other; this made the Portuguese a friend of Cochin. Relations soured further with Calicut when locals attacked the Portuguese factory there in 1500. The leader of the expedition that set up that factory, Pedro Álvares Cabral, divined that Arab merchants were behind the attack and killed 600 of their sailors, confiscated the cargo from ten Arab merchantmen, and then burned the ships. To pay the Zamorin back for failing to come to the rescue of his factory he bombarded the town of Calicut for an entire day. More bloodshed followed, with the besting of Calicut's fleet at the First Battle of Cannanore (noteworthy as the first recorded instance of a naval fight won by gunnery alone, using line-of-battle as a tactic). Relations with the Zamorin waxed and waned. Only a year later he allowed the Portuguese to establish a post at Kollam. Kollam ought by rights to have belonged to Travancore so he was not giving away much. Shortly after, the Portuguese were once again at war with Calicut, but now they had allies, for Kollam wished to shake off the Zamorin's yoke. And so it went.

Some exploration was then made of the Bay of Bengal, and a post established at Pulicat, north of Madras, mainly as an emergency base, but the focus remained the pepper-rich Malabar Coast. Four forts were established, at Kollam, Cochin, Cannanore, and Anjediva, bracketing the state of Calicut. The rulers in those parts feared the Zamorin and were only too willing to give the Portuguese a stake in the game. In the other direction, Portuguese India incorporated a string of outposts on the Arabian Peninsula and the African coast, most notably Zanzibar and Mozambique.

In 1509 the Portuguese defeated a Mameluke-Indian fleet out of Gujarat (which was secretly sponsored by the Venetians) at the Battle of Diu, ending one stage of a long and bitter war that raged across the width of the Arabian Sea. In the mid 1500s the Ottoman Empire would get involved. Through all this the bickering with the Zamorin, and occasionally the other kingdoms, continued. Allies switched sides, battles and campaigns were won and lost, but the Portuguese kept at it.

In 1510 Goa was wrested from the powerful Bijapur Sultanate, and in 1530 the Portuguese State's capital was moved there. It would remain a Portuguese possession until 1961. The move reduced tensions with Calicut. Mumbai was obtained in 1635, but it would go to the English in 1661 as part of a marriage dowry. The Portuguese do not seem to have regarded that site as a useful one. Again, although the Portuguese did trade and were keen to make money, they were primarily interested in conquest, in setting up a new colonial kingdom that would rival the viceroyalties of America (ironically they would achieve that aim not in India, but in Brazil, courtesy of Napoleon Bonaparte).

The Portuguese never did manage to establish a lasting peace, but toward the latter half of the 1500s things calmed down, and the 17th Century was relatively quiet for them. There was a campaign against them in 1683, by the early Maratha Confederacy, that petered out. The Dutch arrival, however, was a catastrophe of the first water. They took the East Indies. In Malabar Kollam was lost, and Cochin, while the Nayaka rulers of Canara drove the Portuguese off that coast. The expansionist Empire of Muscat exploited Portuguese weakness to roll up their Arabian and African posts (Mozambique would hold but became an independent viceroyalty in 1752). The Portuguese hunkered down at Goa. Though they expanded into its hinterland, their empire was a mere shadow. As far as the present narrative is concerned, they are present in the background, but will have no effect on the plot line. Between 1737 and 1740 they were at war with the Marathas, lost two fortresses, and nearly bankrupted the *Estado* to buy them off.

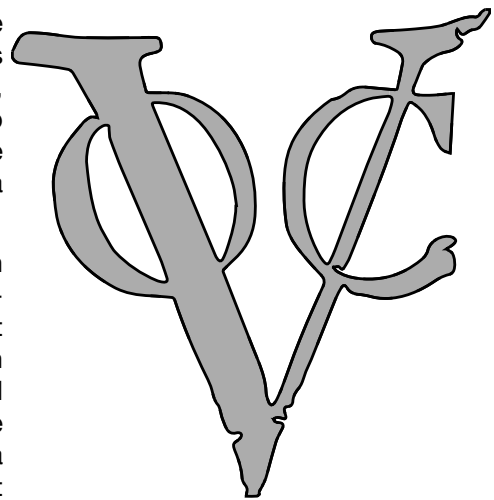
## The VOC

The short version of the Dutch story is similar to the Portuguese in some respects, only they had less time before new rivals came on the scene. There were two main differences. First, they had the 'awful example' of their predecessors to keep them from making some of the same mistakes, but more importantly, the VOC was something new in history, a commercial endeavour on an imperial scale.

The *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (United Dutch Chartered East India Company) was the very first modern joint-stock company. It was not the first chartered company; that honour goes to the Stora Enso copper mining firm of Sweden (late 13th Century), and it was not established under royal charter, but by the States General of the Netherlands. The original charter ran for twenty-one years, granting the VOC a monopoly on the Asian trade (once they were able to wrest it from the Portuguese). Shares in the company were available to any Dutch citizen and could be publicly sold, leading to the development of the first stock exchanges. In popular imagination the VOC usually takes a back seat to the British East India Company, but in volume of trade it dwarfed its rivals (other than the Chinese), shipping 2.5 million tons of goods (and slaves) during its existence (1602-1795). The EIC only managed a fifth of that quantity during its lifetime. More personnel were sent from Europe to work in the VOC than the rest of the European companies' employees combined. But, the management of its immense portfolio was less than ideal.

*[In the early 17th Century the EIC's unit purchase price for pepper was 2.75d, sold in Europe for 18d. And their share of the trade was puny in comparison with the VOC.]*

Initially the VOC bypassed India, though the obligatory post at Surat was set up. The East Indies were richer and easier pickings. Batavia became the main entrepôt, and a unique concept was created.



Normally, trading posts bought goods from the locals and stored them until a convoy came from Europe to collect. But Batavia became a fully functional base of operations, with its own administration and even its own shipyards. The template for this sort of operation came from the way the Dutch States operated. In Europe, Antwerp was the main port for all the states, and goods were collected and distributed from there. Curiously, the Portuguese established a similar system at Hamburg for their German traffic, but never thought to employ it in Asia. The operation at Batavia meant there was less incentive to run expensive, months-long convoys back and forth from Europe. There was still some long haul traffic — slaves needed to be sent to the New World, stockholders needed to see that the Company was indeed engaged in trade by being allowed to buy novelty goods, the Hollanders demanded their pepper, and many, many replacement staff needed to be returned to the Indies. When the routine was functioning properly there were three sailings per year from home, averaging 16 ships for the year. Convoys were only used on the return journey — valuable cargoes attract pirates. Outbound ships tended to sail around the same time as each other but only because they needed to catch the same winds. However, the bulk of the traffic remained within Asia, and the bulk of company profit actually came from functioning as middlemen to the various Asian states. India, despite its reputation for wealth, and the importance of the pepper sourced from the Malabar Coast, remained at the periphery of the VOC's trading network.

Batavia also gave the VOC a degree of autonomy that the other trading companies could only dream of. Under its charter the Company could negotiate diplomatically, sign treaties, declare war, exercise justice — including imprisonment and execution — mint coin, and found colonies, all without reference to the States General. This was not very unusual in Dutch eyes, for each of the Seven Provinces had a similar degree of autonomy. Even so, the VOC sometimes exceeded its authority. Perhaps the most notorious example was when Portugal made peace with Holland at the end of the Eighty Years War. The news was deliberately suppressed by the Council at Batavia, to allow the Company to clear out the remaining Portuguese factories.

The VOC may also have decided establishing Batavia was necessary because almost from the start they were engaged in a vicious turf war with the Portuguese. The level of violence seems to have coloured the Company's future decision making. There was no time to send home for help or instructions. Strategy was quite straightforward, and right out of a street-gang's shakedown playbook. Company warships would locate Portuguese ones and send them to the bottom, preferably in full view of the native trading partner. The VOC representatives would then go ashore and offer a new and better deal, perhaps including an offer of protection (you've got a nice palace here, raja... it would be a shame if it should just happen to blow up, accidental-like). Sometimes coercion worked, sometimes it was not necessary — the Portuguese were universally hated — and sometimes it backfired spectacularly, but it was standard operating procedure.

Making a deal with the VOC (or any of the other companies) was an attractive option for many local rulers anyway. Trading companies never suffered from succession crises and never subdivided into smaller independent entities. Their policies might be grasping and their methods unpleasant, but no more so than the ruler's other neighbours, or own kin, for that matter, while the company offered stability and dependability. Company officers might be corrupt, greedy, and manipulative, but no more so than the king's ministers, and they were usually far more competent. Often, such men wound up on the local ruler's privy council or commanding his army. Naturally this enhanced the Company's control, but so what — the king should make his worthless half-brother prime minister just to please his scheming stepmother who tried to poison him when he was a toddler? Better to have a foreigner in charge who was always talking about retiring to some chilly fishing village on the North Sea.

It took a few years, but Portuguese influence was ultimately eradicated from Southeast Asia (barring a weedy, decayed warehouse at Macao). By then Batavia had a Governor General (Jan Pieterszoon Coen — 1619), guided by a full Council (of *state*, no less), a corps of diplomats, and an army that grew (perhaps) to 8,000 regulars, plus local auxiliaries serving on contract or as part of some feudal obligation. Thanks in large part to Coen's dynamic leadership and advocacy of 'direct action' in the VOC's first years it was Batavia that made Dutch policy in Asia, not the States General or even the Directors — the Gentlemen XVII, as they were called — who were almost always forced to acquiesce to whatever the

Council had already done. Coen dreamed of founding a new republic in the heart of Southeast Asia, the so-called Kingdom of Jakarta. It helped that the Dutch Government persisted in regarding the VOC as a mere trading company, a mere source of revenue, and kept oversight to a minimum. This could be a problem for them, though, because the VOC was technically operating under Dutch law, and thus, in the eyes of its European rivals and their own states, the States General was liable for the VOC's activities.

*[The name 'gentlemen' had a special significance within the VOC. All members of the company were ranked as 'gentlemen' when they returned to Holland, but only for a period of six weeks, after which it was 'back to work you scum'.]*

As a State, the VOC had the edge against its local rivals — meaning the Asian potentates — not so much from superior tactics, or drills, or gunnery, some of which its opponents copied, but because Batavia occupied a central position and the Dutch had command of the seas. Living continually in the East, and on a razor's edge of competition, senior personnel became adept at politics and military affairs, as well as trade and espionage. Batavia also had, unlike the other companies, a grand strategy, one that was moulded by events but remained relatively consistent in its outline; in essence, Coen's dream.

Trading posts were established as far away as Japan and Persia. However, by the time of this narrative, trade with Japan was heavily restricted by the Tokugawa Shogunate and Formosa had been lost — a rare failure. Canton was opened in 1729, but trade with that port was also subject to restrictions. Focus shifted to India, where the locals were more willing to cooperate, but where there was more competition. Pepper had been the Company's sole commodity in the early years, but the demand for other spices, as well as cotton, sugar, and tea gave it more options. Strangely, the Directors were reluctant to expand their product line, perhaps because it would increase competition. Or, it may have been because by now the Directors were no longer merchants, but members of the political class.

The VOC hoped to create a lasting monopoly in Malabar. Elsewhere on the mainland (Sri Lanka was nicely sewn up) they were from the start forced to share. The large ports, like Surat and what would one day become Calcutta, did a lot of business, but they were occupied by traders from many nations and governed by the Mughal Empire directly, or by one of its semi-autonomous governors. There was no scope for politicking beyond that needed merely to survive. There were a few posts on the Coromandel Coast and in the Carnatic. The main base there was originally ex-Portuguese Pulicat, but the company administration was moved to Nagapattinam, south of the Kaveri Delta, late in the 17th Century. By withdrawing southward here the VOC not only placed their factories to windward of the competition, they withdrew from the orbit of the Sultanate of the Carnatic, which was a somewhat unstable polity, and drew closer to kingdoms that produced much pepper and that had close ties to the ruling dynasty of Sri Lanka.

Some native states were simply too powerful, or too distant, to dominate, but might still serve as allies in the greater scheme of power politics. It was regarded as good form for the Great Mughal's permission to be obtained when establishing a new post. This went some way to warding off attacks by nearer neighbours, who were thus robbed of one of their common excuses. The Raja of Bijapur, before he succumbed to the Marathas, was reckoned a good friend, at least while the Portuguese remained a common enemy, as was the King of Kandy, who ruled the interior of Sri Lanka. Such rulers might provide contingents of troops; conversely, they might sit back and let the VOC blast their enemies, for a price.

## The Malabar Command

The Malabar Coast was the most active region in India for the VOC during the early 18th Century. The lure was some of the best pepper on the planet. Other spices like cardamom and ginger were plentiful, and there was also salt. Though the VOC held concessions on many sections of India's coastline, the heart of their operations was in Kerala, and specifically at Cochin. It took three military campaigns against the Portuguese and their local allies before the VOC secured a foothold in



Kerala. The Dutch took advantage of local dissatisfaction with the Portuguese and allied with various parties, most notably the Zamorin of Calicut. The first campaign began in 1661 and the last ended, rather messily, in 1663. There was some underhanded dealing, because the war was launched after rumours that a peace treaty between Holland and Portugal (the two had been at war for some time) was imminent, and news of its signing was suppressed by the VOC Directors to allow the war to go forward.

The downside of this hostile takeover was the dumping of the Portuguese protectorate of Cochin in the VOC's lap. As had happened with the Portuguese, Cochin sought protection against Calicut, and thus did not declare independence or try to eject the Dutch, instead asking for protection. And, as had happened before, this annoyed the Zamorin immensely. Learning from history, he avoided war, however, and merely stirred up the Cochin nobles against their ruler. Regarded at first as a glittering prize, the Dutch quickly realized they had been handed a bomb with a short fuze.

Cochin got a VOC governor, who within a few years was acting as the raja's unofficial prime minister. The raja's flag sported the Company logo. The VOC became a player in the politics of Malabar, which sometimes benefited them but more often did not. Because, every time the raja got into mischief (which was often), whether from boredom or a secret grudge against his masters, his neighbours laid all the blame on the VOC's desk. Royal authority had been critically weakened under the Portuguese and VOC attempts to strengthen it (as a cost-cutting measure) were halfhearted. A number of revolts occurred, but the rebels were placated with treats — which included weakening the royal authority even further. They liked this arrangement with the Europeans. It paid well, and they and the raja could spend their days hunting and feasting, and running the economy into the ground... because why not? Whenever money ran short, a small rebellion would produce more. Nationalism was not even a concept at the time, and there were strong incentives to putting an outside arbiter, even a blatantly self-interested one, in charge. In fact, the more blatantly self-interested, the better. To reiterate, the VOC was a corporation, meaning it had long-term, predictable policies, and a continuity of rule that could not be matched when the alternative was a plethora of shaky blood-claims, flying daggers, and poisoned chalices. At least one ruler of Cochin amused himself by picking fights with his neighbours just to watch the Dutch running around putting out the fires. To be fair, there was the typical old-school clique of men who wanted to get rid of foreign interference, but they faced their own difficulties, and often risked being branded traitors because the only counterweight to the Dutch was Calicut.

Despite the dangers, the VOC's new assets appeared even more lucrative than the prospectus made out. Besides pepper, Cochin sourced some of the best cinnamon and cardamom. The company also acquired the rights to salt pans and cocoanut farms. The Arab trading community here was small, while the Portuguese had kept the British and French out of the area. And, the Coast was insulated from Mughal influence. As was their habit, the VOC signed bilateral agreements with a host of local rajas.

By the 1730s the VOC's structure in Kerala was well organized. The chain of command descended from the Council at Batavia to the Malabar Command, which was responsible for the entire Coast. The Command consisted of a small council headed by a bull-headed individual named Julius Valentin van Gollennesse. He may have been aggressive, but he was also astute, and usually knew when to stay clear of trouble. Under the Commandery was the Governor of Cochin, who handled everything in South Malabar. M. Adriaan Matan, or Maten, was the man on the spot for many years. He was effectively the ruler of Cochin, and was responsible for the kingdom's defense and its relations with its neighbours, with the primary object of ensuring the pepper flowed in the right direction.

The main VOC possessions in Malabar were Cochin (Kochi), Craganore (Kodungallur), and Cannanore (Kannur), each an entrepôt of one of the bigger kingdoms. They lost Mangalore, the Bednur Kingdom's entrepôt, in the 1730s, when that ruler decided globalism was a bad idea. Though the Zamorin and the VOC had a bad relationship, the Dutch retained their position at Craganore, north of Calicut. The fort here had been built by the Portuguese and though antiquated was still very strong. Cochin, as the seat of first the Portuguese and then the Dutch government, was more heavily fortified. Because that kingdom had annexed Kollam to its south, the VOC also had a presence there. In the other direction, they had a base at Cannanore, called Fort San Angelo. As already related, Kolathunadu had been the most powerful political entity on the coast after the fall of the Chera Empire but it was now a shambles,

with five competing cadet Houses vying for control. The Dutch picked one to open the door and then played the field to maintain their position. The trade treaty included the city of Cannanore, whose ruler, the Ali Raja, agreed to the deal, with a mental reservation to weasel out of it if the Dutch ever showed themselves weak. Kolathunadu was famous for cardamom, not pepper. But, what there was of the spice was first class, and the VOC wanted it all.

Ceylon (Sri Lanka) also needs to be mentioned, because it was the first source of help if Malabar Command had a problem. On this island the VOC had secured all the coastline, leaving the interior to the King of Kandy, a Tamil dynasty with ties to Madurai. Ceylon had its own governor, a man named Gustaaf Willem Baron van Imhoff. Like his predecessors, Imhoff had a vision for the company, which he would try to implement when he became Governor General in 1743. Much of the drive to make Malabar a growing concern after some false steps and pushback during the early part of the 18th Century was down to him. When he gave up his office in Sri Lanka, Batavia's interest in Malabar quickly waned, which was unfortunate, given that just before his departure he succeeded in starting a major war.

### **Gustaaf Willem Baron van Imhoff (1705-1750)**

Born at Nuremberg of an East Frisian family. Joined the VOC in 1725 and promoted steadily until becoming Governor of Ceylon in 1736. While governor he established good working relations with the King of Kandy who ruled the interior (things had been a mess prior to his arrival). Although he promoted war with Travancore in 1739, when recalled to Batavia in 1740 he openly opposed the VOC's harsh crackdown on the riots taking place there and was arrested and deported. This backfired on the Administration, as the Gentlemen XVII who ran the VOC decided to appoint Imhoff Governor General. He began his tenure in 1743 and succeed in terminating a war with the Javanese princes and instituting some reforms. His tenure had mixed results. On the one hand he was a progressive and a reformer who favoured education and integration, but he was opposed both by his own people and the local ruling elite, partly because of his overbearing manner and failure to consider the opinions of others. He offered to resign but this was refused, and he died in office, feeling he had accomplished nothing.



Obtaining a new concession typically went something like this. Bearing in mind that Malabar had been engaged in the spice trade for thousands of years, both the sources of spice and who owned what was generally known already. Company officials in the major town might correspond with the raja in question, or if the situation was unclear, some exploration might take place, as when the French discovered Mahé. The Company would ask for a plot of land on one of the many barrier islands that lined the coast. They might pay money, or offer military assistance, or they might allow the raja to take out a loan. The Company thus became the kingdom's creditor, with every advantage that suggests. The fort would be on a lagoon associated with one of the rivers that the locals used to transport the spices. Permission to erect a fort would also be granted, and usually a few inland warehouses for temporary storage. Wise rulers, like the Zamorin of Calicut, would forbid the fortification of such places, and even go so far as to ensure the physical appearance of the warehouses did not show up his own infrastructure. The raja would also ensure the land grants were widely scattered, though they would normally lie along the same river valley. Perhaps there would be a salt concession, too. In exchange, the Company would agree to what were usually very heavy customs dues. If the raja was weak, this process could be repeated until the Company became a significant landowner; sometimes it was possible to cut separate deals with petty chieftains who were supposedly the raja's vassals. If the raja was strong he would eventually lose patience with this creeping encroachment and

issue some restrictions or even attack the Company's fort. He might also do this just to remind the Company who was in charge. On a day to day basis, the locals would grow their spice and bring it to one of the warehouses, which would probably be run by a higher caste middleman from the neighbourhood, someone delegated by the raja. From there the spice would be shipped in bulk down to the fort, and from there to the major town, where the excess could be sold to merchants from anywhere in the world and the home consignment secured until a convoy arrived. Some money would be collected by the local government at every stage. This process was pretty much the same for all the companies operating in Malabar.

Though they were a cautious people by nature, Dutch policies in Malabar were probably too heavy-handed for the fragile political situation to withstand. Aggressive trading practices had worked elsewhere, and did work here, too, but they led to inflexibility in method. To be fair, the VOC's options were already limited by the fact they had been stuck with a protectorate. Forced from the start to enter into the political game, their divide-and-rule tactics only made things worse in the long run. The VOC became the Arbiter of the Coast, but ironically could not afford the necessary resources to be an effective one. They were forced to play favourites and to rely on very unreliable local allies.

It is tempting to compare the militarized trading companies to modern PMCs. Both appear to be military forces engaged in economic activities of an exploitative nature. The lines between the two can be blurry, but a private military company is a mercenary crew that arranges mining deals, or smuggles people and drugs, to keep itself fit for the battlefield. Personal enrichment is a bonus. Entities like the VOC were merchant corporations that funded their own armies for protection. If the VOC had been a real state it would have had other sources of income which it could tap to maintain its position in the world. Revenues for many European states in this period might see as much as ninety percent of taxes go to the military — armies were the main reason states collected any taxes at all. But for a trading company acting as a state, Profit remained the be-all and end-all. The Directors were loath to spend on defending Batavia's position when the shareholders were clamouring for dividends, so the VOC only expended a third of its revenues (20% on its European side) on defense. This was still an enormous amount of money, but it barely sufficed to tread water. Alas, the Council had little real choice. As a political player and the backer of various native states, an army had to be maintained. Batavia might report record profits, but that usually meant some record-breaking military campaign had been needed to create the glowing report in the first place, which cost more than the Company made that year.

Mostert (*Chain of Command*) identifies five reasons for the decline of the VOC. First, over time the trade networks in Asia shifted around for a variety of reasons — war, competition from the French and British, the decline of Mughal power — leaving the Company with only that portion of the network that it controlled itself. This forced the Company to use more coercion, which only drove trade farther away. As will be seen, the Maharaja of Travancore deliberately rerouted his pepper away from the Dutch and at one point placed the whole operation in his lands under embargo. Second, the Batavian 'rendezvous', as it was styled, became less efficient than direct trade between India and China. This may have been because (third) there was a significant rise in venality and corruption, which was inevitable given the lack of third party oversight.

The years from about 1717 to 1729 are seen as the VOC's Black Period. Not only did trade decline, but Management was more corrupt than usual, more heavy-handed with the native princes than usual, and more bumbling than usual. There were times in its history when the native states could turn to the VOC as a reasonably unbiased arbiter and even the lower classes might hope for justice against oppression, but this period was not one of them. In Sri Lanka an official of the company was executed for committing judicial murder, while the ruling Council of the Indies consistently appointed clique leaders to the post of Governor General to gain kickbacks for themselves. In 1731 the Malabar Commander, Jacob de Jong, had to be relieved from his post due to his highhanded behaviour toward the locals.

Fourth on the list is the mortality rate, which can be tacked on to the mounting costs of military campaigning in general. The VOC's efforts to maintain a grip on Malabar began to cost more than the profits the Company could extract. And fifth, exacerbating the other issues, was the Company's dividend policy. Dividends were never, ever, reduced, even when expenditures rose and profits declined. Since the

payouts amounted to 40% on the original investment, the only way this policy could be maintained was by selling off capital stock in Asia and converting it to liquid capital in Europe. This in turn led to the taking out of short term loans in order to try and restore capital — and a vicious cycle was created. By 1740 the VOC was sliding fast. It is a testament to its vast wealth that the Company lasted another 55 years.

## The EIC



Unlike some of the subjects covered in this Commentary there is no lack of information about the Honourable East India Company. The question is rather, what to omit. Fortunately, there are only about 120 years to cover from its founding until the time of the narrative, and those years predate its 'classic' period. The irony of the EIC's rise to empire is that there was no desire in Britain or among the Company personnel generally to establish any sort of empire in Asia. Until the wars with France started the EIC had a strict non-interference policy. Local men might find themselves playing politics, but only to stay alive, or

for some small personal advantage. This was beginning to change, but mainly because the Churn was getting worse by the day.

Every trading company's history is one of boom and bust, record profits and bailouts. When one remembers the global economy lacked any of the checks and balances 'enjoyed' by modern corporations, both extremes were really, really extreme. The Indian market was big enough and diverse enough that failure in one zone could be compensated for elsewhere, but the foundations of these companies were never secure. Unlike the other companies there was no attempt by the EIC (except under specific circumstances) to integrate with the local communities, either forcefully or on friendly terms. In modern parlance this created a lack of 'market presence'. On the other hand, the EIC was willing to deal in pretty much anything, legal or illegal.

The 'Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East-Indies' was founded in 1600, with the express intent of trading in Asia. This was the Age of Exploration, and no less a person than Sir Francis Drake had made contact with some of the sultans and rajas of what would become modern Indonesia. Activities like this, and the acquiring of a variety of extremely rich ships' cargoes from extremely Catholic countries, encouraged the English to join the scramble for wealth. The Dutch had led the way with the first joint-stock monopoly in history; the English attempted to copy them. Like most such ventures it came together over drinks at a pub. Or possibly a coffee house. With much effort the promoters persuaded the aging Queen Elisabeth I that she had nothing to lose by sponsoring the attempt.

The Company was founded with the express aim of competing with the Dutch, so the first trading posts were established in the East Indies. No one could accuse the Directors of a lack of ambition. After the Dutch sent around a few of the lads to have a 'free and frank expression of views', the EIC decided to focus on India instead, where the Dutch had less of a presence. Those early years were more legalized piracy than legitimate business. They tried opening factories to collect spices but without much success. Either they lacked the capital to buy from the suppliers, or the competition (Portuguese or Arab) persuaded the locals that the EIC were bad men or nobodies. So, they let the others do the trading and stole the proceeds.

First contacts in India were naturally made at Surat, within a relatively short distance of the court of the Great Mughal at Delhi. The Mughal emperors generally favoured trade with outside interests, and the EIC was granted permission to trade. Ironically, the first factory was established on the other side of India, at Masulipatnam (1611). However, a base at Surat was established in 1615 and this is generally accepted as the start of the Company's India operations. The problem with the Empire, however, was that it had a Bureaucracy, and, as one of the author's early mentors once said, 'I never met a bureaucrat who didn't need an assistant to help him do nothing'. Too much red tape. So, like all the other merchants who came

to India, they looked for other places to trade. Just as well. Surat was reaching the end of its ancient career as a trading hub, as the harbour gradually silted up. The Mughals were never big on infrastructure maintenance.

The main purchases for home consumption were spices, cotton, and saltpetre, used for making gunpowder, as well as the madder used for the famous red coats of the Army. Business was good enough that King James I extended the EIC's charter indefinitely and the Mughals continued to provide favourable deals, including the waiving of customs dues in certain regions. The EIC both bought and sold, and did so locally as well as to and from Europe, but regional trade was less important for them than for the Dutch, for whom it was critical. In 1720 an estimated 15% of all British imports came from India. There is a comical trope about the English trying to sell heavy Midland woollies in exchange for spice, but apparently in Malabar, the hottest part of the Subcontinent, they actually found a market! The natives did not wear the apparel, they cut it up to make useful rags. Nevertheless, the EIC did far more buying than selling; coastal India has always had a cash economy, and just as in China, what the locals really wanted from the Europeans was silver.

Bengal was opened in 1634 and Madras in 1639. Bombay was acquired as part of the marriage dowry of Charles II in 1661. By the middle of the 17th Century the Company was running 23 factories in the Subcontinent. However, there were only 90 company employees, and no military force whatsoever. The EIC was entirely reliant on the kindness of strangers. That changed with an uptick in competition with the Dutch, but the EIC still tried to restrict itself to purely mercantile activities.

Case in point: in 1670 Charles II granted the Company the rights usually granted to a colony, such as the acquisition of territory, the right to mint coin, the right to wage war, form alliances, and the right to sue for peace. The VOC had enjoyed these privileges for decades, even though the company was not a colony. But when the EIC tried to exercise the same rights they brought down the wrath of the Mughals, who captured Bombay and only granted a new lease, on much more restrictive terms, after the EIC begged for pardon (1690). Company fortunes took another nosedive in 1695 when pirates led by Henry Avery took one of the Great Mughal's treasure ships in the Bab el Mandeb (*modern pirates have no panache*). Four factories were shut down and the Company was nearly kicked out of India entirely. The reader is probably aware of the Interlopers, other companies or individual captains granted charters by the King or by Parliament (and sometimes not), but these were insignificant in the grand scheme of things, at least at this time. The Company's lobby was powerful enough to close or merge most domestic competition.

As it grew, the EIC's mode of operation began to vary somewhat by region. In general terms, until the French began pushing them around in the 1740s, the English, and later British, kept a low profile. They built few forts or even infrastructure, deployed next to no garrisons, hardly ever tried to raise bands of sepoys to fight for them, and survived as jackals, picking over the carcasses left by the other companies. The Directors were cheapskates. But, there were exceptions, and these increased as Mughal rule disintegrated and instability became endemic. Each of the three presidencies (Bombay, Madras, Bengal) had its own administration and would develop its own military force, but the number of paid employees remained small.

In Bombay they toed the line set down by the Mughals. There is only one instance, in 1664, when the factory at Surat stood up to a native power. In this case it was the Marathas and company personnel were lauded for it by the Mughals, who reduced their tax burden (until the Avery unpleasantness).

In Bengal, the local Mughal *nawab* enjoyed a lot of autonomy, but he was often a hardliner who kept the Europeans both from interfering too much in local politics and from squabbling with each other. A couple of adventurous souls tried a more proactive policy between 1685 and 1690, and got their fingers burned (not literally, though that was always a possibility in India). That affair and the company's inability to control its more piratical members frequently led to its reps being summoned to the Mughal Court, where they had to perform all sorts of demeaning diplomatic gymnastics to retain their contracts.

Madras, and southern India generally, was on the Mughal frontier, and if not quite 'wide open' definitely enjoyed more flexibility. Except that during the period covered by the narrative the Company Governor

there was a bureaucratic nonentity. Within the Madras Presidency, Madras itself, and the subsidiary factories in the Carnatic, displayed no interest in territorial expansion, and indeed had only enough contact with the local governments to guarantee the flow of trade. Partly this was policy, and partly it seems to have been an attitude of 'cultural superiority'. The governing council at Madras was so feeble they could not find the money to even repair their fort and had to rely on shaky guarantees from the Nawab of Arcot. The First Carnatic War would go very badly for Madras, though at sea, the British would dominate. But, for once the British would learn their lesson. In the Second Carnatic War, and all subsequent wars in India, the EIC would (one way or another) emerge on top.

Robert Adams, factor at Tellicherry for many years, had no qualms about interfering in local politics. But he was an unusually enterprising chap; apart from sitting on the local raja's privy council, he ran guns and sold dope on the side. Malabar is a forgotten chapter in EIC history, because it played little part in the Carnatic Wars that led to British rule on the Subcontinent. But it was there that the template was first drawn up. Not only Adams, but his less adept successors, conducted themselves in ways that amount to 'classic' EIC policy. They were Nabobs before it was cool.

Although the Malabar Coast later came under the Madras Presidency, during the period covered in the narrative all the posts there were under Bombay's authority. Only after Malabar was annexed did it fall under Madras' authority. This is important, because the presidencies and their precursors functioned as independent fiefdoms and had quite different ways of doing things. Anjengo (Anjuthengu) was a coastal fort in the latitude of Attingal, a small place but important for cultural and political reasons. The site was a good early warning station against European ships coming from home and also put them in contact with the rising kingdom of Travancore, though of course the quality of the spices in the hinterland was the chief reason for its existence. Tellicherry (Thalassery), a little south of Cannanore in the lands of the Kadatha, who were vassals of the state of Kolathunadu, was an even better location, except that it was too close to the French post at Mahé. It was acquired in 1708. There was a third important post, an extension of Tellicherry. This was Dharmapattanam Island. Dharmapattanam Island had the advantages of being more defensible, and being located at the confluence of multiple river mouths, but the disadvantage of being claimed by just about everyone. More will be said about it later in the Commentary.

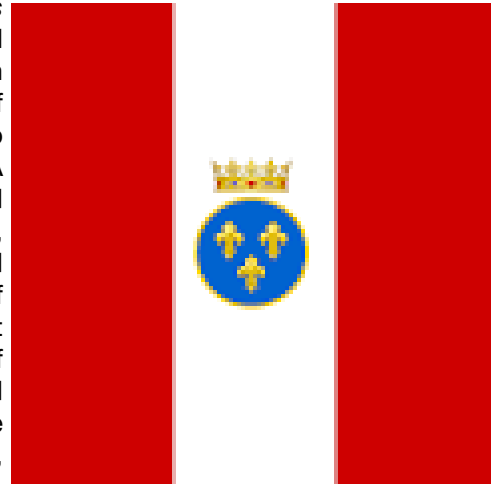
As for what happened to the EIC in the following century, well, presumably the reader is well aware. One cannot thank the French enough for helping to create the British Raj.

### **Robert Adams (c.1674-1738)**

Robert Adams was the quintessential EIC governor. He served 42 years on the Malabar Coast, arriving at Tellicherry when just 13. From 1703 to 1720 he served at the EIC factory in Calicut before being made Governor of Tellicherry. Fluent in the local language, he thoroughly understood the rules of the game. At Calicut he mended fences and improved trade (things had been a mess); he would do the same at Tellicherry, and even more, performing a delicate balancing act in a maelstrom of local politics. At the same time, he enriched himself exceedingly, by methods that were not altogether by the Company's own rulebook — including running his own ships for his own profit and buying into various local ventures — and in ways that by modern standards are morally questionable, such as gunrunning and dope smuggling — neither of which were regarded as illegal or immoral at the time. He also paid various factions to fight each other, or to attack the other trading companies; for this he often used his own money, but sometimes the Company's. Such underhanded actions were also acceptable by the standards of the day; he was, in fact, just doing as everyone else did, only somewhat more skilfully. He was feared and hated by the Dutch and French, yet their own factors found it difficult to get on in the country without his services. He may have been forced to leave the Coast in 1728, but he was apparently back by the early 1730s. Accusations of profiteering and misappropriation caused him to lose his bid for the next rung on the ladder, the Governorship of Bombay, and he was recalled to England. Before he passed away he eventually cleared himself of the charges, and became a Director of the Company. Although Robert Clive is generally seen as the driving force behind the EIC's takeover of India, Adams may have created the template — though not with any idea of creating an empire, but simply to assure his own survival and enrich himself.

## The CIO

The *Compagnie française pour le commerce des Indes orientales* was another joint-stock company holding a royal monopoly. Like the VOC and EIC it had its own personality. In this case the company was founded, in 1664, by the decree of Louis XIV on the advice of his finance minister, Colbert, who merged three smaller existing companies to create it. A precedent had been set by an even earlier company, founded by Henri IV in 1604, which was simply a crown corporation, without stock. The history of the CIO is one of repeated bankruptcies and mergers with companies that had a variety of different aims, and this was because the entity was, like most crown corporations, perceived from the start as a tool of government finance. The presence of actual investors and actual merchant adventurers were merely incidental. In one sense, therefore, the CIO was tightly controlled by the Crown, in another sense its organisation was quite loose and fluid.



The finance angle will come back into the picture shortly. With respect to India and the East generally, the CIO developed along three lines. First was an attempt to found a major colony on Madagascar as a counterweight to Batavia. Like everyone else the French first aimed for Indonesia, but, like everyone else they found the Dutch too hard to compete with. Those were the days before France had any sort of a navy. Colbert's founding of such a navy went hand in glove with his recreation of the CIO. As for Madagascar, no one had any understanding of just how powerful the kingdoms on that immense island were; the colony was a complete flop. It did not help that the man in charge, Admiral Lahaye, was incompetent, but it is doubtful that even an organizational genius could have made it work. The survivors would be used to form the foundation of the second project, the development of Mauritius — then known as Île-de-Bourbon and Île-de-France. This project also came close to failure until it was picked up by the Breton adventurer, Mahé de La Bourdonnais, who turned the islands into his personal fiefdom. They became a valuable forward base for French endeavours on the Subcontinent, a base of operations which the British could not match.

*[Madagascar is a fascinating side note. It is believed the first permanent population were Polynesians who came all the way from the Sunda Islands, in Indonesia, around the time of the classical civilizations of the Mediterranean, perhaps in search of unique spices. People from the African coast and Persian Gulf only began arriving from about 700 AD — traders, refugees, and, later, slave hunters. During the same period there was another wave of migration from Indonesia. Swahili Arabs were few in number but their culture dominated. Europeans mainly used the coasts as pirate bases. Various kingdoms existed, emerging out of a clan-based society. Those with access to foreign trade became powerful, and made war on their neighbours to obtain slaves to sell. France is usually considered the former colonial owner of Madagascar, but the island was first unified by a native dynasty during the Napoleonic wars, under British auspices. The island only became French after an invasion and colonial wars between 1883 and 1895.]*

The last project was of course the development of trade with India and around India. The CIO's first base in India was naturally Surat (1666). Pondichéri, a much better site, was purchased from the Bijapur Sultanate in 1674, but only fully established in 1683. Chandernagore (Chandannagar), upriver from Calcutta in Bengal, was founded in 1688. In 1739, as will be explained in detail later, Pondichéri acquired the port of Karaikal to help the Company compete with the Dutch. The port of Mahé, on the Arabian Sea, which is germane to the Malabar narrative, was founded in 1721, though not fully operational until 1725. The initial establishment of the French in India was a foreshadowing of later events, for the group that did so, under a captain named Caron, were supposed to be reinforcing Madagascar. However, on arrival there Caron judged it would not be long before the remnants of the colony would be wiped out — the smart colonists had already fled for Mauritius — so he exceeded his authority and sailed for Cochin. Here he found the Dutch solidly in possession; thus, Surat.

Coming late to the party the French brought a new attitude. Though spices were still the main lure, they were, like the EIC, open to acquiring other commodities. At the same time they were, like the Dutch, not hesitant to involve themselves in local politics, though they had no need and no inclination to develop territorial dominance — that was something circumstance had forced on the Dutch in India. By the time the CIO arrived on the scene the Mughals were already well into their decline, so from the start the French saw the need to act proactively, to protect their interests amongst the political churn.

Operations were successful enough that in 1669 the CIO put out feelers to Golconda, still an independent sultanate, that held the stretch of coastline north of the Carnatic, on the Bay of Bengal. Masulipatnam was selected as the future base. Despite opposition from all and sundry a licence was obtained, and even better, exemption from taxation. But, there was another foreshadowing: jealousy between the men involved in setting up these operations. Caron was still in charge at Surat, but he had his hands full. In contrast, the man picked — by him — to open Masulipatnam seemed to skate through the endeavour with no problems at all. There was a crucial difference, though. This second man, named Mercara, was a Persian from Isphahan whom Caron hired as an agent. As a Muslim, and a Persian in a society dominated by Persian culture, he naturally got on just fine. Caron became so jealous that he wrote false reports about Mercara. The latter cleared his name but was so fed up that he started an independent operation on Java, where, inevitably, he fell foul of the Dutch and went broke.

Meanwhile, Colbert remained enamoured of the Dutch model, a permanent colony in the East that could run its own trading network. In his day there were still openings at Ceylon, but the man sent to establish a colony at Trincomalee was the same who tried to open Madagascar, Admiral Lahaye, and he botched this attempt, too. (Lahaye was a Director of the Company.) But, yet again, something good did come from it. Lahaye was driven away by the Dutch to Sao Thomé, just shy of Pondichéri. This was an ex-Portuguese factory, now owned by the Dutch, but they could not be strong everywhere and Lahaye's squadron ran them out of town. As a side note, Lahaye successfully blamed Caron for the failure — too few resources allocated, probably — and the Governor was recalled. Greedy and proud, he was not missed. Expecting to be imprisoned under the harsh regime of Richelieu, Caron diverted his vessel to Lisbon but was shipwrecked and drowned, along with all the wealth he had amassed.

The coast around Pondichéri was an excellent site, but the French would have to fight to hold it. The Dutch wanted it back, and they called on Golconda for help. It must be noted the fight was over Sao Thomé, not Pondichéri itself, which was only a village. After a valiant defense the French had to surrender, but earned favourable terms. The ruler of Golconda, Abool Hassan, allowed them to occupy land on the other side of the Coleroon River which had already been granted to them but never developed. And that is how Pondichéri came to be. François Martin was installed as the first governor of a colony of just 60 people. Lahaye and another Director, named Baron, returned to Surat and Martin was left to his own devices.

*[Interestingly, both Martin and Caron got their start in the Dutch VOC. However, Martin was as universally liked as Caron was universally hated.]*

Things did not look good. Martin had only one ship, a frigate, and thus could not even conduct trade. On the other hand, the climate was decent, the coast relatively sheltered — considering that the shoreline stretched for hundreds of miles in an unbroken straight line — the site defensible, and he had some money. This he loaned to a local *nawab*, Shere Khan Lodi, at 18% interest. The rate might seem high, but Shere Khan appreciated the goodwill gesture and reciprocated. Native craftsmen came to work at the post, starting a trade in cotton piecework, and the Nawab agreed to allow French settlers. Martin's policy of befriending the locals was one that future governors would imitate. In general the French had the best reputation of any Europeans in India. There was an incident at Surat when the factory there defaulted on its payment to the Mughals, but Martin sorted matters out by paying the debt and transferring it to Pondichéri's books. The man was clearly a magician.

In 1676 and 1677 the sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda, respectively, fell to the Mughal advance under the conqueror Aurangzeb. This did not just put a question mark in front of Martin's charge, it created a power vacuum into which the Marathas poured. In 1677 Shivaji I Bhonsle, founder of the Maratha Confederation, appeared in the Carnatic, riding the shockwave of Aurangzeb's advance. The English he

ignored, regarding them as some sort of low caste fringe group, but the French were allies of Shere Khan. That worthy had tried to oppose Shivaji with 5,000 cavalry and lost badly. Martin managed to collect a small garrison, 300 sepoys who were designated 'armed colonists', but there was no hope of fighting the Marathas. Therefore, Martin joined Shere Khan in submitting to them as vassals; the governor offering both tribute and the licensing fee for his factory. The Marathas would probably have demanded more, but about that time the Mughals captured Golconda and Shivaji had other things to worry about.

This is when Martin's loan paid off. Shere Khan became embroiled in some local fighting. Martin became concerned for his principal and asked for the money back. Shere Khan had of course no hope of repaying, so instead he gave Martin the land on which Pondichéri sat, plus the satellite villages and their revenue, in perpetuity. Only 34 colonists remained, but they had enough money now to expand. In 1689 they were given permission to build a fort. Unlike the other Europeans, the French were earning a reputation as reliable allies and mediators. Martin also led the way in having the company personnel adopt native customs and ways of doing business, to the extent possible. The governor also instituted the custom of treating important visitors like royalty, and Pondichéri became a place down-and-out rajas could be sure of safety for their people and, more importantly, their treasuries.

The CIO's fortunes took a dive in the 1690s, though. In Europe the French were fighting the Nine Years War, one of their enemies being William III of England, who was at the same time the Staathouder of the United Provinces. In India, the Marathas, now under Ram Raja, were hard pressed by the Mughals. The Empire overran the Carnatic and the Dutch used their influence at the Mughal Court to have Pondichéri transferred to them — the French were vassals of the Marathas, and thus rebels. A siege was still required. This took place in 1693. When the fort fell the native population was dispersed and the French sent home. And, that seemed to be the end of French ambitions in India.

*[The besieging army amounted to 1,500 soldiers, 2,000 sailors, a party of Sinhalese mercenaries, 16 brass guns, 6 mortars, and a siege train. Not to mention 19 ships of the line, plus lighter warships and transports. The Dutch really wanted that bit of coastline.]*

Well, they did have Surat, but the harbour was rapidly silting up, and it was too close to the Mughals. The place remained viable until 1714, but trade dwindled year by year. Also, Masulipatnam remained in French hands. That post had nearly foundered, but the money generated by Pondichéri had restored it, and the Dutch never bothered to attack it, perhaps because it was a site shared by all. And then there were Chandernagore, Balasore, and Kassimbazar. So, the CIO was not out of the game after all. But Balasore was insignificant and Kassimbazar merely a subsidiary of Chandernagore. The latter was located on the Hoogly River, not far from what would eventually become Calcutta, and it had to share the trade of the country with every other European power that had a presence in India.

However, by 1701 Pondichéri was back in French hands, thanks to the peace that ended the Nine Years War (the treaty also guaranteed the walls would remain standing). Martin, meanwhile, reported to his government in person and quickly persuaded them that a renewed effort would garner great riches. Chandernagore was placed under Pondichéri's control and the latter place became the seat of the Governor General of the Company. By the time Martin died, in 1706, the town had a population of 40,000. His treatment of the locals encouraged them to seek work there. Buried in the town, he died poor but honoured.

Martin's successors continued in the same fashion with the successors of Shere Khan. These were the Nawabs of Arcot, who were appointees of the Mughals through the Nizam of Hyderabad. The friendship of Sa'adatullah Khan I (1711-1732) was earned by quietly backing his claims to independent rule. This friendship continued down to the time of the coming narrative. Dost Ali Khan, who gave the CIO the right to mint its own coinage at Pondichéri, and his son-in-law Chanda Sahib was a complete Francophile. Thus the French were already 'playing the game', though not at first for conquest but merely for survival. The native princes admired the French for their skill at it.

So far, so good. What hampered the company were the twin issues of lack of capital and lack of vision. King Louis XIV tried to address the first problem by declaring that participation in overseas trade was

something befitting a gentleman (unlike domestic trade which was only suitable for the Bourgeoise). This allowed many penurious 'nobles of the sword' to go out to the East, but they brought the wrong attitude with them. Their purchase of appointments and the pernicious practice of selling licences kept the Company solvent while at the same time they compounded the original problem of mismanagement. This was part of a larger systemic problem within French society that saw some individuals, usually of the high nobility, become extremely wealthy, while the institutions they served — not just the CIO but entire government departments — bled money. By 1714 company officers enjoyed all sorts of privileges they could not afford, due to the inability to turn a profit. Probably the worst decision made for the Company was in 1712, when ALL of the CIO's shipping was outsourced to the town of St. Malo, which was given the contract on payment of an annual fee. This streamlined things but left the Company at the mercy of an entirely separate corporation.

Then came the famous market crash that took place in the 1720s. The story is a bit convoluted, but shows how, in the eyes of the Government, the CIO was merely an instrument of finance. In 1714 the Company's charter was due to expire. Ultimately it was renewed for ten years, with a proviso that a portion of the profits would go to the Grand Admiral of France (despite the title he had absolutely nothing to do with the Navy). Then the old King died and an examination of the State's finances revealed France itself was nearly bankrupt. This is when the Scotsman, Law, stepped in with his idea of a national bank and a stock market, of turning Louisiana into a model colony, and various other schemes, most of which ultimately made things worse. As always happens in France under such conditions there was a struggle between Crown and Parlement, which the Crown unfortunately won. To quote Malleson (p. 45):

*It is perhaps unnecessary to allude here to the contest of the Regent with the Parlement more than to record the state of practical despotism which his victory established. Profiting by this victory he caused to be issued on December 4, 1718, a royal proclamation by which the General Bank was declared attached to the State under the designation of the Royal Bank with effect from January 1, 1719. The King, i.e., the State thus became security for the notes. The change was effected by the purchase by the State of the twelve hundred shares which constituted the original capital of the bank. These shares were paid for in cash. It will be recollected that the original shareholders had paid for each share of 5,000 francs only the first fourth of 1,250 francs in cash, and the remainder in Government notes, then at 70 or 80 per cent discount. The transaction then was most favourable for the shareholders. It seemed at first scarcely so for the State. So greatly indeed did the notes of the bank multiply that Law found it would be impossible to act up to the rule which had made the fortune of the General Bank, and which provided for the payment in specie to the bearer, of the amount of the note at the current value of silver. Under his auspices it was decreed that thenceforth the amount represented by the note should be paid in 'livres tournois of a fixed and unvarying value whatever might be the after variations of coined money;' and that only notes under 600 francs should necessarily be paid in cash, it being optional to the banker to give change for notes above that amount in notes or cash, as he might consider most convenient.*

The financial crisis had an impact on the CIO in a number of ways. Due to its shares falling by about 50%, Law decided to merge it with a West Indies endeavour, plus a China company and a Senegal company. The new issue of shares was, of course, a victim of outrageous insider trading that in the short term sent the value of the CIO through the roof. The chief beneficiaries were Law, the Regent, and their cronies. But they did not really understand what they were doing. Law gave the CIO a nine year contract on the royal mint, hoping to use the company to underpin the new bank he was planning. New shares were issued, and newfangled things called banknotes, and the thing might have flown, but the populace were suspicious, there was a mass sell off as they bought 'real' security in land and specie, share values slumped rapidly, and there was a tremendous crash in 1722. As a desperate expedient, Law even tried to turn the CIO's share certificates into a kind of currency. Fortunately, before that happened the Company was able to use its ephemeral profits to buy a tobacco monopoly and the salt mine rights in Alsace. This allowed it to get out of debt, buy back all the worthless shares on behalf of the new royal bank, and pay them off on the proviso that the Company be granted commercial privilege in perpetuity. France itself was left to sink into the mire.

The governors after Martin, Duliver and Hébert by name, were a lacklustre pair but they were further crippled by lack of resources from home, and since shipping had been given to St. Malo they were

unable to benefit from the local carrying trade in the way the VOC did. Meanwhile, the old Surat debt remained on the books (though Law eventually wrote it off). Regional warfare was also on the rise, further reducing trade. But, in 1721, just before the great crash in France, the Company sent out three treasure ships to Pondichéri. This allowed the next governor, Lenoir, to pay off a large number of loans the CIO had obtained from the local princes — another boon from Martin's original loan to Shere Khan. Unfortunately, the treasure had been intended to buy goods, which Lenoir could no longer do after prioritizing the loan repayments. Both he and the native princes had assumed this treasure fleet would be an annual thing, but the Directors were so annoyed that they refused to send any more. Martin's goodwill gesture paid off yet again, for the men whom Lenoir had lined up to trade with agreed to wait for better times. And, indeed, by 1723 a dribble of ships did begin to arrive. The Indies trade picked up. Alas, the profits fell into the Louisiana swamp.

Still, Pondichéri itself prospered. In the 1720s a new wall was built around the town. Public gardens were laid out and various Christian missions popped up, though they were not allowed to interfere with local practices. The town itself was laid out on a grid. Government was by a ruling Council of five men, of whom the Governor General was one. They ruled in the King's name, but were all employees of the CIO. The Governor General was entitled to an honour guard and rode about in a richly decorated palanquin. By the early 1730s the population had grown to 70,000.

Rapson (*The Struggle Between England and France for Supremacy in India*) believes that encouraging nobles of the sword to join the CIO added a conquest mentality that had been lacking before. He may be right. It was certainly evident in two of the most important men to participate in the project, Joseph François Dupleix and Bertrand-François Mahé de La Bourdonnais. The history of the CIO during the period covered by this Commentary can almost be described by recounting the life stories of La Bourdonnais and Dupleix.

Bertrand-François Mahé de La Bourdonnais (1699-1753) was a naval officer who had been in the East for a long time. He had done three or four years trading on his own account in the Arabian Sea. As a newly promoted captain, he participated in the establishment of Mahé; indeed, it was his plan of attack that took the place. After helping settle a dispute between the Portuguese and some Arab sailors at the port of Mocha he was given command of a ship in Portuguese service, a command that came with titles and orders. He made some cruises of the Indian Ocean and took an expedition to Mozambique, but after a couple of years he grew tired of the Portuguese, returning to France in 1733 to be married. While there he made connections among the Directors and the Naval Ministry. This led to his appointment, in 1735, as Governor of Île de France and Île de Bourbon — that is, Mauritius. The man he replaced, M. Dumas, was in turn made Governor General of India. His new post made La Bourdonnais extremely rich, chiefly through the development of slave plantations. On the credit side, he poured much of that wealth and a lot of his energy into bringing the colony back from the brink of destruction and turning it into a powerful naval base. Coffee was grown on Île de Bourbon, and some other exportable items. The island was remarkably fertile, given its location. Île de France was not as developed, being colonized only in 1721. It was not as fertile, either, and was in fact dragging the whole colony down. La Bourdonnais was sent there as a last hope, and performed a miracle:



*The fact that it possessed a harbour gave to the Isle of France a great superiority in the eyes of La Bourdonnais over Bourbon, and he at once made it the seat of government. But the people! Had La*

*Bourdonnais been less of a real man than he was, he might well have been appalled at the task of making anything of a race to whom toil of any sort seemed the worst species of evil. Almost naked, defenceless, and starving, having preferred to be comfortless and miserable rather than to exercise even the small amount of labour which in such a clime would have amply supplied their necessities; dwelling in wretched cabins; possessing no energy, living in fear of their lives from the attacks of the Maroons — the free descendants of the slaves who had been kidnapped from Madagascar, and who had found a refuge in the interior — endowed apparently merely with the animal love of existence — these so-called colonists were yet capable of combining to resist any lawful authority over them. But La Bourdonnais was not a man to be baffled. He taught them, in a hundred instances, that he was resolved to be master. And yet, in doing this, he showed such tact, he was so gentle while he was determined, his measures were so wise, and the benefits resulting from them so evident to all, that he forced these colonists, even whilst murmuring against him, to admit in their reasonable moods, that he was the wisest, gentlest, and best of governors, the only man who could have induced them to forego their old habits of indolence and sloth.*

*Malleson, pp.108-109*

La Bourdonnais turned the islands into a paying colony and a first rate naval base, with a fortress, and anchorage capable of holding 35-40 ships, and shipyards that could build new vessels as well as repair visitors. The first ship, the *Insulaire*, was launched in 1737. Though it was lost in the Ganges delta in 1746 it was accounted an excellent build.

During the First Carnatic War he personally provided naval support to the CIO's trading posts, which were under threat from a British squadron. But, at the taking of Madras he had a falling out with Dupleix and the two men became enemies. La Bourdonnais, who's forces were cobbled together from whatever driftwood he could collect, withdrew his support, doing only the bare minimum required by his instructions and refocusing his attention on his governorship. As a result of the affair at Madras his political enemies charged him with taking bribes from the EIC and he was recalled to France and imprisoned. That ended his career, though he only served a three-year sentence. But, his family retained its holdings even past the Revolution. Thanks to their wealth being founded on the plantation system, their reputation on the islands is mixed.

Joseph François Dupleix (1697-1763) was destined by his father for the life of a merchant. Ironically, though he would have preferred to become a scientist, his business skills put him on the CIO's Bengal Council by 1720. He also did a stint as the deputy governor of Pondichéri, under Lenoir. It may have been at that time that he first conceived of creating a vast empire on the Subcontinent. The empire, though, was to take the form of a trade network, and would have been of benefit to the various native states, for internal trade barely existed in feudal India. Though there was no money for this project, Dupleix did invest his own capital in a number of ventures and made a good return. Ten years later he was Intendant of Changanagore, in compensation for an earlier episode where bad reports by jealous rivals got him recalled to France. Changanagore was something of a backwater, so 'reward' is a loaded term. He used the posting to test his theories and turned the operation around. In a brief four years he had established networks as far as China and Tibet, and was running 30, 40, then 72 ships. But, his career really took off after he married the widow of one of the other councillors, Jeanne Albert, or Joanna Begum, as the natives called her. She was of Franco-Portuguese heritage (her mother was a de Castro, a well known clan in India), but born in-country, and a woman of exceptional ability, a master linguist who helped Dupleix navigate the perilous waters of



local diplomacy. That was in 1741. Shortly after, he replaced Benoit Dumas as Governor General. Dumas figures largely in the narrative, but Dupleix's ambitions were far greater. By inserting himself and his representatives into the never-ending local succession disputes, and by conducting himself in the 'oriental manner' with a splendid Court, Dupleix put the French first into the position of Arbiter, and then Champion, of various princes. His hand would be felt through the First and Second Carnatic wars and his influence would persist until the EIC triumphed, but he left India in 1754, recalled to France and unable to muster enough support for a return. Rapson says of him (p.30):

*... a man who possessed an equal knowledge of the state of native affairs, and joined to this an ambition even greater. His promptitude and boldness formed a contrast to the cautious policy of Dumas. The policy of Dumas had been essentially one of peace, of interference only when interference was safe, and of resistance only when the honour of the French name called for it. Dupleix mingled more freely in the affairs of native princes and tended more to take up an independent position. The French had hitherto acted the rôle of humble allies of a native prince. These positions were shortly to be completely reversed. Dumas had laid the foundation of French power in India: it remained for Dupleix to raise the superstructure. The characters of these two men seem to have been admirably adapted to the work each had to do.*

## **The Company Militaries**

Superficially, the armed wing of all the trading companies was the same. They used stoutly built ships called Indiamen armed with enough cannon to qualify them as 'fourth rates' or at least frigates — powerful enough to be requisitioned from time to time by their national navies and overwhelming in presence from the native princes' point of view. They relied on fortified posts built to European specifications, that while second rate in European eyes were again almost insurmountable obstacles to native armies. Their own armies were tiny, organized and drilled like regular European forces, and often composed of the same material, havens for professionals seeking work when there was no conflict in Europe. Yet they each had a unique character.

## **The VOC**

The military forces of the VOC are hard to document, primarily because the Directors, very wisely, never committed their plans to paper, meaning there are only routine returns to be sourced. There are strength estimates, but they only illuminate short periods of time. The quality of the soldiery is still debated. In the view of some historians the VOC's soldiers were trash. Others opine they were pretty good, given that small numbers of them were reasonably successful in defeating much larger native armies — volley fire may be a dreaded tactic but it can only kill so many men. Mostert (*Chain of Command*) thinks they were probably no better and no worse than other European soldiers, but lacked training. But, as De Saxe once wrote, 'a few old heads' are all you really need for the infantry. The VOC adopted the use of native auxiliaries to a greater extent than the other companies, though they did not integrate sepoys into their forces but used tribal *foederatii*. They also relied heavily on fortifications. These traits match the Dutch style of war.

The upper ceiling, on paper, for the 'regular' component of the VOC Army seems to be 10,000 men. This number is for the mid-17th Century, when the Company was at the height of its profitability. Batavia apparently considered 8,200 men to be the ideal number. (By way of comparison, there were an estimated 1.5 million members of one warrior caste or another on the Malabar Coast alone; fortunately for the Europeans, if they had all been assembled for one battle they would have started killing each other first.) VOC troops were always kept separate by tribe and caste, so the regulars were all European, lured out from home at great expense, though the expense was not as great as it might have been because the men had to pay for everything and their pay was only for six months. Upon arrival they found they had wasted money buying shoes and trousers...

Mostert provides a data point from 1658: 3,970 men on active service, of whom 60% were sailors and 40% soldiers (but cannon ashore would often be supplied and manned by the fleet). Allowing for wastage he assumes between three and four thousand men in any given year. Even when a major

operation was planned the numbers would remain under 4,500. As to wastage, of course a lot of men died, but many also jumped ship at Cape Town. Also, each of the states that comprised the United Provinces was assigned its own quota, which could be hard to fill. According to Jones (*Troops of the Dutch East India Company*), there were 3,400 regular troops stationed in Sri Lanka in 1675. Like other European armies of the period the regulars were organized by company — large ones like those favoured by the Swiss, of 150 men each. There was no permanent higher organization beyond either the governor's or expedition commander's staff. With regard to the campaigns in India, quotes average between 1-2,000, and this includes the tribal auxiliaries.

Most Dutch auxiliaries were either indigenous to the islands around Java or to Sri Lanka. Again, there is a debate as to whether the native auxiliaries were more cost effective than Europeans — survivability and cheapness weighed against slightly less cheap and much less durable material. The Company preferred European soldiers because they always did as they were told; the tribal levies never did take to European drill. They were familiar with firearms but preferred bows and melee weapons. In Batavia itself were the *Madijkers* or 'free people', mostly Portuguese ex-POWs and Catholic converts from India, and the usual mix of half-breeds, creole '*mastizos*', and freed slaves, who were employed in Batavia as a civic guard, though some also served overseas on campaign. The VOC also employed many of the immigrants who had originally made their own way to Batavia as seasonal workers and had stayed on. These were organised into ethnic war bands who each fought in their own customary style. They were settled in cantonments (*kampongs*) in the Ommelanden, the agricultural belt surrounding Batavia. There were a wide variety of these people, but the ones the VOC preferred to hire for 'wet work' were the Bandanese (Malays), Ambonese, and Balinese. The first had come to Batavia as slaves but were later freed, while the Ambonese had always been mercenaries, descended from those of their countrymen who had sided with the Dutch in the Ambonese Wars. Though they essentially fought as peasant levies the Dutch prized their fighting spirit. Most of these auxiliaries, who only numbered a few hundreds, never saw service in India. Even the dreaded *Lascorins* feared them. They were the *Boogymen*.

*['Bogeyman' is an old English word for an evil spirit but the name was transferred to the Bugi people of Sulawesi. They are a peaceful people now, but they used to be aggressive pirates. Colloquially, it was applied to other Indonesian natives, particularly the people of Aceh at the northern tip of Sumatra, who preyed on international shipping and were rumoured to eat their captives.]*

The *Lascorins* were rather nasty themselves. Probably more familiar to the reader as the sinister deckhands who feature prominently in old 'yellow peril' B-movies, the true *Lascars* are a Sinhalese people. They were good fighters but served in a militia role. They were adamant that they should be allowed a full six months off-duty to tend their farms and would mutiny when kept away from home too long. There may have been as many as 5,000 of them, organized in companies of 20-30 men. The Dutch found them useful as scouts and raiders. The other group the Dutch employed in Malabar were the *Neiros*. The name is sometimes confused with that of the *Nairs*, and of course the Dutch fought alongside their Cochin Nair allies, but this word, borrowed from the Portuguese, seems instead to refer to a 'cannibal tribe' of the coast (there were a few ritual cannibal groups in the region) famous for carrying shields made of tiger skin.

As to uniforms, the Company preferred red, for reasons of cost — Coromandel supplied vast quantities of madder. The Governor General's horse guards wore yellow, faced red, but they never left Batavia. Pants and shoes were dispensed with, even by the European troops, and the men would most often wear only their white shirts and perhaps a sleeveless waistcoat and a kerchief around the neck. If pants had to be worn, they were of the baggy variety, and stockings were rolled down. Hats had distinctive wide brims.

Like the native armies, the VOC preferred to use matchlocks rather than flintlocks, because they were more reliable in humid climates, though by the 18th Century the flintlock was also in common use. Proper swords (as opposed to the 'hangers' worn in Europe) were often carried. In the 17th Century the troops seem to have been equipped with pikes, and with breastplates and morions, but one wonders how long it would have been before those were discarded. Remember, the men were required to purchase their own kit before leaving home. If modern commissariats are any guide, there was no

correlation between what they bought and what they needed. The Lascars dressed in white kilts, red caps, and not much else (the length of the kilt denoted one's social standing). They fought with swords, spears, and carried the ubiquitous round shield of South Asia.

Ironically, though the Europeans are supposed to have conquered India through 'superior firepower', they obtained their gunpowder locally. Coromandel and Bengal supplied the best saltpetre in the world. The Dutch found good sulphur in Indonesia. Though some powder was shipped from Europe (possibly processed from Asian raw materials), the VOC had its own powder mills in Batavia. They found the climate actually improved the quality.

India also produced superior cannon — the problem the native rulers had with its use lay in tactics, not manufacture. The VOC gunners belonged to the naval branch and the guns could be employed on board ship or ashore. Mostert estimates a total of 1,000 pieces in active service across the VOC's Asian empire, with half that number again held in storage.

Next to their naval supremacy, possibly the chief advantage the Dutch possessed was their skill in constructing modern fortifications. They seem to have had no siege masters in the East, but worked to a set of standardized plans that any competent engineer could use. Throughout its history the VOC only lost two forts to capture, one on Formosa and one at Rembang, and the latter, lost in 1741, was surrendered by an insane commandant. As the reader might expect, when combined with seapower, their fortifications ensured the Dutch could maintain a presence on a coast no matter what the circumstances.

Regarding the VOC Navy, it had no dedicated warships, but employed the standard East Indiaman as a jack-of-all-trades, shipping valuables to Europe, bringing new personnel out, ferrying troops, and providing fire support. For local trade the common Dutch flute was used. Again, these were far superior in seaworthiness and carrying capacity to anything they might encounter. Quite a number were lost over the years, but they were regarded as a disposable tool, manufactured in bulk at the Batavia shipyards.

Command of the seas was critical in several ways. Through their vast network of traders, both European and indigenous, the Batavia Council was quickly made aware of potential military threats as well as immanent fluctuations in commodity prices. Long experience and a host of agents also allowed them to play local dynasties against each other, either to squeeze out new concessions or to prevent moves against the Company. Enemies in different lands could not coordinate because they had no means of communicating. It also gave the Company full control of the resources available to the various political actors — not just imported goods, but things like mercenary troops, whom some rulers preferred to their own fractious nobles.

## **The EIC**

This Commentary is primarily concerned with the Madras Presidency, but similar circumstances prevailed everywhere. The EIC's naval assets will not be discussed here. During the First Carnatic War naval support was provided by a single Royal Navy squadron of variable composition. As for the Army, eventually each presidency would field its own, and each would be larger than most European armies. But, the first troops were not hired to serve at Madras until 1644, a hundred years before they were really needed. Prior to, and even after, the defence of a factory would be down to locals fighting for their homes, troops loaned by the local raja, and shore parties from whatever ships were nearby. The ships provided much of the artillery, too.

Bengal was the first presidency to start recruiting sepoy on a fairly regular basis. Madras made no attempt to copy them, partly for fear of the Sultanate of the Carnatic, and partly because they despised the local 'so-called' warrior castes. Forced to recruit them during the Second Carnatic War, the British discovered they had been mistaken. The local fighting castes made excellent sepoy. However, during the First Carnatic War, if native troops had to be used they were supplied from the North.

At Madras, Fort St. George was the main — make that the only — defensive work. Its garrison in 1644 amounted to 30 men. In 1645 this rose to 50 men, minus those who had already died. Company policy insisted that the men must be recruited exclusively in Britain. Very rarely, mercenaries, particularly Swiss,

might appear on the rolls. French deserters were almost never used, and natives never. Over the winter of 1690-91 a company of artillery was activated. The Foot grew to three companies (perhaps 50-80 men each), and a troop of Horse. In the winter of 1693-94 a replenishment of 70 soldiers arrived. After that, the garrison atrophied, so that in 1706-07, 400 men, or nearly the entire paper strength of the garrison, had to be shipped out from England. A similar draft was sent in 1732.

When the War of the Austrian Succession broke out in Europe it was regarded as inevitable that the French and British would go to war at some point, so attempts were made to beef up the garrison. Reinforcements came to Madras in 1742 (after the Marathas held the place to ransom) and in 1745 (after war was declared with France). Nonetheless, when the French attacked Madras in 1746 Fort St. George had a garrison of only 150 men, while Fort St. David, farther down the coast, had a similar number. After losing Madras, Fort St. David was the only post the EIC still held on the Coromandel Coast. Reinforcements from Bombay and Bengal (about 100 men each) and 150 replacements from Britain, plus the presence of the squadron, saved it from capture.

*[An alternate number for the Bombay draft, in 1747, is 300 men. It is possible 300 were sent and 100 retained.]*

Only in 1748 was the Madras Regiment properly constituted, under Major Stringer Lawrence, one of the heroes of the Carnatic Wars. He reformed the troops into a regular battalion of 6 fusilier and 1 grenadier companies. With this he was able to repulse a French attack and assist at the British siege of Pondichéri, which was otherwise conducted by soldiers of the British Army and sailors from the Fleet. Lawrence is regarded as the father of the British Indian Army; his reorganization would be extended to the other presidencies. Unlike the French system, EIC sepoys were commanded by British officers and NCOs (later, a dual command system would develop). This lessened the number of mutinies, though it did not prevent them. Sepoys were even worse paid than European soldiers.

Like the troops of the other trading companies, the EIC's soldiers were attired in European fashion, but with alterations made to suit the climate, such as a lack of trousers and topcoat, and possibly even shoes, the use of a neck kerchief, and the wearing of a wide brimmed hat. At least by the 18th Century they appeared have been armed with flintlocks and bayonets. They are likely to have spent a good deal of time working second jobs if they could get them.

## **The CIO**

Unlike the other trading companies the CIO made extensive use of sepoys from the start and fielded a comparatively large army. By the time of Governor Martin's death in 1706 Pondichéri had a garrison of 200 men and could call on 7-800 European militia; it had a large artillery park. In the 1720s a 12-man Horse Guard was added, and 300 foot guards (though they were really militia).

By Dupleix's day, apart from his twelve-man honour guard and the 2,000 native cavalry accorded him as a *nawab* in the Mughal system, the force was primarily infantry and artillery. There is mention of dragoons, but they were probably raised after the period covered in the narrative, when things really heated up. Similarly, a force of 10,000 sepoys is noted without having a date pinned to it; since half were 'in the Deccan', it must have been raised for the Second Carnatic War. Most of the sepoys came from the Muslim *mappila* communities of the Malabar Coast. Unlike the British, the French allowed them to have their own officers and NCOs, which frequently caused problems. One of the interesting quirks of human psychology is that troops, especially when required to act in ways they are not used to, often perform better under alien leaders — there is a distance between them that engenders respect, so long as the men are well treated.

At Pondichéri in 1744 the European troops numbered three companies, each of about 150 men. In 1740 the numbers were 350 at Pondichéri and 117 at newly acquired Karaikal. By the end of the 1740s there were supposedly 22 companies, each of 300 men, in India. But, the fixed overall total given for 1748 is 1,850 men. Cannon the French had a-plenty. Per the doctrine of the time pairs of light field guns were detached to serve with the infantry and 'normal' field pieces operated in batteries. Siege guns and mortars were obtained from the fortresses or the ships. At the siege of Madras 14 mortars were used, but for direct fire the fleet was employed close inshore.

## The First Carnatic War 1744-1748

This Commentary breaks the narrative into multiple sections, not in chronological order, but geographically. As should be clear by now, the era was one of constant warfare and very few of the conflicts were directly linked, though many had a ripple effect. Of all the conflicts of the day, this war, and that of the completely separate Dutch war with the state of Travancore, had the greatest impact on India's future.

The First Carnatic War breaks down naturally into three components: the purely European naval conflict, the fight between the Europeans on land, and the backdrop of the Churn in India. Of the first and second, it should be realized that although there was animosity between the companies, they were still just commercial concern, and furthermore, the reaction of the various factors varied considerably. Just because their countries were at war did not mean the personnel of the trading posts immediately signed up to fight with their respective armed forces. That phenomenon would not occur until much later. Mostly, they were concerned to keep their shipping safe and looked to their navies for help. Only Dupleix used the war as an opportunity to defeat his rivals militarily. As for the Churn, it had a major effect on the direction the conflict between the European took, but it was the native states who were most affected, not so much by the individual outcomes of the various conflicts as by what the plough turned over in the process.

### Madurai Succession Crisis

The events in Madurai during 1730s have some bearing on the Carnatic War but also serve as a reasonably well documented example of the sort of warfare that was taking place all over the South.

The last true king of Madurai, Vijayaranga Chokkanatha, died in February of 1732. He had been more interested in scholarship than statecraft and left the affairs of the kingdom to a corrupt prime minister and an equally corrupt army commander. His heir had predeceased him eleven years before, but his queen, Meenakshi (Rani Minakshi), survived; in a pinch female rule was allowed, and even fairly common. She used the ploy of claiming she was pregnant to avoid the customary *satt* (widows being burned on a pyre). It also helped that she bore the name of Madurai's patron goddess.

In the event there would be no direct heir, so she adopted the son of the corrupt general, a man of royal blood named Bangaru Tirumalai Nayaka. One would think the General would have been happy with the deal, but he and the Queen quarrelled bitterly and continually, resorting to arms on several occasions. Scenting blood, the Sultanate, the Marathas, and even Mysore, pricked up their ears and sniffed the wind. To obtain some protection, Madurai agreed to become a vassal of the Mughals, giving the Nawab of Arcot a stake in the kingdom's troubles.



*Rani Minakshi*

Upon the old king's death the capital was moved to Trichinopoly, an immensely strong fortress on the South bank of the Kaveri (which still boasts two of the largest temple complexes in the world). This was to give the Rani some security. She tried to sort out the kingdom, which was rife with banditry, state corruption, and general anarchy. She had some success in cleaning up the State, but old Bangaru Tirumalai was too entrenched — hence the adoption gambit. Unfortunately, the General decided he wanted the throne immediately, for himself. He enlisted the aid of the corrupt prime minister, *dalavay* Venkatachari, and they assaulted Trichinopoly, but without success. Depending on the source, either the General or the Rani obtained the aid of Tukkoji Bhonsle of Tanjore in the struggle. Both probably tried, as

both also tried to involve Arcot in their domestic problems. The kingdom, already a rump of its former glory, split, with the Rani at Trichinopoly and the General at Madurai.

It was at this point that Arcot became actively involved, perhaps by coincidence. Dost Ali was still securing his position and it does seem he simply wanted to show the flag, particularly since his southern provinces, as fictional as that claim was, were showing such signs of unrest. In this he was continuing the policies of his predecessor. But, Dost Ali was notorious for ignoring politics and letting his eldest son and son-in-law make policy, and this may also have been the case here. (During one of their many quarrels Chanda Sahib the son-in-law and Safdar the son, even forced him to flee his own capital.) He therefore may have been pressured by them to order the expedition, which promised opportunities for their ambitions.

Whatever the motivation, the son, Safdar Ali, came south with a small army of 12,000 men in 1732. Chanda, the brother-in-law, accompanied him as advisor. Chanda Sahib, or Husayn Dost Khan, was the *dewan*, or paymaster, for the Sultanate, but he held additional civil and military powers. The name Chanda (or Chunda) was pejorative, but it stuck.

Safdar took his time, first visiting Madras and Pondichéri. This does make it seem like a flag-showing expedition. He next invaded Tanjore, where the raja bought him off at a stiff price in the customary manner. This also was in aid of establishing the pecking order. Safdar then passed on into the deep South — for the Sultanate claimed the whole of the Carnatic, all the way to the tip of the peninsula, and the new Nawab wanted to enforce the claim. They marched all the way to Kottar, chief city of Travancore, and defeated a portion of its army in a battle at nearby Nagercoil before heading north once more.

Meanwhile, Bangaru Tirumalai's own plans ripened. He bought the services of Mysore with lavish promises and led an army of roughly 80,000 men, including discontented elements from the royal army and various *poligars* loyal to him, up from Madurai to Trichinopoly. With the help of Tanjore the Rani beat off this combined assault in 1733, but was almost taken when the General's minister, Naranappa, subsequently marched on the fort of Dindigul, which controlled a key river crossing on the border of Trichinopoly and Madurai provinces. Her army marched out to drive him off but had to beat a hurried retreat when Mysore's army returned to attack her capital.

Naranappa was at least as influential in these affairs as the General. He had been ousted from office, and it was he who led Mysore's expedition against the Rani. During negotiations the Rani agreed to make him her own minister again, as the price of sending the Mysore troops home and strengthening her hand against the General. It was arranged that the General would have a district to rule. One... paltry... district. Safdar, now headed north again, was buttonholed by the Rani and encouraged by the payment of a large remuneration to, as the nearest Mughal representative, champion the Rani's cause. He agreed. At which news the General offered him 30 *lakhs* of rupees to renege. Which he did. He held a sham investigation, and surprise, surprise, it turned out the General was actually the legitimate ruler. The Rani was to be divested of her throne, though to receive good treatment.

This put Bangaru Tirumalai on the throne at Trichinopoly, but the Rani was still ensconced in the city's fortress. Safdar now withdrew from the scene, back to Arcot, but he left Chanda behind to sort the matter out. The two men never did get along, and it is also possible the wily Chanda advised Safdar to retire. Because when the Rani offered him an entire *crore* of rupees (10 million) to restore her status he at once accepted. This stunned Bangaru Tirumalai. He was planning an assault on the fortress when he received the news. Chanda still had soldiers with him and he and some of his men were admitted to the fortress to guaranteed the Rani's protection. Unwilling to risk war with the Sultanate, the General withdrew to Madurai and was quiet. All this took place in 1734.

Chanda swore an oath that he and Safdar would only use their troops to maintain the Rani's cause. A legend grew up that he and the queen were lovers, but it is only a legend. There is another legend that is more likely. Chanda swore his oath on the Koran, but it is said that it was really only a brick wrapped in a koranic cover.

He did not remain an impartial arbiter for long. But, at first he did as he was bid and defeated Bangaru Tirumalai in 1735 with the aid of Tanjore and its general, Ananda Rao. Naranappa was executed, the General sent a prisoner to Arcot. The pacification campaign continued with Chanda as the Rani's enforcer, but he had less success against the Kallar, one of the two warrior castes in Madurai, from whom many of the *poligars* were drawn. They ambushed his army at Nattham — they were always ambushing somebody's army, it was what they did best.

## **Chanda Sahib and the End of the Nayakas of Madurai**

Safdar was fickle and cruel, but also weak. Chanda was anything but. According to Ramaswami (p.46), in reference to his later fight with the British proxy Mohammad Ali in the Second Carnatic War:

*He was brutal, he was faithless; but he was a personality, a man born to command and to rule. If he failed ultimately, it was because he had committed the misjudgement or incurred the ill luck of having chosen the French for his coadjutors. His adversary, Stringer Lawrence, the "father" of the British Indian army, said of him that he was "a man of no family or riches, but endowed by nature with talents and a capacity that made amends for what fortune had denied him".*

In January 1736 Chanda returned to Trichinopoly with the General in tow. Until now he had remained the Rani's protector, and many of his troops were still in the fortress. Negotiations on behalf of the General followed, and only in April 1736 did Chanda enter the city. In some versions of the tale there was an assault, during which the men he had left behind as part of the garrison opened the gates from the inside. In others, Chanda had already been admitted in his role as neutral arbiter and opened the gates for the General. The former is the most likely version. Either way, he and the General deposed the Rani, throwing her in prison. From this point, though the General was officially the raja, Chanda Sahib began to act as if Trichinopoly province belonged to him. He attacked Tanjore for a third time, this time with the intent of capturing the city; he failed, but received another large bribe. Tanjore was the gift that keeps on giving. After, he reclaimed some western territory that Mysore had occupied. That weak state made little to no resistance.

In 1737 he moved against Madurai town. The locals had raised up the General's son, a spare prince named Vijaykumara, against Chanda's rule, using the claim the General had negotiated with the Rani. A coronation was planned at the ancient royal capital, sponsored by neighbouring states and the unruly *poligars* of Tinnevely. Chanda responded by deposing Bangaru Tirumalai and releasing the Rani from jail. Presumably more of the army was loyal to her than to the General. That worthy fled to Madurai, where he was given command of the southern army. Chanda dispatched a large army of his own, in the Rani's name. He did not go himself but gave command to a pair of generals, Govindiah and Ravaniah. They met with Bangaru Tirumalai at Ammayanayakkanur, not far from Dindigul. The Maravars sent no aid and the General and Vijaykumara, relying only on royal levies and various dubious *poligars*, were completely defeated. They fled to Vellakurchi, a fort in Sivaganga, where the Maravars of that country welcomed them. Madurai was occupied in June of 1737 and the province of Tinnevely also fell into Chanda's orbit, but only in a loose tributary sense. Chanda proclaimed himself Nawab of Trichinopoly. The Rani was again incarcerated, and, depending on the source, either took her own life or was forced to do so. This ended her dynasty. Bes (*Heirs of Vijaynagara*) concludes that Madurai was on its last legs by this time, and if Chanda Sahib and Arcot had not taken control, the throne would have gone to some puppet put up by another neighbour. Indeed, he believes Madurai's vassal, Ramnad, held more real power, because it was the guardian of the dynasty's gods.

*[The Nayaka line was not quite extinct — one of Bangaru Tirumalai Nayaka's relatives was connected to the Kings of Kandy in Ceylon, and when that dynasty died out in 1739, Sri Lanka got a Nayaka ruler, the new dynasty lasting until 1815. Some sources also claim Bangaru Tirumalai was briefly installed as a puppet at Madurai by Safdar, after Chanda Sahib was gone.]*

Between 1737 and 1739 Chanda had his status as Nawab of Trichinopoly recognized both Dost Ali and the Mughal Emperor (but crucially, not the Nizam of Hyderabad, who had become jealous of his growing power), and installed his brothers Bade Sahib and Sadak Sahib at Madurai and the Dindigul fortress. The kingdom was essentially annexed to Arcot by in 1737. Whole districts were leased to the tax collectors.

## The Troubles of Tanjore

Shortly after the initial defeat and exile of Bangaru Tirumalai in 1735, Tanjore and Pudukkottai went to war, the former led by its general, Ananda Rao, and assisted by the Rani of Madurai's army. There were a mix of motives at play here. Tanjore was an expansionist state in a small way, but Pudukkottai had also lined up with the General and the Rani wanted vengeance. Pudukkottai's leader, styled the Tondaiman (his country is sometimes known by that name), was soon besieged at Tirumayam and the rest of his small kingdom was under Tanjore's control. This in turn brought in Ramnad, whose ruler, known as the Sethupathi, was related to the Tondaiman. The besiegers began to suffer from the guerrilla attacks of their enemies; worse, the Rani decided to back out and recalled her forces, leaving Ananda Rao to carry on alone.

In a volte face, the Rani of Madurai then sent Chanda to attack her erstwhile ally, Tanjore (!) — at Ramnad and Pudukkottai's request. This broke Ananda Rao's siege of Tirumayam. It also gave Chanda another opportunity of extorting a large bribe from Tanjore to go away. After this, he too retired to Arcot, but not for long.

*[Many summaries of the events suggest that Chanda remained at Trichinopoly through to the end of 1736, but this was not the case.]*

The Raja of Tanjore who had involved himself in all this fighting so far was a man named Tukkoji, grandnephew of the original Maratha king, Shivaji. The early decades of the Bhonsle dynasty in Tanjore had been stable, but in 1711 the throne had been contested by two brothers. This Tukkoji was one. He had not inherited, and being discontented, had retreated into the south of the kingdom and raised a faction against the raja. He never had to actually overthrow his brother, however, who passed away in 1729; Tukkoji was the natural successor. It may have helped that he received backing from the Nawab of Arcot in exchange for paying a massive bribe.

Tukkoji had set a dangerous precedent. In July of 1735 he died and his son, Baba Sahib, a.k.a. Ekoji II, took the throne. Interestingly, as part of the coronation he was blindfolded and made to pick out one of three random objects; he chose a dagger, which was regarded as a bad omen. But, Arcot backed him. He only lasted a year, dying in August of 1736 from unspecified causes, probably natural. He was 64. The choices for succession were two pregnant wives and the son of a concubine (or sword wife), called Pratap Singh (Pratapasimha). Arcot backed the elder queen, Sujana Bai, for Regent. Pratap Singh either became or already was Governor of the port town of Karaikal.

Troops from Arcot enforced the rule of Baba and then Sujana Bai for a time. But, Tanjore city had a Muslim commandant, Seid Khan, with ambitions of his own — Muslim mercenaries could often be found commanding garrisons in this part of the world, and one without 'ambitions' would have been a freak of nature. As an aside, there may have been more than one Seid Khan; the name crops up repeatedly in different decades. Whether one or many, Seid Khan was a noted kingmaker who oversaw the rise and fall of more than one raja and pretender. In 1738 this iteration of the man produced a pretender, in collusion with a powerful courtier named Koyaji Kattigal. They staged a coup. The Queen Regent, Sujana Bai, took poison. The pretender, who used the old saw of being swapped out at birth, was crowned as Sahuji II. Rumour, and some legitimate reports, say he was a low caste boy, possibly a slave and a betel nut keeper for the Court, who had been groomed for the job at a hidden compound in the jungle. The people of Tanjore called him the 'jungle king'. Seid and Koyaji trained him well enough that the EIC and VOC emissaries were duped into supporting Sahuji II financially, and later the French would also sponsor him. He was much given to taking opium. Later court histories pointedly ignore his entire reign. Historians are still not sure if he enjoyed his brief rule only at this time or if he was reinstated by the French for a second go a bit later. The whole sequence of events being described here is only the author's best guess cobbled together from a variety of conflicting reports.

Sahuji's rule was weak. This led to war in 1738, involving a number of players: himself, the concubine's son Pratap Singh, Arcot, and the CIO. The latter had a new Governor, Benoit Dumas, who replaced Lenoir in 1735. An astute and careful man, it will be remembered he had been replaced by La Bourdonnais as Governor of Mauritius. His general policy was similar to the first governor, Martin

— make friends, be evenhanded, play by the host's rules. Nawab Sa'adatullah had admired the French and recommended them to his successor. Dost Ali therefore sought Dumas' aid when the Nizam of Hyderabad refused to acknowledge his own succession. Dumas agreed to back him in exchange for the right to coin money. In 1736 Dost Ali then went behind the Nizam's back and applied directly to Delhi, which approved his takeover. The two main consequences of this were the Nizam becoming very annoyed, which would lead to a very bad end for Dost Ali, and the French coinage becoming the local medium of exchange throughout much of the South. Its quality was good, and it was guaranteed; it also meant Dumas did not have to rely on a treasure ship to bring the money needed to buy stock.

*[The reputation of the French gold pagoda was due to its thickness and size. 100 pagodas was worth 320 rupees. The project earned Dumas a knighthood.]*

As the French gained security in this way Dumas began looking to gain other advantages and quickly pitched on Karaikal. It was a section of coastland in the Kaveri Delta about 20 Km north of the chief port of Nagapattinam. The place included a fortress and ten villages (essential for paying the rent) and a decent anchorage. Karaikal had a number of other advantages. First, it was farther south and therefore could be reached more quickly by ships from Europe. Also, it was closer to the heart of the cotton industry and the supply routes from Malabar — as will be explained later the rajas in Malabar were at this time diverting much of their pepper trade eastward, to avoid selling to the Dutch. Finally, it was close to the main Dutch base in Coromandel, at Nagapattinam. With the locals using French currency they would naturally be inclined to change their habits and divert the few miles needed to come and sell at Karaikal.

Meanwhile, another coup was launched at Tanjore. No one seems to agree on the protagonists, just that Sahuji was the victim. What seems most likely is that he fell out with Seid, who may have decided to instal himself as raja and ask Arcot for forgiveness after the fact. In one version Seid put up not one but two pretenders, both of whom quickly disappeared. Though it does not seem to make sense, the rumour was that he himself had done away with them after deciding to take the throne personally. In a better attested version Seid backed Pratap Singh, who at least had royal blood and was descended from a Marathi woman.

Whatever the truth of the matter, Sahuji barely escaped the coup, fleeing to the Chillumbrum Pagoda, roughly 10 Km away on the North bank of the Kolroon River. That river was the border with Arcot. It was also only 40 Km from Pondichéri. Like many temple complexes in India, it was quite well fortified, but Sahuji had only a small band of loyalists. He wrote to Dumas, offering him the port of Karaikal in exchange for aid. Included in the deal were the associated fort of Kirean Gurree and the ten villages.

Dumas was all ears. He had approached Tanjore before on the matter, but the Dutch envoys always pricked his balloon. He sent Sahuji two warships, *Bourbon* (6) and *St. Geran* (40), loaded with troops, cannon, ammunition and a *lakh* of silver. The ships sailed to Karaikal in August of 1738 with orders to land and take the place, then render assistance to Sahuji. But, but the time this had all been arranged, Sahuji had managed to bribe most of his enemies, including Seid (!), who allowed his puppet Pratap Singh to be arrested. Sahuji returned to his palace. The French arrived, only to be told their services were not required. They found the town garrisoned by 3-4,000 men under a man named Khan Sahib, a probable relation of Seid's.

Sahuji had yet to learn that one does not cross a Frenchman. The captain of the expedition sent to Pondichéri for new orders. Sahuji had already sent a different message to Dumas, claiming he would honour the deal, but just not now, because he feared Chanda Sahib. Here is where Dumas' character differed from what Dupleix would display. He knew full well what was going on, but recalled the ships anyway. In law, the French now owned Karaikal, and there is more than one way to skin a cat. As for Chanda Sahib, he saw a chance to ingratiate himself further with the French. While his brother-in-law Safdar respected French power but did not particularly like them, an attitude shared by most of his peers, it was said of Chanda that he was the only Indian who really understood the French. He was also quite poor, with only a small client base, but great ambitions. That is no doubt part of the reason he hung out with foreigners, but he really did admire French culture. One thing he could not believe, though, and that was that the French had no territorial ambitions. He was sure that if he helped them secure Karaikal they would be properly grateful.

*Chunda Sahib, it will be recollected, was son in law of Dost Ali, Nawab of the Carnatic, and feudal lord of the territory to the north of the French possessions; he himself as Dost Ali's lieutenant held the country on the southwest; that on the southeast alone was held by the Rajah of Tanjore. It was clear then that Chunda Sahib's offer to conquer a portion of that Rajah's possessions involved no risk to the French; it did not even invoke the suspicion of a greed for territorial extension. It was the offer of a powerful Indian potentate to compel a weaker ruler to adhere to his agreement. M Dumas then violated no principle of his predecessors policy by accepting that offer. This he did almost as soon as it was made.*

*Malleson, p.76*

The commander of Chanda's punitive column of 4,000 horse was named Francisco Pereira, a Spaniard. The port was taken without a fight on 6 February 1739, and the fort, which then had a garrison of 400 men, was stormed the same day. Pereira brought the news of his success to Pondichéri and Dumas dispatched a ship laden with 150 tons of stores. The French flag was run up within 24 hours. On 14 February Karaikal was formally ceded to the CIO. Dumas stationed a warship off the coast to make sure. Malleson has this to say (pp.77-78):

*The effect of these forcible measures upon Rajah Sahoojee was such as might have been expected from a man of his weak and unmanly nature. It completely overawed him. He at once sent messages to Pondichery, casting all the blame of his previous hostile conduct on the evil counsels of the Dutch at Negapatam; stating that he had always intended to cede the territory at the proper time; and professing his readiness now to execute in full the treaty of Chillumbrum. As a proof of his sincerity, he sent at the same time two instruments dated April 25, 1739, one of which contained a ratification of the former treaty, and the other an order to the inhabitants of the districts he had yielded, to acknowledge and obey the French in future as their masters. It is probable that the complaisance of Sahoojee in this matter was quickened by the fact that one of the clauses of the treaty of Chillumbrum contained a stipulation for the payment to him of 100,000 rupees — a stipulation which the French now in possession might, according to oriental notions, have been inclined to evade. Before, however, his propositions reached Pondichery, a domestic revolution hurled Sahoojee from his throne. But his successor and half brother, Pertab Singh, not only confirmed the agreement of Chillumbrum, but added to it a greater extent territory.*

Enter the last external player in the drama, and the reason Sahuji was deposed: Safdar Ali. Chanda Sahib's growing influence and power begat jealousy in his brother-in-law. Though he was the eldest son of Dost Ali his succession was not guaranteed, and Chanda was growing intolerably popular. Safdar, and Mir Assud, who was acting as interim *dewan*, both worked on Dost Ali to recall Chanda, but the old Nawab was too vacillating. Safdar therefore moved against Chanda indirectly, by attacking Tanjore. If he could install his own puppet there he would be able to cause mischief for Chanda at will. As it turned out, this campaign was really very simple. Safdar took care to be invited by Pratap Singh, there was a palace revolution aided by the man on the inside, Seid Khan, and Safdar, as Arcot's representative, recognized the former governor of Karaikal as Raja of Tanjore. Sahuji, the son of a slave woman, languished in a dungeon.

According to Bes' research (*Heirs of Vijaynagara*) Pratap Singh would not accept the throne unless Sahuji formally gave it to him, and they had a talk in prison. Sahuji warned him that if he did not accept they would both be killed. It did save both their lives, and after peace with Arcot was concluded early in September 1739 the arrangement was as follows: Seid would govern in the name of Pratap Singh and Sahuji would be pensioned off. Apparently Safdar offered to restore the latter on payment of a large bribe, but Arcot did better with the peace deal as it was, scoring 6 million rupees, plus a mass of jewelry, horses, a train of elephants, and most important of all, the revenues of several disputed districts.

Pratap Singh's recognition of French rule at Karaikal was given grudgingly, and there was much haggling still to come. The land was rich in cotton, indigo, and rice, with a population of 10-12,000 in the villages and another 5,000 in the town, and it generated an annual rent of 10,000 pagodas. It was also located on a navigable waterway. Still, when he later visited Dumas (in 1741), Pratap went so far as to suggest the town be fortified. Perhaps by then he was reconciled to the loss. By 1741 Tanjore had at least paid back Chanda Sahib.

Meanwhile, Chanda and his two brothers continued expanding their authority. The brothers fought a coalition of Tinnevely *poligars* near Sattur (halfway between the towns of Madurai and Tirunelveli) and defeated them, while Chanda annexed Pudukkottai. At the same time he had Trichinopoly's defences improved. It appears that he was aware of his brother-in-law's designs but felt himself equal to the task. In December of 1739 he attacked Travancore again. Some sources claim this was to help the Dutch, who had Mughal favour, and who needed to engineer a distraction for their latest enemy, the Maharaja of that state, but it seems far more likely this was just another show-the-flag operation. He sent his brother Bade — or possibly Bade made the expedition on his own account. The brothers were following the typical model of probing for weakness and seeing if it were possible to carve out their own kingdoms.

## The Maratha Invasion of 1740

The Maratha invasion of the Carnatic was the first such grand raid in many years. It was led by Sardar Raghuji Bhonsle of Nagpur (1695-1755), a.k.a. Raghuji the Great. The *Senasahibsubha* (Master of Provinces and Armies) was a driving force in the Confederacy. Interestingly, he became Raja of Nagpur only in 1739. The Marathas had long been upset at the extent of Mughal penetration into Southern India. A number of Maratha chieftaincies there, such as Bangalore and Kolar, and Maratha kingdoms, such as Sira, were asking for help. Now Tanjore made its own plea.

A Maratha kingdom asking the Marathas for aid ought to be readily understandable and need no explanation, but the details are extremely confusing. Often it is said the Marathas were asked for protection against Chanda Sahib. This is not exactly true. Actually, Safdar Ali was occupying Tanjore, and it was against him, and Arcot in general, that Tanjore wanted to direct the Marathas. Also, it appears that Pratap Singh was the one sending the request, and that he did so not for himself but on behalf of Sahuji. Now, shortly after Sahuji was deposed Pratap Singh had Seid Khan executed. It is probable that with the old puppet master out of the way, Pratap planned to play with the strings himself. But, there is more. Tanjore's plea was seconded by the General of Madurai, Bangaru Tirumalai, the rajas of Ramnad and Shivagunga, the exiled raja of Pudukkottai, and even their longtime rival, Mysore.

Surprisingly, according to Ramaswami a similar request for help came from Arcot itself. He assumes it was from the anti-Chanda faction and that Safdar and the *dewan* Mir Assud were playing the risky game of leaguering with the Marathas to take their enemy down. This is probably why Chanda is so often marked down as the primary target. The details seem to have been that Safdar would pay the Marathas 4 *lakhs* of rupees in advance, when their army was four days march from Arcot; as it turned out the Marathas would demand an additional 10 *lakhs* when they came within range of him, and also demand Safdar evacuate Tanjore and restore Raja Sahuji. In addition, Dost Ali was to be abandoned to his fate. This last item is still debated. There are many sources that claim Safdar moved as quickly as possible to aid his father but others claim he purposely dallied on the road. In their correspondence he does say that given his small army he could not be much help, and that Dost Ali ought to trust to the walls of Arcot and the fact that Marathas were probably satiated with the plunder of Kadapa and Karnool. It is more certain that Chanda Sahib was slow to react when he also was summoned to help his father-in-law, but he also may have had another excuse besides self-interest.

From the Marathas' point of view, however, the whole affair was entirely opportunistic. In 1737, before Raghuji attained his present position, *Chhatrapati* Shahu floated the idea of an expedition to remind everyone the Marathas still existed, but he was always floating ambitious schemes. The *peshwa*, Baji Rao I, who was the real power behind the throne, dissuaded him. There was an immanent threat of invasion from Persia, where the conqueror Nadr Shah was amassing a huge army. Baji Rao felt it would be wiser to build their forces and wait upon events. In 1739 things were different. For one, Nadr Shah sacked Delhi that year. Though this troubled the Marathas, it also meant they were free to face in the other direction. Moreover, their other enemy, the Nizam of Hyderabad, was called to Delhi to help with the surrender negotiations. Then also, as Ramaswami points out, the Marathas did not really need an invitation. Such requests had been sent before, but they had failed to respond. Now, however, the stars were in their proper alignment. Not only was a Muslim ruler — Safdar — fighting against Hindus, and members of the Bhonsle clan no less, his brother-in-law (Chanda) was refusing to pay the *chauth*. As a matter of fact, the Marathas had legally acquired the right to collect the *chauth* from both Arcot and

Trichinopoly from the Nizam of Hyderabad as early as 1720. So, they were entirely in the right, even if they were extortioners. It must also be said that they had a not-so-secret ambition to push their power down to the very tip of the Subcontinent. This they would demonstrate in later wars. It is therefore quite likely that the Marathas came south with no clear plan of exactly who they would attack. Could Chanda Sahib's enemies persuade them to attack him, or would the Marathas stick to the primary goal of evicting Safar from Tanjore? Would they insist Sahuji be reinstated, or could Pratap Singh bribe them to recognize himself? Could Chanda even turn the tables and gain recognition from the Marathas?

The one man who could have stopped the expedition, the Nizam of Hyderabad, chose not to. He was, after all, at Delhi, and would not return home until 1741. But it is fairly certain that he actively prompted the Marathas to attack Arcot. He detested the Nevayet dynasty and was of the opinion that their insolence was growing with every passing year. Forget the *chauth*, they had been neglecting to pay their feudal dues to *him*, their *real* overlord. Apologists sometimes claim that as a Maratha vassal — he had also paid the *chauth*, however reluctantly, in the past — he had little choice. But, future events would demonstrate otherwise. And is one more point about the Nizam, often overlooked. He ordered a column of his own troops, 20,000 strong and led by his second son, Nasir Jung, to proceed into the Carnatic at the same time as the Marathas. Not to fight them, but to assert his own rights *viz.* Arcot and to chastise Chanda Sahib. The rumour at the time, strengthened by reports collected by the British at Madras, was that his troops and the Marathas were to join forces. The column was sent possibly a month or so after the Marathas got started; its movements are very unclear and Nasir Jung probably decided to remain inactive unless a good opportunity revealed itself.

All of which is to say that every player in this drama was out for himself.

The invasion began in May 1740. According to the muster rolls, Raghuji brought 50,000 men with him, mostly cavalry, and mostly his best troops. His assisting general was Fateh Singh Bhonsle of Akkalot. Fateh Singh had invaded the Carnatic before, in 1725 and 1727, and he held the *jaghir* of Akkalot specifically to give the Marathas access to the region.

Two small Mughal states lay in their path, Karnool and Cuddapah (Kadapa). Karnool escaped humiliation on the battlefield by paying a massive tribute (4 May). Ruled by a foreign adventurer with a majority Hindu population and bureaucracy who identified as Marathi, Cuddapah did not last long either. The *nawab* was in fact in the middle of marriage preparations for a family member when the invaders knocked on his door. However, Cuddapah was not absorbed as a conquest and continued to be ruled by the same dynasty, only paying the *chauth*. Its rulers would have a much greater role to play in the Second Carnatic War. After crossing these speed-bumps, Raghuji marched south toward the Damalcherry (Damalcheruvu) Pass. The general populace of the Plain fled in droves to the cities, particularly Pondichéri and Madras, where the Europeans afforded a fig leaf of protection.

Dost Ali, the Nawab of Arcot, chose to fight, though he would have preferred not to. Hated by the Nizam, he could expect no reinforcements, but, as Chandramauliswar quotes (*Maratha Invasion* p. 276), he 'resolved not to survive the disgrace of suffering the infidels to ravage without resistance the very precincts of his capital.' Dost Ali was old, and he had neglected the Sultanate in pursuit of contemplative religion for many years, but he was still a fighter at heart. As the Marathas approached from the North he ordered his artillery and baggage out of storage and began assembling his army outside Arcot. He could not muster much over 10,000 men, and apparently there was a dearth of horses. This may have been due to the season.

He sent urgent summonses to both Safdar Ali and Chanda Sahib, to meet him on the banks of the Ponanni River at Damalcherry Pass. Neither man showed much eagerness, but there are conflicting interpretations:

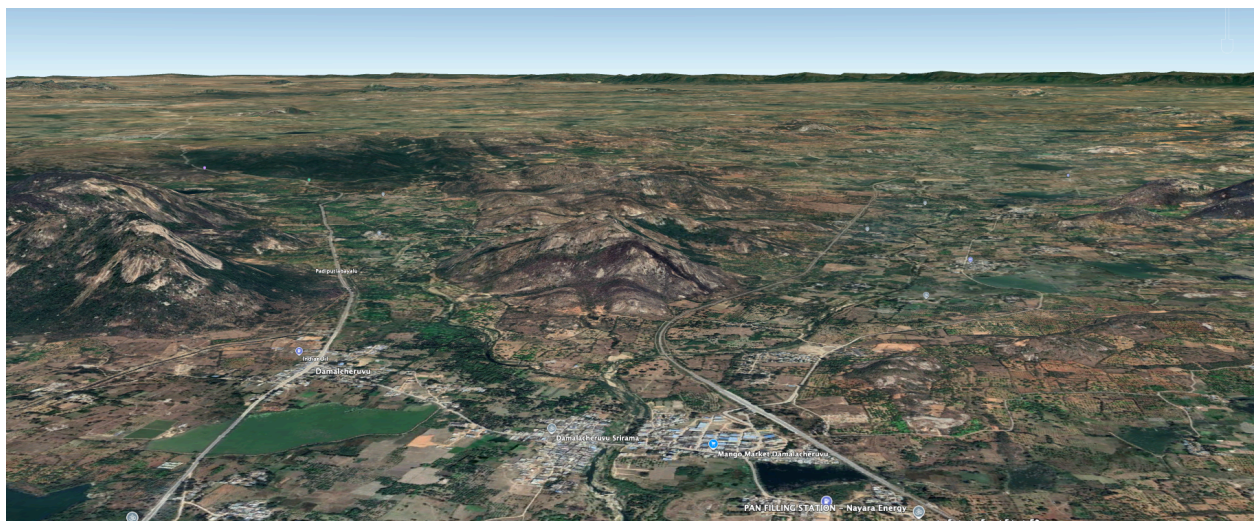
1. Safdar abandoned Tanjore and came north but only got as far as Arcot because he was dragging his feet. Chanda never left Trichinopoly and actively prepared to duke it out with Safdar (and not the Marathas, whom he presumably expected to buy off). Or;
2. Safdar came north but only got as far as Arcot because he had to settle matters at Tanjore first. Chanda also marched, but slowly. On hearing the result of the battle he fled back to Trichinopoly. Or;

3. Again, Safdar came north but only got as far as Arcot because he had to settle matters at Tanjore first. Chanda also marched, but slowly. On hearing the result of the battle he carried on and met with Safdar at Vellore, where they discussed their next moves.

The last version seems to be the most accurate. It tallies with the various original sources. But, there are a few wrinkles. Rajayyan (*The Marathas at Trichinopoly*) adds that Safdar released Sahuji from prison (after taking a bribe) as the Marathas were demanding. This might also ensure Sahuji's rival, Pratap Singh, would have his hands full. Disengaging from Tanjore will have taken time, so it is not surprising that Safdar was slow. The speed of the Maratha advance was also surprising. They were known for rapid marches, but it had been many years since anyone had experienced such a raid in the South. Ramaswami (quoting Orme) says that Chanda came also, with 5,000 horse and 10,000 foot. It is generally agreed that he delayed by whatever means he could. The story that he fled back to Trichinopoly on hearing the outcome of the battle (also recounted by Orme) is false. Rajayyan says the story of Chanda's flight is fantastical. It may be rooted in British propaganda of the time, for Chanda later became a key French ally. There is also the fact which features in histories of Malabar and is ignored in histories of the Carnatic (an annoyingly common feature of Indian histories), that Chanda was preparing yet another expedition into Travancore. This would take place later in the year, led again by Bade Sahib, who also needed to suppress unrest in Tinnevely, and did involve many of Chanda's men, but it is not clear if Chanda had already earmarked them for the campaign or not at this point. If so, his excuse that he had no troops might actually have been true. With regard to Safdar, correspondence between himself and the Marathas exists, as well as a variety of reports made to the Europeans by native agents, which Ramaswami argues proves Safdar was faithless and had no intention of aiding his father.

## The Battle of Damalcherry Pass

The Battle of Damalcherry Pass was fought on 20 May 1740. It was hard fought and decisive, and it is unfortunate that not a single sketch seems to exist that can aid in explaining it. The pass was the natural entry point to the Plain, had been used by the great Shivaji in 1676, and would be used again by Haider Ali. To reach the pass from Arcot, which lies on the right bank of the mighty Palar River, one crosses that river and marches northeast up the tributary Ponnani for about 70 Km. The Eastern Ghats form a barrier, which is not as significant as the Western Ghats but there still only a few easy ways through them. The pass is roughly 112 Km due south of Cuddapah. On both sides of it the terrain is rough and wooded, and what small defiles there are all point in the wrong direction. The Ponnari has two branches that join at Damalcherry, one coming from the North through a narrow gorge and the other coming from the Northeast across a narrow plain, as can be seen from the attached satellite image.



The village of Damalcherry sits on the West side of the confluence. Dost Ali's army could have been facing either opening. The wider plain points in the direction the Marathas would naturally approach from, and appears to be good cavalry country, but the accounts state that Dost Ali could only deploy

about half his army and put the rest in reserve; the accounts also speak of a 'gorge'. The narrower pass is about 750 meters wide and the plain is about double that, at their narrowest points. It is also possible Dost Ali occupied a position in a third pass that runs east-west, to the west of the main passes. This tactic is sometimes used, as at Marathon, to pin an enemy and force him to fight on unfavourable terrain. But what details there are make this very unlikely. The sensible way to hold a pass is to deploy with the defile in front, and Dost Ali may have done this, but the accounts make it sound like he was holding the neck of the pass, or was even in front of it.

To quote Malleson (p.79):

*Before they (Chanda and Safdar) could arrive the Mahrattas had approached the pass. This, as the most important, was held by Dost Ali in person, but there was a gorge, or opening, to the south of his position, the defence of which he had intrusted to one of his commanders, a Hindoo. This latter had allowed himself to be seduced from his allegiance, and permitted the Mahratta army to march through the gorge he was guarding on the night of the 19th May. The Mahrattas, thus secure of their prey, moved swiftly at daybreak the next morning on the rear of the position occupied by Dost Ali. This chieftain, noticing the approach of cavalry, imagined that his son, Sufder Ali, had arrived to reinforce him, and was only undeceived when their movements indicated undisguised hostility. Driven to bay, however, he determined to sell his life dearly. The battle which ensued was, notwithstanding the disparity of numbers, contested most desperately, and it only terminated when Dost Ali himself and his second son, Hassan Ali, lay dead upon the field, and his first Minister, Meer Assud, had been taken prisoner. Almost all the principal officers were killed or trodden under foot by elephants, and the slaughter was unprecedented even in that age. No rout could have been more complete.*

Additional details are available. Dost Ali placed one wing of his army, supported by cannon, astride the high road itself at the crest of the pass, and kept a reserve lower down on his side of it. It was probably not practical to station troops actually overlooking the road, or if he did so they would have been just a handful of matchlock-men. The Marathas similarly fought in two medieval-style 'battles'. Their advance guard consisted of 10,000 cavalry in three columns. It assaulted the crest of the pass. Meanwhile, the second 'battle', also of 10,000 cavalry, circled around from their camp eastwards along a deep ditch which was enclosed by a wood of thorn trees on both sides. Their guide was one 'Chicka Royallo, a Gentue Prince of Poonganoor'. By his route they were able to appear to the rear of Dost Ali's reserve, looking at first like friendly reinforcements. Mention is also made of 4,000 Maratha musketeers that did great execution. Probably, they were brought forward after the encirclement had been completed. Dost Ali was slain while leading a band of 80 retainers.

From these accounts one is tempted to imagine Dost Ali deployed on the narrow plain north of the village, with the narrow gorge on his left behind a steep triangular line of hills, through which the Marathas came. But their eastward movement does not jibe with this, for the narrow pass lies to the West, and neither does the mention of a deep ditch. There are east-west passes that would have been on Dost Ali's right, which could have served, but again, they are not 'ditches'. There are also the tributaries. Neither is mentioned. The northern one flows through the middle of the plain and would have been an obstacle even if dry. The northeastern one follows the slopes within the gorge and would not have been in the way. For such an important battle very little is known for sure.

This victory sent shockwaves the length and breadth of the land. For years it was hailed as a great Hindu triumph that shattered the myth of Muslim invincibility.

Safdar's response was to garrison the fortress town of Vellore, where Chanda joined him. The danger to their House at least temporarily united them. This place, upriver a day's march from Arcot and also on the right bank of the Palar, was more defensible than the capital. Safdar also immediately opened negotiations through the *dewan*, Mir Assud, whom Raghuji released and sent to Vellore for that purpose. Meanwhile, Arcot was plundered by the Marathas.

Before they could be taken both Safdar and Chanda sent their families, and their own treasuries, to Pondichéri for protection. This put Dumas on the spot, but he remained true to his word to Chanda and gave them shelter. He did what he could to strengthen the defences and collected 15 days worth of

rations, as well as opening the gates to the common people. Dost Ali's defeat had shaken the whole of the Carnatic and refugees clogged the roads. The royals arrived on 25 May. There was some renewed debate over whether to admit them or not, but Dumas compelled his council to agree. Malleison describes the arrival (pp.81-82):

*This was done with great state and ceremony. The garrison was placed under arms, the ramparts were manned. The Governor himself, in a magnificent palanquin, and followed by his horse and foot guards, went down to the Valdaur gate. The gate was then thrown open. Immediately there entered the widow of the Nawab, her daughters and relations, in twenty-two palanquins, followed by fifteen hundred cavalry, eight elephants, three hundred camels, two hundred bullock carts, and two thousand beasts of burden. The entrance of the principal personage was saluted by a discharge of cannon from the ramparts, and she was conducted by M. Dumas in person to the apartments he had provided her. A similar hospitable reception was accorded a few days later to the wife and son of Chunda Sahib.*

*[According to Rajayyan, the French were no help at all. But perhaps he means Dumas offered no military aid.]*

The Marathas pillaged the countryside from their new base at Arcot. Despite the rich haul they made when they took the place, it appears much of the Nawab's treasury had been shifted in time, while the countryside round about was already desolate, either because the peasantry fled with their moveables or because it was too early for the harvest. This led to much discontent among the rank and file. It should also be noted that glad tidings reached Raghuji at this time: two of his powerful rivals, the *peshwa* Baji Rao and the latter's brother, Chimaji Appa, were both dead. This opened up many opportunities for the future; in the short term, he could make good terms with Arcot without having to run everything by the *peshwa* first.

In August of 1740 a treaty was agreed. Safdar would be Nawab under Maratha sponsorship (Hyderabad could probably be made to agree to this) upon payment of 40 *lakhs*. Raghuji included a boilerplate article about paying a tribute of 10 million rupees to the *peshwa*, but, knowing the man was dead and not wanting to enhance the clan's power, Raghuji told Safdar to ignore the clause. Instead, he had only to pay the 40 *lakhs* to Raghuji personally. By a pair of secret articles Safdar also agreed to league with the Marathas to attack Chanda Sahib and reinstall the dispossessed Hindu princes of Coromandel. This after he paid Raghuji an additional 4 *lakhs*. Along with some other segments of territory demanded by the Marathas, Safdar agreed to give them Trichinopoly, if they were able to conquer it.

This may strike the reader as an odd sort of thing to offer. It is true Safdar was a weak character and in the Marathas' power, but even they observed the proper forms. Surely Trichinopoly belonged to Madurai, though conquered by Chanda Sahib. If the Marathas took it the logical thing to do would be to give it back to their allies or keep it themselves, and Arcot had no input in the matter. But, that is looking at the matter the wrong way around. This is about *personal*, not state property. There was no such thing as state property. Chanda had taken Trichinopoly by treachery and its original owner, the Rani, was dead. It never did 'belong' to Madurai, as a state. It belonged to her family, which was now defunct. Thus the fortress now legally belonged to Safdar, both because as Nawab he was Chanda's overlord and because Chanda was family. Since Safdar was Nawab, it was in his power to give it to the Marathas.

By this point Safdar and Chanda had openly fallen out again. Scholars differ in the details, but that is the gist of it. There are many discrepancies in the narrative. A minor one is whether the pair travelled to Gingee — still the most defensible fortress on the Carnatic Plain — in August and again in September, or just the once, in September, and also, whether on the latter journey they spent time there together or split up before reaching the place. Sorting that question out would help with the timeline and perhaps give a clue to the veracity of other events. It is agreed that they were at Pondichéri about 1 September, visiting their families, and that they stayed for a few days. There are rumours of some attempts to assassinate Chanda en route to Pondichéri. While there Safdar was elevated to Nawab. Some say that Chanda offered fealty to Safdar, others that Chanda refused to go to the ceremony with the other chiefs, considering himself Safdar's equal. Most likely, he did swear but not in person; perhaps when he visited Dumas on 8 September he merely gave the Governor assurances that he would make no trouble for Safdar. The secret articles of the treaty with the Marathas proved not so secret, for Dumas quickly learned of them, which also shows that the French had as an effective network of spies as any native

state. It is assumed Chanda was told at some point, perhaps on 8 September. If the assassination rumours are true, he probably already guessed. Nonetheless, he and Safdar put on a show of reconciliation.

Meanwhile, an additional 1,200 European troops were quickly added to Pondichéri's garrison (part local volunteers, part regulars from other posts, and part ships' crews) and 4-5,000 Muslims were recruited, whom Dumas ordered drilled to fight in the European manner. Most of these will have been *mappilas* from the Malabar Coast. Negotiations continued with the Marathas and it was during these that the Marathas first tried to intimidate the French. The Governor's reply to Raghuji in their written correspondence is famous. Having been threatened with the fate of the Portuguese garrison of Bassein, which the Marathas had recently eradicated, Dumas wrote:

*I have heard what has happened at Bassein but that place was not defended by Frenchmen.*

*[It is not recorded whether he used the words 'hamster' and 'elderberries' or threatened to 'taunt him a second time'.]*

Safdar's attitude, meanwhile, underwent a slight change. Impressed by the French defiance, and also grateful for their hosting his family, he gifted lands near Pondichéri to Dumas (this was later ratified by Delhi). Now, he may have thought the Marathas would return them 'when' they sacked Pondichéri, but he may also have thought they stood no chance and hoped to buy Dumas' favour. Either way he should come out ahead.

On 10 September Safdar and Chanda left Pondichéri together, bound for Gingee. According to Ramaswami they had their argument at this point and never reached that place. Maybe Chanda challenged Safdar on the matter of the secret articles. Safdar went to Arcot and Chanda to Trichinopoly. He supposedly offered the Marathas an entire crore of rupees to go away, and they appeared to agree.

Another questionable episode is the matter of Trichinopoly's grain supply. Supposedly, Chanda sold off nearly his entire store of grain. This was either to fund Bade's campaign against the *poligars* of Tinnevely or because the Marathas made a great show of returning home after their agreement with Safdar (as indeed they did) and he assumed they would take his money. The latter is more likely, and is favoured by Ramaswami. Rajayyan regards the story of the grain as entirely false, pointing out that Trichinopoly would only be taken by a combination of <possible> treachery and escalation, and that Chanda would hold for some time and not be starved out.

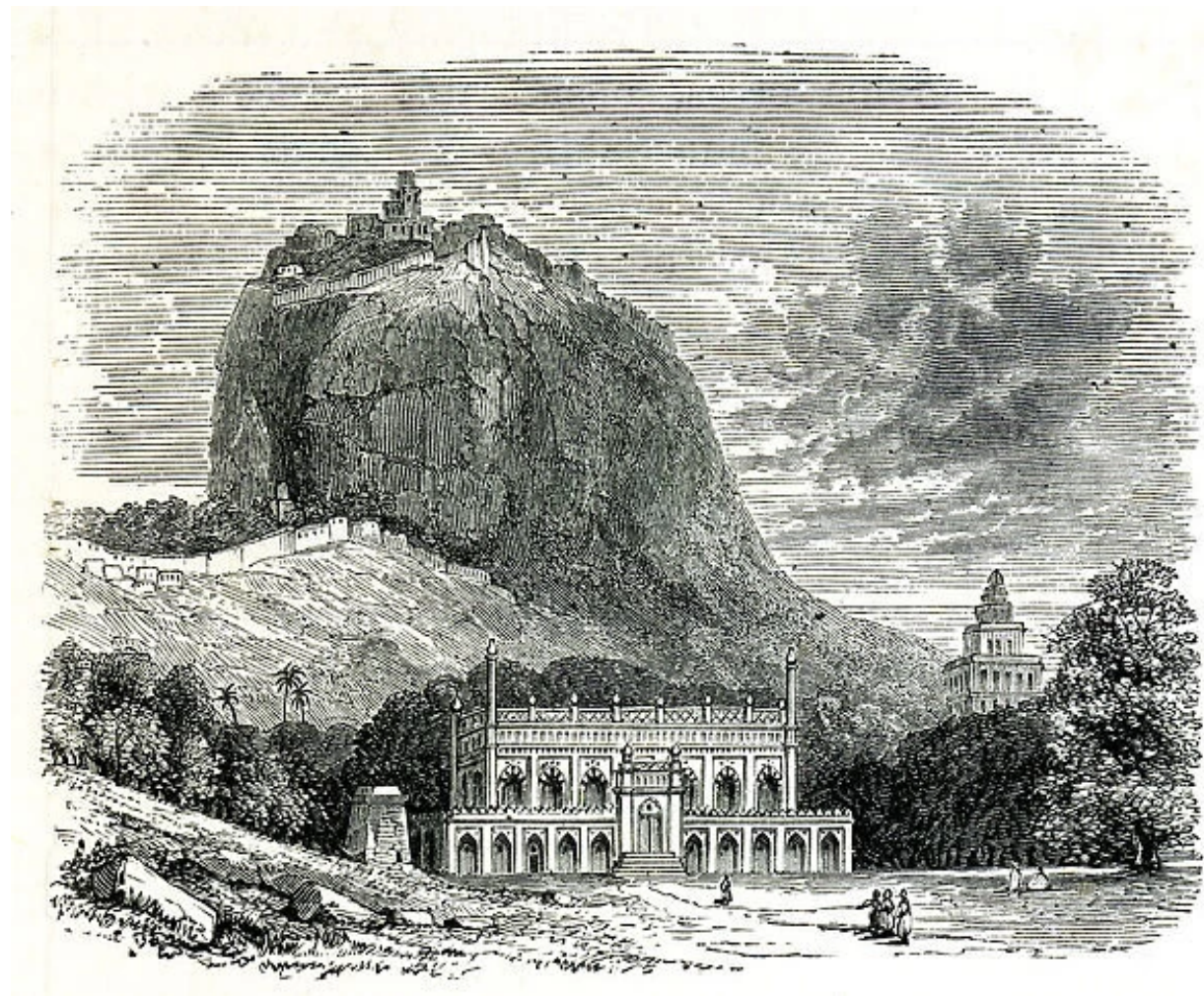
Bade Sahib, Chanda's brother, certainly did open a new campaign, though possibly on his own account. He was now governor of Madurai and Dindigul (and curiously the Madras district, too). He had with him 3,000 horse and 7,000 foot, many of whom were Chanda's own men, leaving Trichinopoly with few troops, though the remainder were of high quality. Bade made good progress, finally taking Tinnevely. His main opponents in this campaign were the various Maravar *poligars*. Details are sketchy, but it appears he also made another brief invasion of Travancore, which had an effect on the entirely separate war being waged there. Bade's forces crossed the border and approached the capital Kottar, meeting only a rearguard; the Maharaja was closely engaged with his enemies elsewhere. Whether Bade and Chanda had any long term plans for the region is not clear. There was always the old Mughal mandate to conquer all Hind. Bade Sahib may have wanted to be governor of Kottar, too. The question is moot, for their family's star was already hurtling earthward.

The Marathas were on the move again. Far from vacating the Carnatic they had proceeded to the vicinity of Tiruvannamalai, 80 Km southwest of Arcot and 90 Km northwest of Pondichéri, where they camped during October and November. According to Rajayyan, their pretended inaction was so they could collect Safdar's tribute (and maybe Chanda's bribe), but they were actually waiting for a famous Hindu festival — the Karthigal Deepam or Festival of Lights — to begin at that town; it drew in tens of thousands of Tamil pilgrims every year (now of course, it draws millions). The Marathas were not subtle. They did not set up concession booths or even aggressively collect 'fees' from the attendees. They simply sacked the town at the height of the festival. Hind for the Hindus!

According to Chandramauliswar, the Marathas returned to Arcot in December and plundered the land a second time. This is what may have led people to believe they were returning home. It may have been at this time that Safdar offered them Trichinopoly, and there is a possibility it was that offer that made them turn around. Ramaswami modifies the account, saying they had already split up into small bands of 50 or 100, as was their custom, and were pillaging all the land even before the festival; only 5,000 men participated in the sack of Tiruvannamalai. It does appear the Marathas were also waiting for reinforcements: 10,000 men under Morari Rao Gorpade, the governor of Gooty.

*[Gooty was another Maratha border post that gave access to the Carnatic.]*

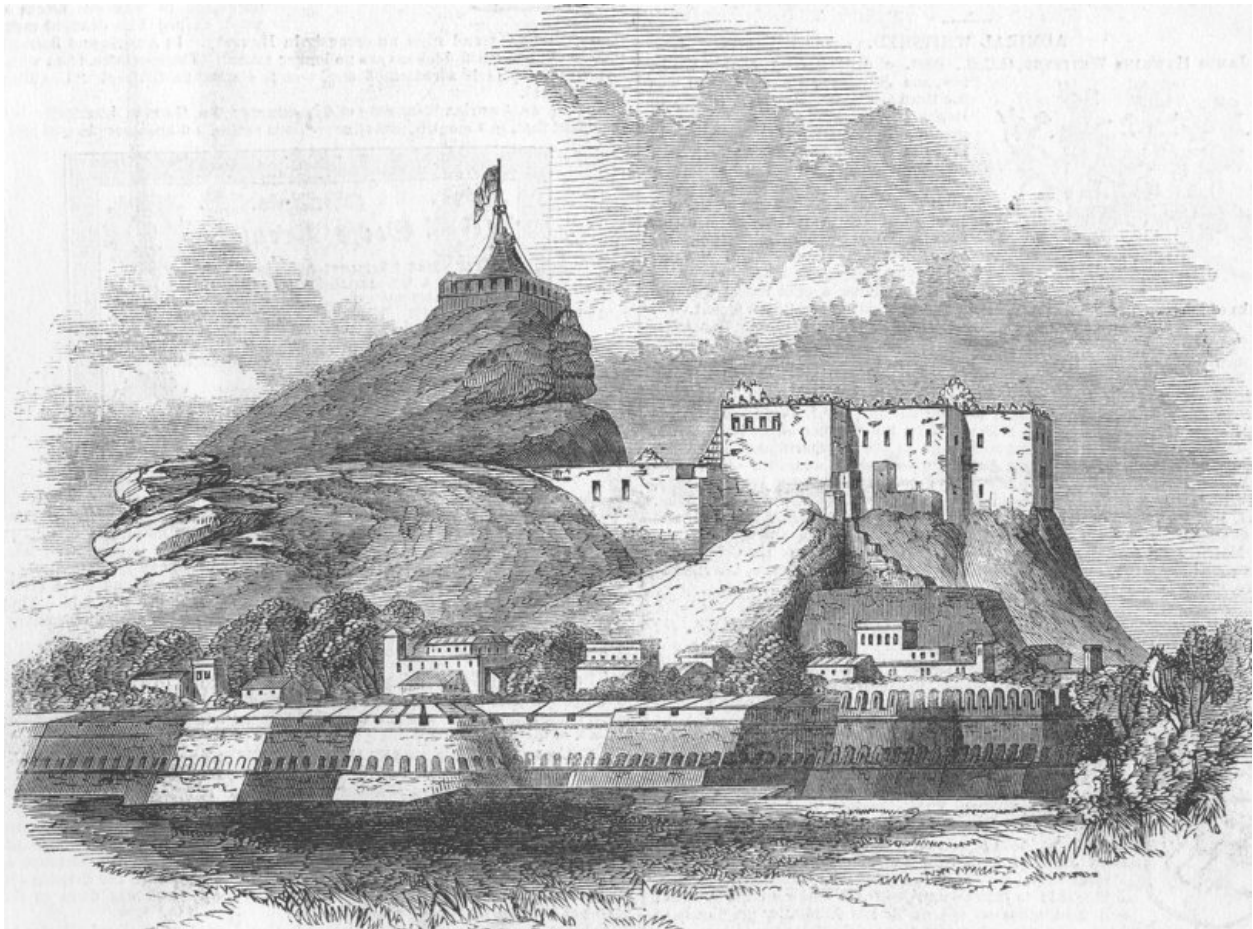
The populace fled to the coastal towns, but even these were not safe. Porto Novo and Nagapattinam, a full 60 Km south of the Kaveri River, were sacked, and the Dutch governor of the latter place taken prisoner along with his family. (Some sources state the sack of the Dutch base was not made until after Trichinopoly was taken.) They raided as far north as another VOC post, Sadras, roughly halfway between Pondichéri and Madras. A rough estimate suggests the Marathas were ravaging an area of 30,000 square kilometres. Safdar was apparently so despondent (he may also have believed in the Marathas pretence of going home) that he prepared to move shop to the fortress of Gingee.



*Hill fortress of Gingee*

## The Siege of Trichinopoly

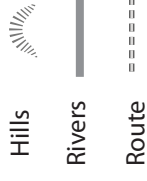
The march to Trichinopoly, now led by Raghuji and Sripat Rao Pratindhi, began in February 1741. Negotiations began when they camped at Valikandapuram. This town is about 180 Km south of Arcot; it is another 60 Km or so to the banks of the Kaveri at Trichinopoly. Raghuji sent an ultimatum to Chanda Sahib. He was to provide him with a suitable present or face the consequences. Chanda went so far as to agree to 7 *lakhs*, saying he was prepared to fight if they rejected the offer. But, when the Marathas said this was not enough he upped it to 12 *lakhs*. When they would not agree to this he bid them defiance.



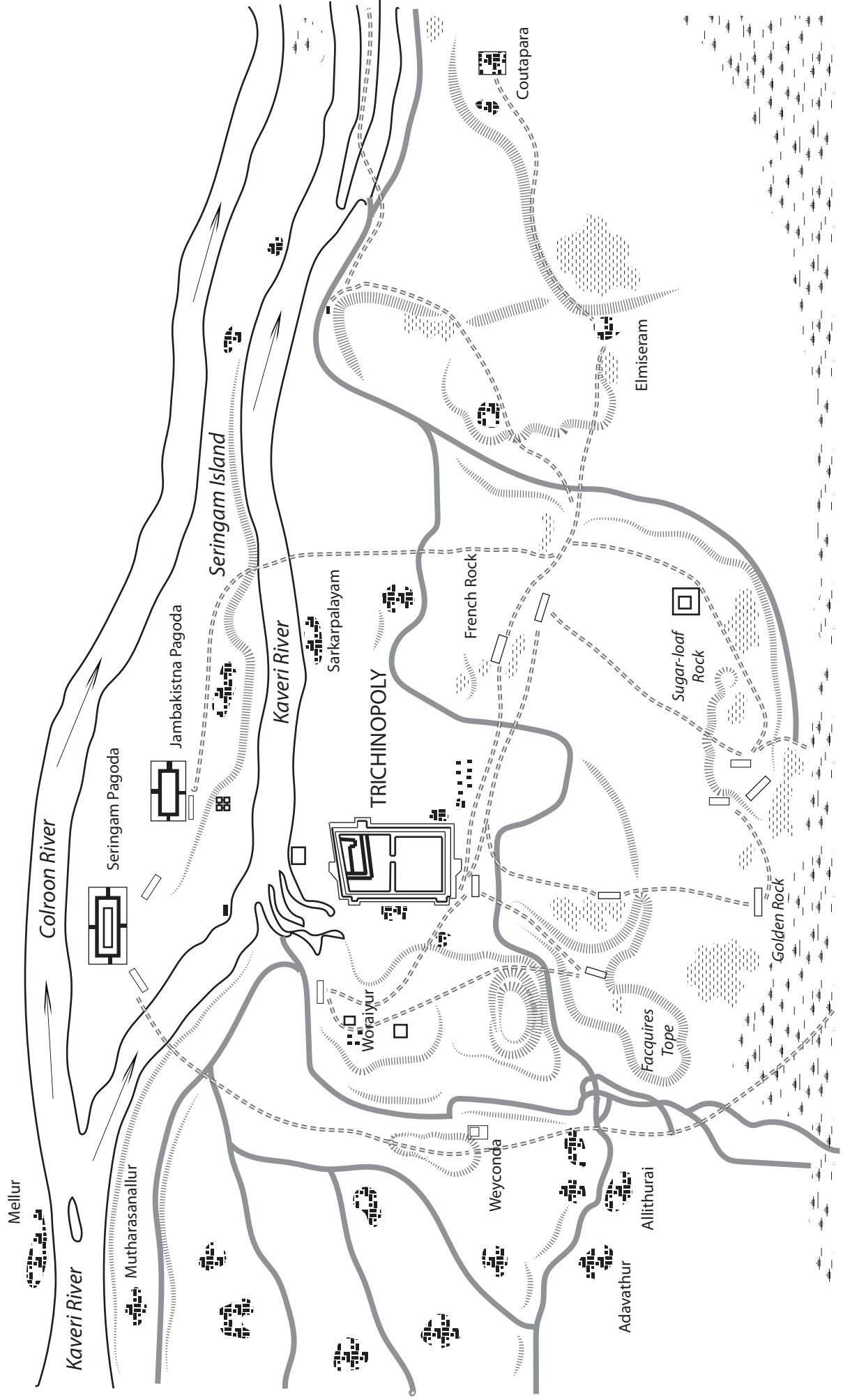
*Trichinopoly, early 1800s*

Ramaswami has the best description of Trichinopoly, or Tiruchi. (The multitude of pictures available do the Rock and the fortress justice, but not the whole town.) The city was valuable for several reasons. Located on the right bank, at the spot where the Kaveri River splits to form its vast delta, it stood about 5 Km back from the river. There were facilities nearby for controlling the flow of water into the Kolladam, the Kaveri's northern branch. It had two famous temples located on Seringham Island in the Kaveri to its north, and was a site of pilgrimage in its own right as well as a stop on the great pilgrim route to Sri Lanka. It sat above the flood plain, an oasis among bleak hills, and its temple-fortress crowned a towering plug of rock. The city itself was also formidable: over 1800 metres west-east and 1100 metres north-south, with double walls flanked by round towers equally spaced. The outer wall was 5.4 metres high and 1.5 metres thick but had no rampart or parapet. The inner wall was 9 metres high and 3 metres thick at the top, with a sloping rampart. The parapet was another 2 metres high, with loopholes. The walls were 7.5 metres apart, and there was a wet moat 9 metres wide and 3.5 metres deep. Unlike many Indian fortresses on the plains, the walls were built of stone, not mud brick. The citadel-cum-temple

# Trichinopoly Environs



2 Km



complex stood at the northern end. Its foundation rock was 122 metres high and could be seen for miles. Stacked around it one above the other were four temples, the upper two dug into the rock. The pinnacle was crowned by an observation pagoda, reached by 335 steps, that was always manned. The city also contained a royal palace numbering hundreds of apartments and a variety of courts and gardens.

His demands rejected, Raghuji dispatched an advance guard to blockade the city. This was ambushed and routed by Chanda's chief general, Sessa Rao, very near to Valikandapuram. After this inauspicious start the Marathas moved up en masse and laid siege to the town. The routine was similar to a Western siege. First, the cavalry established a blockade. Next, camps were established and formal siege lines begun. The difference, especially with the Marathas, came with the fact that they had a cavalry army. Compared to many Indian armies their infantry was of good quality, but it was not that numerous. Also, they lacked a siege train in the European sense. Most sieges at this time involved mining or scaling the walls, because one thing all Indian armies could rely on was a vast labour pool.

Of the neighbouring Nayaka states and statelets only Pudukkottai is recorded having sent troops to help the Marathas. As noted earlier its raja had been dispossessed by Chanda Sahib. Reputedly Mysore offered 50 *lakhs* to the Marathas as an incentive to take the city — and *that* might be the reason why they turned back, not Safdar's deal — while the trio of Ramnad, Shivagunga, and Pudukkotai offered 5,000 horse and 40,000 foot. The weight of evidence suggests most of these promises were empty, but the 5,000 horse and another 5,000 foot from Pudukkottai were in the van during the assault.

Bade Sahib abandoned his own campaign and quickly marched to relieve his brother. Before the Marathas had done more than establish a cavalry cordon his column reached Dindigul, the key fort that controlled the river crossing between the province of Trichinopoly and that of Madurai. The Marathas attempted to intercept but his brother, Sadak Sahib, reinforced Bade and the pair defeated the Marathas below the fort. This was clearly a small portion of the Maratha army, for when they hastened north to relieve Chanda they were intercepted again, this time by 20,000 men led by Raghuji himself. The battle site is variously given as Koduttalam or Manapparai. The latter is the most likely, because it sits on the main road to Trichinopoly, about 40 Km distant. Koduttalam cannot be easily identified but is supposedly '15 miles' or 24 Km from the fortress. The battle lasted 9 hours. Both sides lost about 3,000 dead, but the brothers were slain, Bade by a random bullet that dropped him from his elephant. His body, richly attired, was sent to Chanda as a warning (in some accounts they sent only his head).

*[A question that arises when looking at the map is why armies always marched by way of Dindigul. There was a more direct route through the lands of Pudukkottai — there is a spur of the Eastern Ghats between the two routes that isolates them. The probable reason is that Pudukkottai was forested and infested with guerrillas.]*

The official dates for the siege are often given as 15 December 1740 through to a date in March 1741, but the proper siege only lasted a month or so. The actual date of surrender is given variously as the 16th, 21st, 25th, or 26th of March. On the day, Raghuji ordered a full assault from all sides and his 'cannon-fodder', the southern *poligars* and the *pindari* cossacks, swarmed over the walls. In some accounts, the fortress was betrayed by one of the garrison who revealed a secret approach route. Chanda only surrendered after his life was guaranteed. He offered to pay 12 *lakhs* to be allowed to walk away, but the Marathas demanded an entire *crore*. (Which, after all, is what he originally promised them.) Before his surrender, Chanda appealed to his family. Amazingly, Safdar and some others banded together to raise funds to buy the Marathas off; equally amazingly, the wives of his slain brothers refused to help. The Marathas rejected the money.

*[The 16th and 25th probably correspond to Old Style/New Style dating using the British calendar of the times and is probably the true date. The 26th may be the day Chanda Sahib finally surrendered in person — it was often the case in a siege, especially of a large fortress, that the besiegers would occupy much but not all, and the defenders would negotiate from their last bolthole. The 21st may be a typo, or perhaps the day the traitor (if there was one) revealed the secret route, thus sealing Trichinopoly's fate.]*

Chanda and his son, with couple of other close relatives, made their way to the Maratha camp at midnight. Brought before Raghuji, the latter said nothing at all. They were taken into captivity, first at Berar and then at the Maratha capital, Satara. At least for the present they were well treated. Chanda

had held the coveted title of *nawab* for just five years. He would not be released until 1749, when the Marathas thought they could install him at Arcot as their puppet.

A garrison of 14,000 Marathas (Ramaswami says 30,000, though that may include the allies), under the capable Morari Rao Gorpade, occupied Trichinopoly and the rest returned to Satara (July 1741). Appaji Rao, one of Morari Rao's lieutenants, also took over Madurai province.

The Maravar chiefs, whose 10,000 men (5,000 horse and foot) had led the assault, were upset that the Marathas extorted 30 *lakhs* and the promise of a 3-*lakh* annual tribute from them as a war indemnity and *still* did not give the throne to Vijaykumara. So much for Hindu solidarity in the face of Muslim oppression. This would have consequences when the Marathas looked for aid in the face of the army of Hyderabad a couple of years later.

But, Maratha rule was light, at least for the Hindu population. All the various *poligar* chieftains and petty rajas were allowed to run their own affairs, and the temples were restored (Chanda had expropriated the lands for tax purposes and the locals had feared a lot of idol smashing, though that does not appear to have happened). Also, they — that is, Morari and Appaji — did not set themselves up as warlords with dreams of further conquest, but sought to govern wisely, Appaji in particular. Morari Rao would remain in control until 1743, and though the occupation was relatively short, in those two years the Marathas would undo decades of 'Islamization' on the Coromandel Coast, razing mosques and madrassas and building temples.

Sahuji was restored to the throne of Tanjore, but very soon ousted again by Pratap Singh. In response, the Marathas marched on Tanjore. But, rather than depose the usurper, they merely demanded a *crore's* ransom. Pratap Singh agreed to pay, gave his chief minister, one Govinda Rao, as a hostage, and the Marathas went away. It is not clear if Raghuji was simply insatiably greedy or if his troops, who had no doubt expected Chanda to dig deep and produce a king's ransom, simply demanded they be paid what they were 'owed', regardless of the payee's allegiance. By the by, Pratap Singh never did pay, and Govinda remained in close confinement for nine years, only escaping after he managed to bribe a guard.

During the siege of Trichinopoly Pondichéri was not forgotten, nor Madras. At Madras, the Marathas made two appearances in 1741, the last in December. Both times they were paid to go away. At Pondichéri, having got no satisfaction the first time, Raghuji upped the ante, demanding an annual tribute plus a 6 million rupee bonus. 16,000 of his men were sent on a rampage up and down the coast, securing 'donations' from Porto Novo (Parangipettai — a common entrepôt for all the companies) and Cuddalore (EIC). The column encamped with 8 Km of Pondichéri and scraped the country bare. But, when Raghuji sent one of his generals to interview Dumas the latter responded to the man's threats by showing him all the preparations he had made, the troops drilling like Europeans, the stout walls, the brimming storehouses, the ramparts lined with heavy ships' cannon. Dumas told him that although his country had no precious metals, it had plenty of iron. The general went away somewhat chastened.

In European terms Pondichéri's defences were not that strong, but they were too strong for a cavalry army to attack, and since the Marathas had no navy on this coast the town could not be starved out (except during the monsoon, but at that season a besieging army would also wither). And, more troops and ships were supposedly on their way from Mauritius. Still, Dumas was not sanguine. As was his way, he used diplomacy. The affair proved easy. 10 bottles of French cordial were sent to Raghuji, and his wife developed a taste for the stuff. The *Senasahibsubha* continued to pretend great anger against the French, but his wife, and a further present of 30 more bottles, wore him down. She asked him how he would ever get hold of the drink if the French were kicked out of India. Raghuji even ordered his army to cease pillaging the environs of Pondichéri. Anger assuaged, and able to lay the blame on his wife, Raghuji admitted Pondichéri was too tough a nut. Anyway, they had Chanda Sahib, the Sultanate of Arcot was in chaos, and the commitment to Tanjore had been fulfilled. The Marathas withdrew, though they still felt the French needed a lesson. In consequence, part of the army was sent against Mahé, where it would blockade the port until La Bourdonnais relieved the place.

[This is Medieval India... how did Raghuji allow his wife to boss him around? This is Medieval India. She outranked him.]

*The conduct of M. Dumas on this occasion — his bold and resolute refusal to deliver up his guests; the coolness with which he had defied the conqueror of Trichinopoly — procured him amongst the nations of Southern India, the reputation of a hero. Congratulations and thanks poured in to him from all sides. The Subadar of the Dekkan, Nizam ool Moolk, wrote to him a letter of thanks couched in terms of the highest respect, and transmitted to him, at the same time, a dress of honour. Sufder Ali, as a mark of esteem, sent him the armour of his deceased father, richly adorned with gold and precious stones, together with three elephants, several horses, many swords and jewelled weapons, and accompanied by a letter carried by his favourite Minister. The Emperor of Delhi, Mahomed Shah, on hearing of this successful resistance to Mahratta presumption, conferred upon M. Dumas the rank and title of Nawab, with the command of 4,500 horsemen, 2,000 of whom he was allowed to keep about his person in time of peace, without being at any charge for their maintenance. On the application of M. Dumas the title and command were declared transferable to his successor.*

*Malleson, pp.90-91*

Rajayyan believes the fighting over Madurai was crucial to the eventual rise of British power in India, because it renewed the region's instability and set the conditions for the Second Carnatic War, where the French pawn, Chanda Sahib, was set against the British pawn, Mohammad Ali, son of Anwár-ud-dín. Without the power struggles in Madurai the Europeans could not have gained traction.

### **Raghuji I Bhonsle (1695-1755)**

The Raghuji or Raghoji were a branch of the vast Bhonsale clan, which was the clan of the rulers of the Marathas. His ancestors had fought under Shivaji and been richly rewarded. His father died soon after he was born and he was looked after by a pair of uncles, who took him to the wars. When the uncle who planned to adopt him at last fathered a child of his own, Raghuji set off with 100 followers to offer his sword to the Kingdom of Devgad in Gondwana, the Gonds being a unique people of the Subcontinent. After serving there for some years he moved to Satara and enter the service of Shahu I. For slaying a man-eating tiger that threatened Shahu he was given many rewards and allowed to marry Shahu's wife's sister.

His other uncle was at that time the *Senasahibsubha*, or Commander in Chief. However, the uncle got into political trouble for dealing with the Nizam of Hyderabad. Raghuji was not involved, and in fact became the new *Senasahibsubha* in 1728. His first campaign involved bringing his uncle to justice. While doing so he campaigned in many parts of India, winning many victories and extending Maratha influence as far as Bengal.



In 1739 he was made King of Nagpur. His role was disputed by another claimant, Rayaji, but the latter died without an heir and from 1748 Raghuji held unchallenged authority, acquiring many territories. During the 1740s, apart from his expedition into the Carnatic, he participated in a number of campaigns against Bengal and conquered Orrisa, on the Bay of Bengal. He also took over Devagad as its Protector (1743).

### **Chanda Sahib (??-1752)**

Husayn Dost Khan, a.k.a Chanda or Chunda Sahib, was the son-in-law of the Nawab of the Carnatic, Dost Ali Khan, and functioned as his *dewan*, or finance/prime minister. Not much is known of his early life. Ironically, considering how many times he extorted money from Tanjore, some think he was a native of that city. He lacked a powerful client base and the income needed to become a great lord, but he had great ambition. An admirer of the French, he tied his star to theirs, but was never their tool. It is clear his ambition was to carve out a kingdom for himself under the aegis of the Mughal banner. After being taken prisoner by Raghuji, he was lodged at Satara, but when the Second Carnatic War broke out the Marathas decided (with some French persuasion) that he could serve as proxy Nawab with French military support. The EIC backed the legitimate heir to the Sultanate. Chanda and the French held the upper hand for some time, but his son suffered a reverse at the Battle of Arcot and Chanda, lacking troops, was forced to flee to Tanjore, where the Marathas, nominally his allies, took him prisoner once more. He was beheaded on the orders of Tanjore's ruler, Pratap Singh, in 1752.

### **Mahé and the Marathas**

This is another forgotten fragment of history. Somehow, a band of Marathas penetrated the Western Ghats and appeared before the CIO's factory at Mahé, in the lands of the Rajas of Kolathunadu. In some versions of the story they occupied the post for a little while, but La Bourdonnais descended on them and recaptured it. In other versions the fort held out and was relieved; the former seems to be the true situation. This will have been right in the middle of a dust up involving the French, British, and some of the vassal rajas of Kolathunadu, which will be described in the section on Malabar. It would appear that the British at Madras put them up to it, precisely because of this local conflict, which featured a French campaign of encroachment on the EIC's inland pepper routes. The Marathas do not seem to have made any sort of stand, but took themselves off when the French ships hove into view. However, it may be the raid had some lasting effect, because soon after the British at Tellicherry and the French at Mahé came to an understanding. This is why there is no Anglo-French campaign history for Malabar; they engaged in a truce that lasted a good 15 years, splitting the profits of the pepper trade while their companies banged away at each other in the Carnatic.

### **Anglo-French Rivalry**

The natural rivalries of the trading companies were normally held in check by the local authorities. As will be recounted later, in Malabar, where authority was weak, they could come to physical blows, but in the Carnatic the rivalry normally went no further than badmouthing each other in front of the Nawab and trying to steal each other's customer base. Standard practice for any corporation. The Marathas upset the applecart. The death of Dost Ali kicked off a succession crisis in the Sultanate, which in turn led to rampant banditry and unrest, which again led to a collapse of the Market and an inability to obtain goods. Things had been bad for some time, thanks to Dost Ali's inertia, the antics of his children, and Coromandel's own succession crisis. First the French, and then, reluctantly, the British, began to see a monopoly as the only means of securing a steady profit, and for some time now the representatives of each at the Nawab's Court had been actively seeking to 'do each other down' in a number of ways, including hiring bandits to attack each others' warehouses. The European war, which began in earnest in 1741, did not help, even though the French and British were not personally at war. Although the war was predominantly driven by French policy, it was the English who were the more bellicose. It is ironic that the CIO had the resources to make war in India while the EIC did not, yet the CIO's Directors hoped to maintain neutrality in Asia while the EIC personnel had an attitude of 'conflict is inevitable so let's get it over with'. That said, there was a strong desire for a fight among many of the French military, especially in the Navy, and in European waters French naval commanders caused a number of naval incidents that were winked at by Versailles.

No naval forces were assigned to the Indian Ocean. Well, to be pedantic, forces were assigned, and then withdrawn, in the following manner. In 1740 La Bourdonnais was ordered home from his post as Governor of Mauritius to answer various vague charges. At bottom this was simple jealousy on the part of some who envied his extreme wealth. The King's first minister, Cardinal Fleury, became prejudiced

against him, plus his name was linked with du Maurepas, the current minister of the Navy, who had enemies of his own. However, La Bourdonnais was exonerated, and even given a small squadron to take back to Mauritius. During the Maratha invasion, Governor Dumas had sent out urgent appeals for aid, and this was the Government's response.

It amounted to five ships and a support vessel, 1,200 sailors, and 500 soldiers, all untrained. Of the ships, two belonged to the Navy, and had been attached to prevent La Bourdonnais from exceeding his instructions — a common practice. In the event, the royal vessels were diverted to other duties. The ships were: *Fleury* (56), *Brillant* (50), *Aimiable* (50), *Renommée* (28), *Parfaite* (18). Such was La Bourdonnais' skill that by the end of their transit they had become an effective fighting force and could have done great damage. Meanwhile, the Directors became paranoid that he was going to set up his own kingdom, or start a war, or something equally silly, and they recalled the entire squadron. They were quite perceptive. La Bourdonnais did not comply immediately. Upon his arrival in-theatre, he sailed for Pondichéri (30 September), just missing the fracas with the Marathas. Hearing Mahé was in danger, he proceeded thither, as recounted above.

No longer needed for use against the natives, the Governor of Mauritius thought his forces could be employed against the EIC and no questions asked, but before he could act the new instructions arrived. He then dispatched the squadron home, along with a letter of resignation. This crossed paths with a letter from the Directors instructing him to hold onto his ships, as the situation in Europe had changed! Apparently there was a new Ministry and the new Comptroller of Finances/Secretary of State, one M. Orry, liked the cut of his jib. Orry rejected the letter of resignation, but the ships did not return. The confusion left the French without naval forces in the Indian Ocean almost until it was too late. As will be seen, La Bourdonnais managed to acquire a new squadron using some questionable methods, but it took many, many months. Fortunately, the British were occupied elsewhere until 1744.

*[Malleon seems to have been a great admirer of La Bourdonnais. He does not even mention the slaves on the latter's Mauritius plantations. But he thinks the Directors may have been right to worry, and also suggests that La Bourdonnais' early aid to Dumas might have been offered as something between peers, for personal benefit. The Governor of Mauritius had built a lucrative little fiefdom for himself.]*

Dumas, and Dupleix after him, were similarly instructed not to make war preparations. The CIO did not want to create any *casus belli*. Dumas might have obeyed, trusting to diplomacy, but in 1741 his term ran out. Dupleix was the natural choice to replace him, whether he needed to wield any influence to get the position or not. As a matter of fact, the two men did not get along very well and it was the Directors who handpicked Dupleix. He arrived at Pondichéri in October of 1741. In addition to the Company regalia he also acquired the title of Nawab of 4,500, which Delhi duly confirmed, Dupleix travelling as far as Chandernagore for the ceremony.

The new Governor General's first job was to repair the damage to the economy done by the Maratha incursion. There was famine in every direction. Safdar, who had hoped to be installed as the new Nawab of the Carnatic, was in jail, in Hyderabad, for failing to pay his dues to the Nizam. Also, there was considerable corruption among the company officials, which Dupleix proceeded to root out. Relations with the locals were still good, and in fact the local *ad-interim* Muslim governor came to pay his respects — it ought to have been the other way around, but Dupleix held a higher rank in the Mughal system. His position as a *nawab* was a card the new Governor General played very often. In personality he was naturally punctilious, especially toward inferiors, while doing as he pleased on his own account. This was exactly how the native princes expected him to behave; he fit in perfectly.

Toward the end of the year Dupleix was alarmed by rumours that the British intended to send an expedition. As a matter of fact they had prepared one, and it had sailed, but its target was Cartagena des Indías. The only reinforcements for Madras, in 1742, were a handful of recruits sent to replace natural losses. All the same, the new Governor General was not happy. Despite his dynamic personality Dupleix saw that a war between the Europeans might cause one or both of them to lose face, and might also severely damage the French influence networks. So he was inclined to go along with his instructions from France. However, he thought their orders to make absolutely no moves that could be misconstrued were idiotic. He preferred a policy of firm deterrence. On the EIC's side, their personnel

heard the same rumours and decided they had nothing to lose in a fight. They had no political networks and would be quite happy to see the French ones dismantled. But, at the same time, at least so far as Madras was concerned, there was no push to begin preparations for a war. Meanwhile, Dupleix was feverishly strengthening Pondichéri. Lacking company funds, he spent his own money; Safdar's land gift, and the rewards of the other princes to Dumas, were already proving useful.

*Here was seen the real evil, of a body of men in Europe, absolutely ignorant and careless of Indian affairs, beyond what concerned their own commerce, having supreme control in all matters relating to the Indian settlements. It was impossible for such men to appreciate the causes, which, at this particular time, made the English eager for a war, in spite of the fact that war would, for a time at least, greatly hinder their trade. It was only by bold disobedience to their orders, by pushing forward the work of fortification with all possible speed, and by supplying from his own fortune the sums which the Company withdrew, that Dupleix saved French power in India. At the same time Dupleix himself tried every means of bringing about a convention of neutrality; but to such a proposal Mr Morse, who was, at this time, the English governor of Madras, could not agree. The instructions from home were quite definite, and it was not in his power to dispute them.*

Rapson, pp.37-38

## **The Coming of the Nizam**

### **Bubble, Bubble, Toil, and Trouble**

The Sultanate of the Carnatic continued to suffer from the loss of Dost Ali. Safdar was installed as Nawab while the Marathas were still on their campaign, but of a Sultanate that had lost nearly half its territory. Besides being a vassal of both the Marathas and the Nizam, he also switched his allegiance from the CIO to the EIC on the advice of the *diwan*, Mir Assud, who suspected Chanda Sahib (then still at Trichinopoly) and the French were in league against Arcot. To their relief, Chanda was taken by the Marathas, but Safdar also was shortly to be overthrown. Of the two men, Safdar seems to have been much the weaker in character, and it is probable that Chanda's dominant personality coupled with the fact that Safdar was the heir to Arcot was the root cause of the latter's jealousies and intrigues, most of which seem to have rebounded on himself in the end.

Bullied from all sides, Safdar ruthlessly extorted funds from his nobles to pay tribute to the Marathas and at the same time neglected to pay the Nizam his feudal dues. As noted earlier, this had led to his imprisonment by the latter, but only for a short time. Then, at Vellore, while attending a festival on 2 September 1742 (or 13 October), he was assassinated by another brother-in-law, Murtuza Ali Khan, the Nawab of Vellore, who first tried to poison him, then had him and one of his sons stabbed to death in their sleep. In this Murtuza was assisted by his wife, Safdar's sister. If human nature was following its usual course, no doubt his wife nagged him to get on with the job.

Safdar had been cruel as only a weak man in a position of authority can be, but by the standards of his class he was not a terrible ruler. Murtuza was a nasty piece of work. His few apologists claimed he was acting for the good of the dynasty, because of rumours that Safdar was going to resign as Nawab, and when he learned this was untrue Murtuza was overcome with remorse. There is some evidence this story may be partly true. Apparently a draft letter of resignation to the Nizam was indeed found in Safdar's desk. Perhaps some spy read it and Murtuza took preventative steps. It also seems to be the case that his coup had leverage thanks to resistance to Safdar's extortionate taxation — as administrator of Vellore, Murtuza would have been responsible for its collection in his bailiwick and would have had to make up any difference out of his own pocket. There are two other motives. One is that he was not supposed to be the Nawab of Vellore; that was the role of his elder brother. But his wife interceded, and he got the job for a year. However, Murtuza held on to power and would not let his brother resume the position. Safdar did not force him to step down, but in a burst of anger said he would do so if Murtuza did not shape up.

Ramaswami quotes Orme (p.64): "*Mortiz-ally, born cruel and treacherous, had no restraints in his composition to stop his hand from the perpetration of any crime by which his avarice, ambition, or*

*revenge could be gratified; he was indeed by many suspected of being uncommonly deficient in personal courage, but this persuasion seems to have taken its rise from the suspicious habits of his domestic life; since he never moved, even in his own palace, without being surrounded by guards nor ever ventured to taste any thing that was not brought to him in a vessel to which his wife had affixed her seal."* Ramaswami goes on to say that his conduct led others to act likewise.

According to Ramaswami there are three versions of the deed. In all of them, it is said Safdar was invited to stay at Vellore for the festival. Because of the festival he also allowed all but four of his own retainers to go and be with their families, and some say he even accepted Murtuza's men in their place. During the festival Murtuza is supposed to have asked his wife, 'do you require a white veil or a red one?' She replied that she preferred red. Now, the significance of this cryptic exchange is that white was the colour of widows and red that of women who still had a husband. Murtuza was implying that it was either him or Safdar. In this version it was she who made poisoned soup for Safdar and sent it to him with her trademark seal. The poison was not strong enough but he eventually passed out, and some of Murtuza's creatures were sent finish him off. They found him just reviving and slew him. A different version has him poisoned at the banquet but merely made sick, at which Murtuza asked for volunteers to finish him but could only get one, a Pathan whose wife Safdar had ravished. In this version Safdar tried to flee out a window but was grabbed by the Pathan, who stabbed him repeatedly in exaltation. In the third version he was simply stabbed in his sleep. All the versions have witnesses.

They were going to kill Mir Assud, too, but at the last minute he was spared because someone pointed out that the finances were three years' in arrears and he was the only one who knew who owed what. Who says bookkeeping is a useless profession?

Murtuza faced multiple challenges and did not hold the throne for long. His own officers applied to Morari Rao, the Maratha Governor of Trichinopoly, to help them overthrow him. The Governor was more than willing, just from personal dislike of the man. Simultaneously, Murtuza's unpaid soldiers mutinied, possibly at the instigation of a third faction within the dynasty. Murtuza fled from Arcot to Vellore. Depending on the version he was either carried away in a cauldron or disguised himself as a woman riding in a palanquin. Once at Vellore he locked himself in. He would kick around the Carnatic for another decade until the British-sponsored Muhammad Ali threw him into a dungeon for keeps.

This left Safdar's infant son, Seid Muhammad Khan, but he and his mother were living at Madras for safety and it would be tricky moving them to Arcot without some assassin finishing them both off. He was proclaimed Nawab nonetheless, with the regnal name of Sa'adullah II Khan, but this did not stop every noble with any drop of ambition rallying his entourage and making war on his neighbours.

Anarchy reigned for months until the Nizam of Hyderabad stepped in, early in 1743. Like the Marathas in 1740, his intervention was not entirely disinterested. Though he was extremely angry about the situation in the Carnatic, he did nothing about it during 1742, besides moving his capital from Hyderabad to Golconda, to be farther away from the Marathas. They in turn were having their own problems. Raghuji had fallen foul of the new *peshwa*, Balaji Baji Rao, whom he was plotting to oust from power. They were in no position to do anything — though, apparently there was a Maratha force besieging Vellore during the early part of 1743; no details are available. These may have been troops under Morari Rao trying to get at Murtuza.

But, in January 1743, the Nizam received an offer from the *dalvoy* (prime minister) of Mysore. That state was once again taking advantage of the situation in the Carnatic to extend its borders. Though this was chiefly at neighbouring Sira's expense, Mysore still had designs in the direction of Madurai. The *dalvoy* offered the Nizam a *crore* of rupees for Trichinopoly. Despite all the changes of ownership it was still, notionally, part of the Mughal Empire and thus his to sell, but there was one small problem. It also had a Maratha garrison. The Nizam supposedly also received Bangaru Tirumalai and his son at his court, both hoping to restore the Nayakas to the throne of Madurai. An alternate version has it that the Nizam approached Ramnad for military assistance in the coming campaign, offering to put a Nayaka on the throne. However, Bangaru Tirumalai, who had gone to Arcot for safety (!) wound up being poisoned. The Nizam decided it was time to sort out the South.

He came in force, with 80,000 horse and 200,000 foot, some 400 baggage elephants (100 for musical instruments alone), and 100 more for the artillery, of which there were enough pieces (200) to flatten any fortress on the Carnatic Plain. He came with his son Nasir Jung, a man of 30 and his chief general, another son named Jamal-ud-din Khan, and another son, aged 8. He himself was 80 years old but still rode his own elephant. For retainers they had 40 noblemen, with retainers, and another hundred officers of state. The royal horse numbered 20,000. 20,000 more cavalry were commanded by various officers of state, and there were 10,000 'feudal' or mercenary horse. The whole camp occupied 25 square kilometres.

## **The Siege of Trichinopoly (Again)**

The army marched from the Nizam's temporary seat at Golconda down to Arcot. At Arcot, which he entered unopposed, he formally installed the baby Nawab, appointing one of his officers, Khoja Abdalla (Kwaja Abdullah), guardian. This act allayed the fears of the remaining Nevayet clan, though in reality Khoja was acting Nawab and the baby was in the care of the Nizam's court.

*[According to one of Ramaswami's sources, Khoja was quite a character. As a young man he and his brother had fallen prey to the moneylenders. One day he took a whip and they beat their moneylender. They told him they would do so every time he lent them money. Naturally, he stopped. They then hoarded their pay until they nearly starved, but it made them rich enough to buy advancement. The Nizam favoured him because he and Khoja were both Turanis.]*

Next, the Nizam marched to Vellore and dispersed the Maratha force besieging it, before advancing on Trichinopoly. Camping in front of the city, the Nizam summoned Morari Rao to come and pay homage. The Maratha governor decided he would rather fight. At this time he had about 4,000 foot and 2,000 horse, plus a large stock of cannon. The details of the siege are scant and a little confusing. It is said that the Nizam occupied three outer enclosures and camped there, blocking the gates that connected them. It is not clear whether these positions had to be fought for or not. One would assume so, but perhaps Morari Rao retreated to the citadel immediately. In European sieges it was often the case that a town would be yielded quickly, sometimes by prearrangement, and the fight made over the citadel alone. Once entrenched, the Nizam built batteries against the main fort. This was done under a continuous rain of cannonballs, musket shot, and grenades, mainly intended to prevent the Nizam's men from forming scaling parties. For his part, the Nizam decided to only harass the defenders, and attrit them.

Time was on his side. There would be no help from Satara. After six months the siege abruptly came to an end, on 26 August 1743. Morari Rao, having decided no one was going to relieve him, and running low on supplies, negotiated, and scored the governance of Penukonda, a hill fortress on the borders of Mysore in the direction of Sira that Mysore was willing to swap for Trichinopoly. He also received a gift of 2 lakhs and recognition of his rule over Gooty, which lay within the Nizam's sphere of influence. The city was formally handed over on 29 August. This siege reestablished Mughal rule over the Carnatic. Presumably Mysore got the revenues, or a portion of them, as agreed, but this is entirely speculation. Appaji Rao also surrendered, leaving the ancient Madurai state once again with only its most southerly province, Tinnevely.

Nimathullah Khan, son of Khoja Abdalla, was made governor of Trichinopoly (in some accounts just a deputy of his father). To step forward in the narrative, Khoja Abdalla did not last long. He and the Nizam returned to Golconda, arriving there in March of 1744. Already an old man, he died in bed on the eve of his return south. The Nizam had to find another regent fast, and decided on Anwár-ud-dín, a man of experience, who arrived at Arcot in April 1744. There are rumours that Anwar had Khoja poisoned because he wanted his job. Then, in early June Sa'adatullah Khan II was murdered, supposedly by the evil Nawab of Vellore. That unworthy's participation was never proved, but he had been at Madras to attend a wedding at the time, and he did flee back to Vellore afterward with a large entourage. In consequence, the Nevayet dynasty came to an end. This assassination is also rumoured to have really been executed by Anwar.

The fate of the old Madurai General shows that Anwár-ud-dín was not above assassination. As mentioned previously, the General and the titular raja of Madurai, Vijayakumara, applied to the Nizam for

restoration under terms previously offered to the Marathas — their payment of a 30 *lakh* indemnity and 3 *lakhs* annual tribute. The Nizam agreed, and put Anwar in charge of the details, but Anwar never followed through and neither did the Nizam. The latter did give the General an allowance and took him into his service to help restore order in the Carnatic, saying that Madurai would be restored to him once the situation was calm. Instead, the old General was somehow poisoned. As for Khoja Abdalla, Anwar had been temporary governor at Golconda at the time he died. In the case of Sa'adatullah, however, Murtuza always seemed to have been the real culprit, and to have plotted to kill Anwar as well. There may have been two attempts, too. Anwar was resented by the local population as well as the remnants of the former dynasty, and his removal to face charges would have been welcomed. In one version, a Pathan was blamed for the assassination of the boy *nawab*. He could not name who put him up to it, for he was cut to pieces on the spot, but evidence emerged that it was Murtuza. Other versions name a faction seeking revenge, again with ties to the Vulture of Vellore. Interestingly, though, the Nizam at first thought Anwar was guilty and that the evidence against Murtuza was a frame-up. Some historians of the next generation argued that Murtuza's flight did not indicate guilt but merely a desire for self-preservation, and they cite a source who stated the murder was orchestrated by Anwar, using Murtuza as a patsy, probably as the man who hired the Pathan or gang of Pathans (depending on the version). This would at least leave Murtuza as a coconspirator. Anwar later made a great show of clearing all Pathans out of the Carnatic, as troublemakers, but people were not convinced. He also divvied up the Sultanate amongst his family.

## War! 1744-1745

*The English were intimidated by the threat of Anwár-ud-dín and Pondichery, a place unprotected by a fleet or by proper fortifications, a place which Barnet's squadron could have taken in a very short time, without any risk to itself, was saved. The enormous disadvantage at which the English had placed themselves by their utter ignorance of native affairs, was nowhere seen more strikingly than in this instance. They had been content to remain in the belief, which their fathers had held, that the powers of the Great Mogul were invincible. The French, on the other hand, while mingling with native princes, had initiated themselves in all their rivalries and intrigues, and had fully learned the weakness which these rivalries and intrigues produced. A very short time after this, Anwár-ud-dín, in a temporary fit of rage, threatened the French in a somewhat similar manner, and, moreover, had begun to carry his threat into practice with a vast army. Far from submitting, Dupleix ordered a small band of 230 Frenchmen and 700 Sepoys, under a young officer named Paradis, to cut right through this vast army, said to number 10,000, and the result was one of the most complete routs on record.*

Rapson, p.39

In 1743 Dupleix received a letter from his Directors. War between Britain and France was immanent. Therefore, they were cutting his annual supply runs down to four ships, two to Bengal and two to Pondichéri (and nothing, apparently, for Mahé). Counterintuitively, there would be no money for defensive works. Also, he was to cut his expenses in half... somehow.

*The announcement in this despatch, that a war with their great European rivals in India and on the seas was impending, and the injunction which accompanied it to spend no money on the fortifications — the unsatisfactory condition of which was nevertheless known to the Company — must have sounded strange in the ears of Dupleix. Not only were the fortifications in bad order, but on the front facing the sea there was a space of a thousand toises — nearly a mile and a quarter — which was absolutely open. Regarding this in connexion with the intimation he had received of the prospect of an European war, in which the enemies of France might obtain the mastery of the Indian seas, he felt that his duty as Governor of Pondichery — a place for which he was responsible to his sovereign — was paramount to every other. The orders which he received he therefore boldly disregarded. He caused a solid rampart to be erected along the entire length of the open space, with a broad and deep ditch in its front. On this, night and day, the workmen were employed; yet with all their vigilance, the rampart was not completed until nearly two years after war with England had broken out, and it required the exercise of all the genius and talent of Dupleix to prevent an attack, by a powerful English squadron, on the unfinished defences. The expenses of this undertaking Dupleix supplied by his purse and by his credit.*

Malleson, p.96

The Company was, of course, convinced they could work out a deal for neutrality with the EIC and did not want to scare British. Dupleix not only cut expenses, he continued to improve Pondichéri's fortifications — not an easy task, because the job was on him, personally, and not on the Pondichéri Council, so that they could easily have blocked him had he tinkered with their budget. There were complaints, but no mutiny. Partly, he bought cargoes at his own expense and shipped them home. In the end, since the construction work had not cost the company a *sou*, the Directors approved it. Meanwhile, the CIO's military resources at Pondichéri remained fixed at one small warship and 436 European soldiers. Of course, Dupleix had his personal nawab's contingent and local levies, but their use against Europeans might have been problematic. The ship was sent off to rally La Bourdonnais at Mauritius and an emissary was sent to Anwár-ud-dín.

*[The ships Dupleix sent home with personally collected cargoes were Fleury and Brillant, based out of Mauritius.]*

The new Nawab of Arcot — it may be better to give him his other title, Nawab of the Carnatic, since he was Hyderabad's man — was still finding his feet. There were dozens of unruly *poligars* and bandit gangs running about. Therefore, he was willing to act as arbiter and feudal overlord, in the proper style, honouring Dupleix's request as from a fellow *nawab* and trying to keep the peace. He immediately warned Governor Morse at Madras not to attack the French on land. What took place on water was none of his business, but if forces were landed, or ships attacked land targets, he would take action. This stern warning terrified the Madras Council and they agreed, but they also asked that he prevent the French from attacking them. This seemed only fair, and the Nawab said he would do so. Thus, for a couple of years there were no land actions between the CIO and EIC. In fact, Dupleix was more concerned with rebuilding trade and restoring his reputation — asking Anwar for help so quickly had made him look weak. At sea, it was very different.

## **Barnett's Squadron**

*'We are now executing against you', said Commodore Barnet to the captain of a French merchantman he had taken, 'that which M. de la La Bourdonnais had projected against us.'*

*Malleson, p.117*

It bears repeating that, although the various naval commanders were supposed to be protecting their nations' commercial interests and to be under the Companies' authority in one way or another, in real terms the war at sea was part of the general Anglo-French conflict, while the minimal fighting on land was very much driven by the outlook of the men on the spot — or in other words, the fighting between the companies was all Dupleix's fault. (Which is not quite fair, since La Bourdonnais also played a part.)

If French naval resources were entirely lacking in the East, British naval resources were considerable. Circa 1740 the EIC had about 40 large vessels, 10-12 of which would be in Indian waters in any given year. But, for what the British had in mind these would not do. A Royal Navy squadron was required. This arrived in the fall of 1744. Departing England on 30 April, Commodore Curtis Barnett's flotilla consisted of a pair of 60-gunners, a 50', and a 20-gun frigate. Barnett was one of the 'new' school of practical officers, a disciple of the great Admiral Anson and an aggressive leader. Because the Admiralty could not spare many ships, they also issued a great number of letters of marque to captains of the EIC, which were snapped up greedily. Barnett's duties were primarily to aid this effort while also protecting British trade. He was in a sense seconded to the EIC, rather than operating under direct Admiralty orders.

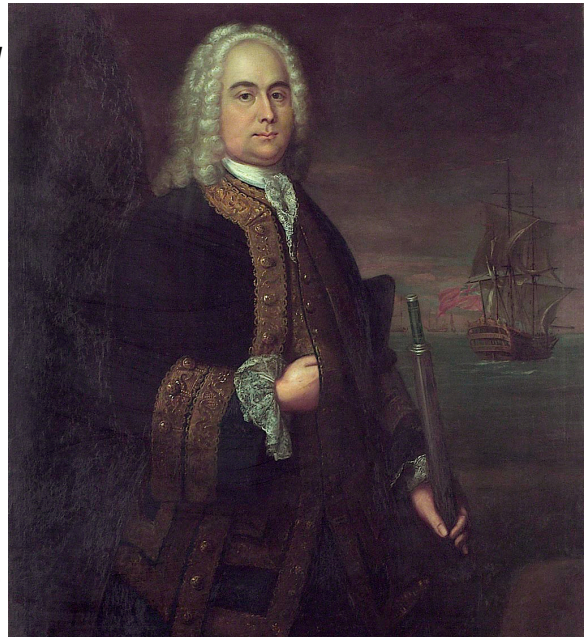
He arrived at St. Augustine's Bay in Madagascar on 26 August. Madagascar at this time had a number of French trading posts but it was not a French possession. St. Augustine's Bay, at the southwestern end of the island, was where the British generally made for when they needed to refit and water their ships. Most of the French factories were at the other end, away from the pirate bases. Barnett did not proceed to India immediately. In December, new orders would be dispatched for him to patrol the Coromandel Coast, but for now, operating under the instructions of the Secret Committee of the EIC, he intended to harass the French China trade. Thus, he made for île Saint-Paul, a lonely rock in the middle of the Southern Indian Ocean (8 October) and then turned his ships north toward Dutch Batavia. The 60-gunner *Medway* and the 20-gun *Dolphin* were instructed to cruise the Strait of Malacca, while Barnett in the 60-gun *Deptford*, accompanied by the 50-gunner *Preston*, patrolled the Bangka Strait disguised as Dutchmen.

[Beatson says Medway's companion was the frigate Diamond.]

Off the East coast of Sumatra, roughly where the coastline turns south toward the Sunda Strait and Java, there is a large island, known as Bangka. The strait of the same name, quite narrow, lies between. This was a favoured merchant route, and Barnett acquired his first prizes here when he encountered three French merchantmen, each of 30 guns, on the evening of 24 or 25 January, 1745. The British hoisted their true colours and the French immediately attacked, coming within musket range. Barnett tried to board, but both his ships had their tiller ropes shot away. A duel of broadsides followed for the next hour and a half until the French all struck their colours. Losses for the British were 10 killed and 17 wounded. The prizes were fully loaded with tea, china, and silk. Barnett sold them off at Batavia for a mere £92,000.

A month later reinforcements reached him, along with his new orders. The new ships were *York* (60), *Stafford* (50), and *Lively* (20). *Medway* and *Dolphin* also returned. They had captured a privateer near Aceh, at the northern tip of Sumatra. This ship, ex-*Favori* (38), was renamed *Medway's Prize* and subbed in for *Dolphin*, now barely seaworthy; she was made a hospital ship.

As so often happened to RN commanders, Barnett's new orders presented him with a choice. On the one hand he had authorization to proceed to the Philippines and attack the Manila Galleon. This was prompted by the return of Admiral Anson to England in June of 1744, loaded down with the contents of the last galleon. But, Governor Morse was pleading for help. La Bourdonnais had at last formed a new squadron of his own. Unaware of Versailles' instructions restricting the Breton to defensive activities, Madras feared he would raid their factories.



Commodore Barnett

Morse miscalculated by pinning all his hopes on Barnett's squadron, instead of organizing a defence of his own. Probably, his Council were so inclined to let things slide that he had no real option. Relying solely on Barnett meant he put the latter on a short lead. This caused a great deal of anger among the RN officers. They did not like being at Morse's beck and call, particularly since opinion blamed him and the Madras Council for the sorry state of the EIC's preparations. Nonetheless, Barnett left Batavia on 28 April, 1745, making landfall off Sri Lanka on 1 June, watering and repairing at the Dutch port of Batticaloa, midway up the East coast of the island, by 5 June. His first job was going to be the security of the regular convoy of inbound EIC ships, with whom he was supposed to rendezvous. Richmond (*The Navy in the War of 1739-48*) gives the location as 'the Friar's Hood'. This is actually a high mountain in the interior of the island, visible far out to sea.

The merchant ships were late, and, apparently, three weeks earlier a squadron of four French ships had passed by, headed north. This worried Barnett. Deciding the French had too much of a lead, he cruised off the Friar's Hood, exercising his ships until 19 July. But, bothered by the lack of news, he then made for the Dutch factory at Nagapattinam. Here he received a letter from Madras suggesting he cruise between his current location and Pondichéri, which he proceeded to do. On 11 August he reported in at Madras, to find the place woefully prepared against the attack everyone feared. The garrison amounted to 350 poorly motivated soldiers. According to Barnett, Madras' defences 'seem rather built by chance than design; the bastions are placed contrary to all rules...' (quoted in Ramaswami, p.89). Only now did Madras learn it was truly at war, though Pondichéri had the news in July.

All this time there had been no word of either the French or the threatened EIC convoy. Governor Morse had heeded the warning of Anwár-ud-dín not to interfere with French activities on land. Concerned that

the French might combine with the Nawab if he disobeyed, Morse ordered Barnett to confine himself to purely naval activities, and also to avoid bombarding Pondichéri. RN rage increased, but Barnett obeyed, sending a patrol up to the Ganges while the rest of his vessels patrolled off Porto Novo, just south of Fort St. David, the EIC factory at Cuddalore.

With the onset of the Northeast monsoon in September, Barnett had to leave the Coast, which gave no shelter anywhere along its length. He crossed the Bay of Bengal to a rendezvous off the coast of Myanmar, at Mergui (27 September). Here he learned his Ganges patrol (*Preston* and *Lively*) had succeeded in rounding up all the inbound French ships, amounting to three heavily-armed Indiamen. He sent *Preston* back there and dispatched *Medway* to the Strait of Malacca. Barnett and the rest of the squadron returned to Madras, arriving there on 17 December. As he had surmised, the EIC convoy had at last made an appearance — five vessels with an escort of two Royal Navy ships, *Harwich* and *Winchester*. These had already finished their most of their business and were making ready to return home.

(Goods from the Orient did not normally travel all the way from China to Europe in the same bottoms. That would not have been efficient. Instead, the merchandise was stockpiled at places like Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay by a network of local shipping, to be picked up by the convoys from Europe. This particular convoy had left England on 15 April 1745 and would arrive home on 25 August 1746.)

The next three weeks were spent in some anxiety, as rumours circulated of a projected French attack on Fort St. David. La Bourdonnais still lacked enough ships for that, but three or four of the CIO vessels still in the China seas were reported bound for Pondichéri. Barnett moved his pennant to the *Harwich*, another 60-gunner, sent *Winchester* (50) to assist *Medway* in the Malacca Strait, and posted *Deptford* off Cuddalore. With his remaining ships he monitored Pondichéri.

## Anwar's Campaigns

The death of the old General, Bangaru Tirumai, sparked unrest in Madurai. His son, Vijayakumara, gathered a band of *poligars* and Maravar nobles. Against them came the son of Anwar, Mahfuz Khan, operating out of Trichinopoly. Ambushed by a force of Kallars in the hilly Natham district north of Madurai town, he was forced to retreat. His brother, Mohammad Ali, then gave it a shot and managed to capture Madurai town. From here he marched into Tinnevely and began to pacify the *poligars* of that region, destroying about 70 small forts and capturing several of the chief men of the district. But, he also was ambushed as he marched home and only just managed to escape. The deep South remained wild.

A campaign against Tanjore worked out better. Pratap Singh was invading Ramnad just for something to do and Mohhamad Ali aided the Raja of Ramnad, after which Anwar himself led two campaigns against Tanjore, one in 1744 and one in 1745, and recovered a couple of districts that Pratap Singh had prized loose from Arcot. Tanjore and Madurai then tried to call in Mysore to curb Anwar's muscle flexing, but nothing came of it. Mir Assud also tried to make trouble for the new dynasty — he was no longer *dewan* and it rankled — but was 'suppressed'.

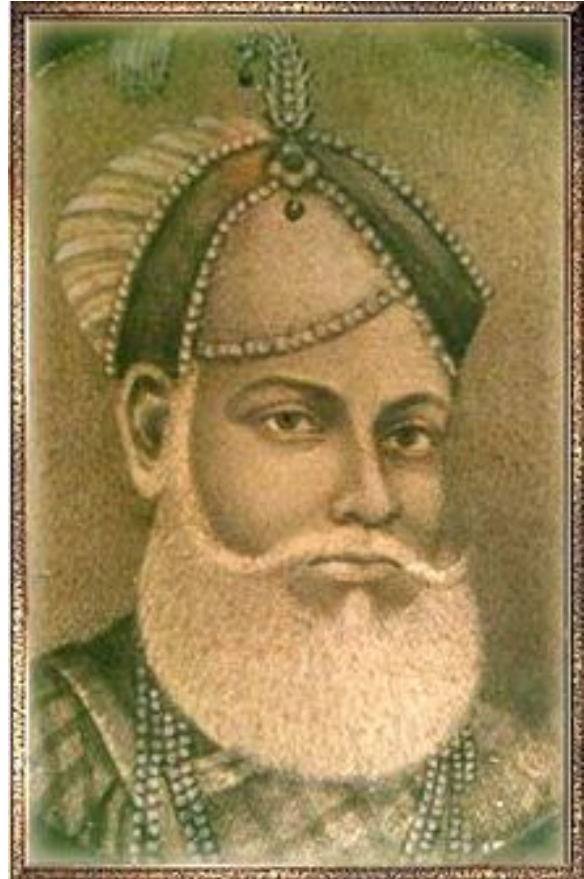
Also in 1744 came the first of two more Maratha expeditions into the Carnatic. This one was partly a response to the loss of Trichinopoly. It was led by Babuji Naik of Baramati, assisted by the ubiquitous Fateh Singh Bhonsle of Akkalot. Chandramauliswar (*Maratha Invasion*) describes the expedition as 'feeble'. It came by way of Salem, a good 180 Km from the coast on the borders of Mysore, through the hill country west of Madurai, and thence hooked north to Trichinopoly, which was reached in March, 1745. They only stayed about a month, and accomplished nothing. Babuji fought a battle with the combined forces of Anwar and Muzaffar Jung, lieutenant of the Nizam, at Basavapatna, which is in the Shimoga district of the Western Ghats, a good 350 Km west of Arcot, the same distance northwest of Trichinopoly, and slightly farther from Madurai, on the ill-defined border between Mysore and the Kingdom of Bednur. Clearly, the Maratha enforcers were making the rounds of the shops. Bednur as well as Mysore were 'clients' of theirs. There are no details for the battle, but it went badly for Babuji. Of course, with a Maratha cavalry army there could be no real 'defeat', but they did leave the district in some haste.

*Governor General Dupleix meeting with Anwar's son, Mir Jung*

**Muhammad Anwár-ud-dín Khan Wallajah, a.k.a Awaruddin Khan, a.k. Muhammad Awaruddin (1672-1749)**

Born in the land of Awadh, Muhammad Anwaruddin began his career in the service of the Great Mughal at Delhi and rose high, acquiring many *jaghirs* and titles. In the 1720s he was, among other posts, made Minister of Hyderabad, serving under the Nizam, who made him his *Yameen-us-Sultanat* or right-hand man. It was for this reason that he was selected to be first Regent, and then Nawab of Arcot. Though as the narrative shows he played a balancing act between the CIO and EIC, in the main he was pro-British. When the Second Carnatic War broke out the EIC backed him against Chanda Sahib. However, he was killed in the Battle of Ambur in 1749. (The EIC then sponsored his son, Muhammad Ali Khan Wallajah.

Awaruddin Khan was a difficult man to assess. There is a wealth of evidence that he arranged or caused the death of the man who was first picked to be Regent, and the boy Nawab, and the tool he used on that job, and perhaps even the old General of Madurai. He was certainly desirous of founding his own dynasty in the Carnatic.



## **The War at Sea in 1746**

In 1746, local politics calmed down slightly, while the Europeans went at it hammer and tongs.

Arriving in strength off Cuddalore on 28 January, 1746, Barnett found Fort St. David under attack by 1,000 soldiers, including 400 Europeans, who had marched down from Pondichéri. The fort was not large, but 1,000 men seemed insufficient to carry the place. Barnett suspected the whole thing was a ruse to draw him off from Pondichéri so the China ships — which his command had failed to find — could sneak in. He left *Dolphin* to provide some fire support and raise the alarm if anything bad should happen while he took the rest of his squadron on a pretended descent of Pondichéri. The French column retreated in a panic.

As a matter of fact the China ships never did arrive. The sources do not explain why, but it is worth noting that the Qing Empire began making drastic changes to their trade policies at this time, which would result in the famous Canton System coming into force in 1757. The French may have had to remain in port, or perhaps were unable to offload or take on cargo, while the Authorities tried to figure out what the Son of Heaven had in mind for them.

On 5 February the EIC ships sailed for home, accompanied by *Deptford* and *Dolphin*. *Winchester*, *Medway*, and *Lively* returned but the first sailed for Bombay, where she refitted. By the end of the month Barnett was satisfied that, given the season, no French merchantmen would be coming from either direction and decided to follow the next part of his instructions, which were to cruise off Sri Lanka. But, the EIC, worried about a rumoured squadron coming from l'Orient (it sailed in April of 1745) asked him to stay. A council of war was held and the Company's interests were deemed paramount.

Throughout March and April the British cruised off the Coromandel Coast, the only actions being the beaching and burning of a couple of French vessels at different locations — the first had opened fire while in a neutral anchorage. Not only were Barnett's ships in a bad way, he himself was sick; he died on 29

April, and was replaced by his second, Captain Edward Peyton. It would be the latter's misfortune to go up against La Bourdonnais.

It was March of 1746 before the Governor of Mauritius could muster enough strength to challenge the British. He was informed France was in a state of war with Britain sometime in September 1744, but, as noted earlier, thanks to deliberate interference from the CIO, who still sought 'peaceful coexistence', he could acquire no ships until the following spring, and only then by commandeering Company vessels as they came from Europe, against the protests of their captains and his instructions from Versailles. A bad harvest leading to famine on the islands slowed progress further. He had also to drill the crews. He had a squadron of sorts ready by July 1745, but it was on the one hand very weak, being only five ships, while at the same time it consumed too much of the resources of the islands.

Receiving word that another five ships were being sent to him (timed to arrive in October of 1745), La Bourdonnais decided that year to send the squadron to Madagascar for the winter. This would ease provisioning and also set them in the path of the trade winds. But, the reinforcements were delayed and the squadron returned to Mauritius.

In January of 1746 the first of the reinforcements began to arrive. Richmond names: *Achille* (70), followed in February by *St. Louis* (36), *Lys* (36), *Phénix* (38), and *Duc d'Orléans* (36). Malleson names the entire squadron: *Achille*, *Bourbon* (42; actually 34), *Phénix* (44/38), *Neptune* (36/30), *St. Louis* (36/26), *Duc d'Orléans* (36/24), *Renommée* (28/24), *Insulaire* (30/20), *Neptune des Indes* (34). The discrepancy is the missing *Lys*, but La Bourdonnais may have renamed the vessel. There might also be a tenth unnamed support ship. Apart from the *Achille*, the reinforcements were unarmed merchantmen that he had to rearm with 8 and 12-pounder cannon. Even now La Bourdonnais could not act. These Company ships had to be unloaded, rearmed, and refit after a gruelling ten-months voyage. The continuing lack of victuals in the islands at least gave him the justification to sail for India. He could only scrape together enough supplies for 72 days, so there would be no aggressive cruising, but he could at least place his ships in-theatre and see what could be done to help Duplex.

La Bourdonnais left Mauritius on 24 March, sailing first for Madagascar (4 April) aboard *Achille*. As inevitably happened with French squadrons, his ships were severely bruised and scattered by a violent storm that lasted three days, and he had to use up most of his provisions repairing them at Antongil Bay. Most of his carpenters died in the process.

*At last, however, they found a safe refuge in the Bay of Antongil, on the north eastern coast of Madagascar. In this bay, lying off a desert island within, it the work of refitting was undertaken. Perhaps never was such a work begun under so many accumulated disadvantages. The island was marshy and insalubrious; the periodical rains had begun; the ships had suffered fearfully, and their crews were knocked up by fatigue. There was no landing place; the forest whence wood was to be procured was on the mainland, upwards of two miles distant; between it and the shore was a marsh three miles in circumference; a winding river with sufficient water to render the frequent crossing [of] it wearisome, but not sufficient to float the logs down to the sea; and, even when in the sea, they were yet three miles from the shipping. But these difficulties, great as they were, were all overcome. He built a quay of the stone which the island produced, he erected workshops for the construction of masts, ropes, and other appliances; he threw a road across the marsh; he caused the logs to be dragged along the bed of the river, and constructing rude canoes, he launched them at its mouth, and by their aid paddled the logs to the side of the disabled vessels. To choose these logs, he penetrated into the pestilential forests, in order that he might be sure that he had the advantage of the best species of wood procurable. His example stimulated the whole fleet. Those who, at first, had been inclined to show discontent, could not long resist his magic influence. But a short time elapsed before all worked with an energy of which before they had scarcely seemed capable. At the end of forty-eight days they had repaired every damage, though at a loss, from climate and exposure of ninety-five Europeans and thirty-three negroes. The fleet however was saved, and was once more ready to sail for the long-wished-for goal.*

*Malleson, pp. 121-122*

According to Malleson, he set sail again on 1 June for his namesake town of Mahé, on the Malabar Coast. Richmond says 15 May. Possibly there is some confusion and he sailed on the 15th to arrive on the 1st, but Malleson says he arrived at the end of the month, which would be 30 June. This fits with Richmond's dates for the British. *Neptune des Indes* foundered in the storm and his crews were depleted, so he made them up with locals. Of 3,342 personnel, a quarter were African. At Mahé he learned the British were cruising off Nagapattinam. The reports indicated their ships had smaller crews, but they were carrying 24-pounders. Only *Achille* could match that. Nonetheless, at his council of war his captains expressed their eagerness to engage the enemy, so he sailed for Trincomalee, which was reached in only a few days.

(As an aside, communications between Pondichéri and the wider world passed through Mahé, overland. It was a more convenient stopping point for ships and saved time on transit. The letter carriers were usually of the *brahmin* caste — technically immune both to assault on the road and interference by native princes, and generally reliable — and the journey took 12 days one-way, as opposed to 3 weeks by sea. The route went by Perumakkal, Ulunder, Attur, Namagiripetta, Salem, Coimbatore, and Palghat.)

Peyton, meanwhile, had troubles of his own. Lacking Barnett's authority, and being a less dynamic character, he found it hard to resist the EIC's demands when they conflicted with operational necessities. His squadron was also badly in need of refit. *Winchester's* departure for Bombay had given him no leeway to repair any other of his ships; his flagship, the *Medway*, was drawing 30 inches of water every half hour of every day by the time *Winchester* returned. A council of war on 4 June 1746 gave Peyton the authorisation he needed to 'abandon' John Company and start to sail down to Trincomalee for a proper refit. Enroute he tangled with a storm that damaged his ships further. On 9 June he arrived at Nagapattinam, where he managed to effect some repairs by 24 June. That night he intended to continue the journey, but the following morning the French were sighted, ten sail bearing up from the Southeast.

[Malleson's and Richmond's dates do not line up, but in this case it appears to be a case of Old Style versus New Style dating, though Malleson still says 6 July when it should have been the day before.]

## The Battle of Nagapattinam

Peyton immediately made sail and formed line of battle as he bore down on the enemy. He had only six ships to the enemy's ten, but his were Navy ships, better manned and better armed. Only the enemy's flagship, the *Achille*, might prove dangerous. Malleson names *Medway* flag (60), *Preston* (50), *Harwich* (50), *Winchester* (50), *Medway's Prize* (40), *Lively* (20), carrying a combined crew of 1,660 men, or about half La Bourdonnais' numbers. The reader should here refer to the diagrams on the following pages. The wind was favourable enough, being from the Southwest, but it was very light and the action came on in slow motion, beginning about 1pm.

La Bourdonnais came-to somewhat to the southeast of the British and formed his own line of battle, then turned northwest. This was about 2-3pm. His was a bold plan; he intended to close and board. But, the wind continued to favour the enemy. It picked up and by 4pm the French were in line-ahead northeast of the British, who came down upon them in line and cannonaded them about 4:30pm, then tacked and made another pass about 5:30pm. La Bourdonnais did not manoeuvre, but drifted slowly northwest. After a council of war Peyton called off the action, about 6:45pm, and broke contact while the French continued on without even correcting course.

This was an inconclusive affair to say the least, and Peyton was later required to attend a court-martial, though he died before he came to trial, in 1749. Opinion was mixed. The EIC lambasted his 'cowardice', but the Directors badly needed a scapegoat after losing Madras to the French (more on that later), an event that could more justifiably be blamed on their own greed and indolence. Peyton's captains were not impressed, either, but both they and the Admiralty decided that he had not actually done anything wrong, nor displayed timidity. Though his ships were worn and leaky, he had not hesitated to engage the enemy, and had seemed confident of success. The main charge against him boiled down to the fact that he had not engaged closely enough, remaining at long range. But, this was a traditional British tactic, and it meant the French could not hope to hurt him badly with their lighter guns. However, his own cannon did little damage either, and in fact his ships actually suffered more. This was because of the French habit of

firing high, whether as a tactic or through lack of skill, which always resulted in the British suffering hits to their rigging, while the British fired at the enemy's hulls — and at long range it would take a long time to produce results that way. Somebody stated that the ships had been at 'musket range' but this was never confirmed; perhaps the eyewitness's ship had come too close at one point.

Richmond is of the opinion that for close action a stronger wind was required. The British would have risked being boarded, but would likely have crippled several enemy ships before they could react. The light wind, though, gave La Bourdonnais a better chance of carrying out his own intentions. Peyton himself gave this as one of his reasons, saying that he had observed the enemy's decks crowded with men. Not expecting such numbers, he had decided to remain out of reach.

Also according to Richmond, Peyton intended to renew the engagement the next morning, and to keep pace with the French should they attempt to draw off. This they did try, so that by dawn La Bourdonnais was about three leagues (12 Km) to the North. By noon the British had closed by a league, before the wind died. Around 5:30pm on the 25th Peyton called a council of war, which unanimously decided there was no hope of catching the French before they reached the safety of Pondichéri. The British turned around and sailed for Trincomalee, where they spent nearly a month conducting repairs (1 July through 27 July). Losses were 14 killed and 53 wounded (Malleeson says 46) on the British side and 27 killed and 53 wounded on the French. Malleeson differs in the second day's action by saying it did not occur, that Peyton headed immediately for Trincomalee.

Thanks to the efforts of the EIC, Peyton's reputation has been blasted. Beatson (*Naval and Military Memoirs of Great Britain*), writing in 1804, is scathing but Richmond provides a more nuanced view. Peyton was just a run of the mill captain. He went by the playbook. Given the situation, something more than that was needed, but nothing more should have been expected. And, as a matter of fact, by keeping his squadron intact his mere presence limited La Bourdonnais' options. It was only because the French later took Madras that this naval action, and the one that followed, took on such significance.

La Bourdonnais claimed a victory, but in fact he was lucky to get away, and knew it. Two of his ships were so damaged they had had to fall out of line. Malleeson says 3 ships, but Richmond may not have counted the dismasting of *Insulaire* as critical damage unless the ship had subsequently been captured. La Bourdonnais blamed losses and damage for not pursuing the British, but he was nearly out of ammunition and some of his crews had only a day's rations (those facts were apparently insufficient excuse in the eyes of French as well as British boards of inquiry). More importantly, La Bourdonnais was secretly carrying a large sum of money, desperately needed by Dupleix. So, he did not try to turn the tables, or even trail a lure. He made for Pondichéri at best speed — which was maddeningly slow — arriving at his destination on 7 July (Malleeson says evening of 8 July). *Insulaire* was detached and told to limp to Chandernagore.

La Bourdonnais and Dupleix were agreed at least on one thing. Madras should be attacked. Morse and his Council had talked big but done nothing, and the place had a garrison of only 300 men. But, that was all they could agree on. Though their relations began cordially, Malleeson portrays them as a couple of alpha males (well, they were, after all). Dupleix bent so far as to offer La Bourdonnais command of all military operations; he would be under the Council, not Dupleix. That was even less to the former's liking. His experience of civilian oversight was not conducive to his accepting it now. Anyway, despite his 'victory', La Bourdonnais did not feel strong enough either to make raids on the EIC factories or go in pursuit of their Indiamen. He must first defeat the British squadron. With this in mind he asked Dupleix for the loan of 58 cannon, only to be refused. The Governor's reasoning against 'denuding' his defenses was specious and he ultimately agreed to loan 40 guns, but with as bad a grace as he could muster. They were also much lighter than the ones La Bourdonnais needed, though he was able to swap out some damaged ones of his own. This became a point of attack against Dupleix when La Bourdonnais wrote his memoirs, but the Governor was probably more concerned with Pondichéri's defences (see letter below) and simply did not understand what a difference heavy guns would make in a naval engagement.

Malleeson (pp.129-130) includes some of the correspondence between the two men. Presumably, to kept protocol simple, La Bourdonnais would have stayed aboard ship.

*B. to D.:*

*At the time of our former squadron of 1741, you know what designs I had formed upon Madras. Encouraged by M. Dumas, to whom I had communicated my project, I begged him to communicate it to you, at the time of your installation. You approved of it, and made preparations which the continued peace rendered useless. Since the outbreak of war, persisting in my first design, I have imparted it to you, begging you at the same time to add to your former preparations, others to facilitate our success... My plan is to destroy or disperse the English squadron if it be possible; the capture of Madras must result...*

*Your idea regarding Madras is the only one which can indemnify the Company for all its losses and expenses, restore the honour of the nation, and procure for this colony a more solid footing than hitherto. This enterprise is very easy, and your forces are more than sufficient to carry it out, but it cannot be attempted with safety, before the English squadron is destroyed or beaten.*

*If fortune favours you, what do you think we ought to do with Madras? My idea is to take possession of and carry off all the merchandise we may find there, and to ransom the remainder; for if we should raze every stone in the town, it would be rebuilt in a year, and Madras would be much stronger than it is now.*

*D. to B. (20 July):*

*I cannot say at present what it would seem good to do with Madras; if you should have the good fortune to take it, circumstances will decide as to the fittest course to be adopted. But I beg you to recollect, that so long as Madras remains as it is, Pondichery will languish, and commerce will fall off. It is not sufficient to think only of a present, and, perhaps, an uncertain advantage; we must look forward to the future. I am not of the opinion that this town, once dismantled, could be restored in a year. It has taken very many years to make it what it now is, and the facilities and means for re-establishing it are less than they were for making it.*

After making an ineffectual raid on some EIC ships at Madras about 24 July, La Bourdonnais obtained his guns and headed south in search of Peyton, though not before offering a plan for Dupleix's consideration. A column could be sent from Pondichéri against Cuddalore — Fort St. David — with the hope of luring in Peyton's squadron if it happened to be in the vicinity. It was not, but the idea would have been for La Bourdonnais to engage if it appeared, and if it did not show, for the column to attack the fort. The column would be small: 200 Europeans, 100 'topasses' (Indo-Portuguese, probably Christians), 300 sepoys, some labourers, plus 170 sailors and 50 soldiers detached from La Bourdonnais' squadron. Dupleix had two objections: a) an attack was against Anwár-ud-dín's orders; b) it was too feeble. To justify such an act, only an attack on Madras could qualify.

(It is curious that such an enterprise was attempted in January — the one that was driven off by Barnett — and these arguments were not advanced at that time. It is possible the account of the January attack is spurious.)

Not willing to attack Madras at present, La Bourdonnais took himself off to find the British, stopping first at Karaikal on 2 August. Here a Dutch officer passed information that there were 6 British ships about 15 miles off the northern tip of Sri Lanka; he had heard they were waiting for reinforcements. The British told the Dutch they had suffered a 'repulse', but he noted their ships had been repaired. La Bourdonnais decided there might just be a window of opportunity here. Originally, he had intended to return to Pondichéri about 8 August and, if circumstances were favourable, load up for an attack on Madras. Now, he thought he might have a chance to sweep the British off the seas, in which case Madras would simply capitulate. Creeping ill health and the coming monsoon meant he had no intention of staying on the coast beyond 4 October.

Peyton, meanwhile, proceeded north once more, arriving off Nagapattinam on 6 August, where he saw what appeared to be 14 Dutch sail. They soon revealed themselves to be La Bourdonnais' squadron. Peyton had arrived in the afternoon, and though the French had the weather gauge with the Southwest wind and were at the same time to the north of him, he was able to steer well enough to avoid battle until dark. In the night the wind shifted, placing the French to windward. They attacked on the morning of 7 August, but before they could close the wind first dropped then shifted again. The British, now

advantaged, attempted to close in their turn. La Bourdonnais drew off northward, his ships having become scattered as they drove down on the enemy, and tried to reform. By 1pm Peyton was set to attack, then decided he was outgunned. Instead, he chose to shadow the French and interfere with whatever designs they might have in mind. This the British did handily, showing up La Bourdonnais as a mere landsman. But, they did not bring him to battle. At a council of war they decided on retreat and made for the Friar's Hood.

This seemed inexplicable. La Bourdonnais could not understand it, and neither could the Admiralty. The reason Peyton gave was the expected arrival of a northbound EIC convoy. Most likely it was yet another case of what many of British naval commanders had to deal with: conflicting instructions and insufficient resources. To protect the EIC factories, all Peyton had to do was maintain a presence. If the French wanted to get rid of him they would have to sink him, and he had just given a demonstration of how hard that might be. As Richmond quotes, La Bourdonnais opined 'they hold us in check'. But, to protect the EIC convoys Peyton would have to draw off and reduce the size of his squadron to provide escorts. Might as well toss a coin. Perhaps he hoped that by his demonstration the French would adopt a cautious approach and not do anything significant until he returned. Unfortunately, Dupleix was not a naval man. Madras fell to the French on 10 September and Peyton became the EIC's scapegoat.

Peyton's squadron cruised off Sri Lanka until 18 August, at which point a Dutch ship reported the EIC convoy had already passed by on 29 July. He decided the best thing to do was head back north and sweep the sea lanes for any French raiders. It was only on 23 August, when he reached the fort at Pulicat, 40 Km north of Madras, that he learned the French squadron had raided the factory. Apparently, La Bourdonnais did not lead this expedition, being sick ashore from 18 to 24 August, and an attempt to cut-out an EIC ship, the *Princess Mary*, was botched.

*[The date of the raid is given as either 15 or 19 August but the sources state La Bourdonnais was sick from 28 August to 4 September. This suggests a transposition of Old Style and New Style dates, the difference being 11 days. La Bourdonnais was well enough to lead the later siege expedition, which commenced on 3 September. Therefore, the dates have been altered to conform with the rest of the narrative.]*

For a second time Peyton did not attack the French squadron. From the record of his council of war it is clear he, and his captains, believed Madras was in no danger. They appear to have heard that La Bourdonnais was ill, or at least that his squadron was at anchor at Pondichéri. Peyton decided it would give him a chance for extensive repairs in the Ganges; *Medway's* leak had returned (Rapson implies the *Medway* was a sacrificial goat used to explain every British failure). This was a definite error of judgement, though he may have been considering the onset of the monsoon. His ships would not fare well if they remained, but the French would be unlikely to commence a major operation so late in the season.

## The Intaking of Madras

*Fort St. George, and the town of Madras, of which it formed the defence, had been built upon a plot of ground which the last of the Hindoo rulers of Bijanugger had made over to the English in 1639. Fourteen years later, the little settlement had been raised to the rank of a Presidency, and it constituted for a long time afterwards the principal emporium of the English in India. It was not very well situated for that purpose. On a bluff point of the coast, where the current was always rapid, and exposed to all the violence of the monsoon, and the inconvenience of a surf which made navigation for English boats impossible, it would have been difficult to find a position less adapted for commercial purposes than Madras. The roadstead was dangerous during some months of the year, especially from October to January, so much so, that on the appearance of anything approaching to a gale during those months, vessels were forced to slip their anchors and run out to sea. Nor did the fertility of the neighbouring country compensate for these disadvantages. The soil was hard, dry, and barren; the population poor and sparse. In those days, however, it was apparently the custom of the different European nations to select as their settlements, points on the coast in as close a contiguity to one another as was possible. And the situation of Madras probably owed its value in the eyes of Mr. Day, the English merchant who negotiated for the land, to the fact that it was but four miles from the Portuguese settlement of St Thomé.*

*Malleson pp.137-138*

There were roughly 300,000 people living in the environs of Madras, according to the census of 1678. Madras was also the headquarters for a slew of other EIC posts: Fort St. David, Porto Novo, Pettipole, Masulipatnam, Modapallam, Vizagapatnam. This produced a satisfactory tax base, but made the place a target for the native princes. One of these had been an earlier Nawab of the Carnatic, who blockaded the town until a compromise was worked out, placing Madras under the Nawab's protection. After that, the town had been left alone until the present times, growing fat and lazy. Governor Morse was appointed in 1744, before war broke out. His chief claim to fame was being a great-grandson of Oliver Cromwell. He was a corporate flunky, with no political or military skills. On the one hand he relied on the Nawab for protection, while on the other he slavishly followed the aggressive policy of Head Office, thus provoking the French without taking measures to defend against them.

*The defences of Fort St. George [Madras' citadel] were certainly not very formidable. The Fort itself was an oblong, 400 yards by 100, surrounded by a slender wall, defended by four bastions and four batteries, very slight and defective in their construction, and with no outworks to defend them. The English garrison consisted of 300 men, of whom 34 were Portuguese vagabonds or deserters, or negroes; of the remainder only 200 were fit for duty. The officers were three lieutenants, two of whom were foreigners, and seven ensigns who had risen from the ranks.*

*Malleson pp.140*

*[Other sources list about 350 in the garrison. Still others claim the 300 were split between Fort St. George and Fort St. David.]*

La Bourdonnais hung about for two days off Nagapattinam before returning to Pondichéri on 14 August. He ought to have been in good spirits, but, perhaps made nervous by his health challenges, he became more reluctant than ever to start operations against Madras. The British were up to something. (Malleson thinks the French merchants were also clamouring for protection.) Avoiding Dupleix, he asked the Council for advice. All thirteen of them said he should either defeat the British squadron or take Madras. La Bourdonnais replied that he wanted explicit orders and refused to do anything until he got them. It must have been pique. His illness may have made him peevish. He also knew that if either endeavour failed, he would be blamed, so he probably wanted insurance in the form of very detailed instructions that he could later point to as 'unrealistic'. Dupleix was vexed. After calling another council meeting on 16 August he decided to summon La Bourdonnais, reiterate his choices, and tell him he would be held accountable if nothing was done. He even offered to let La Bourdonnais employ a competent subordinate if he was too ill, a M. de la Portebarré. La Bourdonnais replied that he had only been asking for a definite 'go' or 'no go' for the attack on Madras, that his ships were already being loaded with troops, and that he planned to sail that evening! Misunderstanding, and thinking La Bourdonnais was sailing off with the garrison, Dupleix ordered him to disembark the men, but when he understood Madras was the goal he allowed La Bourdonnais to keep some.

Too ill to sail himself, but wanting to lead the expedition, La Bourdonnais sent Portebarré on the previously mentioned raid to the Madras Roads, where he took two EIC merchant ships and chased the rest away. By 1 September La Bourdonnais had recovered and the real operation began. On 3 September the French unloaded 5-600 men and two guns about 16 Km south of the town. The whole coast south of Madras, indeed, south beyond Pondichéri, is one long exposed beach. The advance guard marched north, accompanied by the squadron. About noon on 4 September they appeared south of the Cooum River estuary, within cannon shot of Fort St. George, and unloaded the rest of the force, about 1000-1100 Europeans, 400 sepoys, and 3-400 Africans. 17-1800 men remained aboard ship. Madras was summoned to surrender.

Realizing they were about to be attacked, and not knowing which way to turn, Morse and his Council rushed off an embassy to Anwár-ud-dín. The old tale is that in their haste they neglected to provide the embassy with the necessary gifts, so he refused to prevent the French from attacking. More modern scholarship believes it was primarily vacillation on his part. However, the lack of presents did give Anwar a legitimate excuse to hem and haw. Barnett's first arrival on the coast in 1745, which seemed aggressive to the Nawab, may have swung the pendulum Dupleix's way months earlier, but Morse's correspondence with the Nawab is generally regarded as incompetent or at least undiplomatic — the sort of thing a clerk

might write. In 1745 also, Dupleix had invited Anwar and his son Mahfuz on separate visits to Pondichéri, where they were greeted with all pomp. In return Dupleix was gifted with two cannon from Trichinopoly. Interestingly, the Nawab rejected the excuse Morse made regarding the Royal Navy's actions — that he had no authority over naval matters — but accepted Dupleix's similar argument after the battles between Peyton and La Bourdonnais. Now, as the Nawab rejected their final plea, Madras learned Peyton had (23 August) been seen off Pulicat, headed to Bengal for repairs.



*Siege of Madras*

The French erected batteries on 5 September, including one of nine mortars. There was a sortie by the garrison the next day, without effect. The batteries were unmasked on 7 September; the next day another battery of five mortars opened fire. The French took the Governor's House, which lay about half a musket shot outside the walls of the fort, and fortified it. On the evening of the 8th La Bourdonnais received a letter from Morse. This had not gone through the usual channel of a parley drummer, but by the hand of a Mrs. Barneval, a daughter of Dupleix's who was married to one of the English gentlemen in the town. Negotiations began next day. When they bogged down, La Bourdonnais resumed his bombardment, supplemented by three ships, until 3pm, suspended it until 8pm, then resumed until the following morning, 10 September, until the British finally agreed to surrender. There was a slight panic in the French ranks when a false report came that four ships had been sighted off Pondichéri the day before, which may have been the reason for the pause. The siege had cost five European lives — all British. There is no record of native casualties. Some sources do not even dignify the action as a 'siege'.

Obviously, the chief reason for the quick capitulation was the neglected state of the defences, but this swift outcome was a surprise to everyone. The Nawab was certainly surprised, and not best pleased. On learning Madras was under siege he wrote to Dupleix demanding he cease and desist, on the grounds that the fighting was disturbing trade and in particular the Muslim community in Madras. Unless the French withdrew he would bring his army down to help the British. Dupleix fobbed him off with assurances that no civilians would be harmed and a gift of 150 oranges.

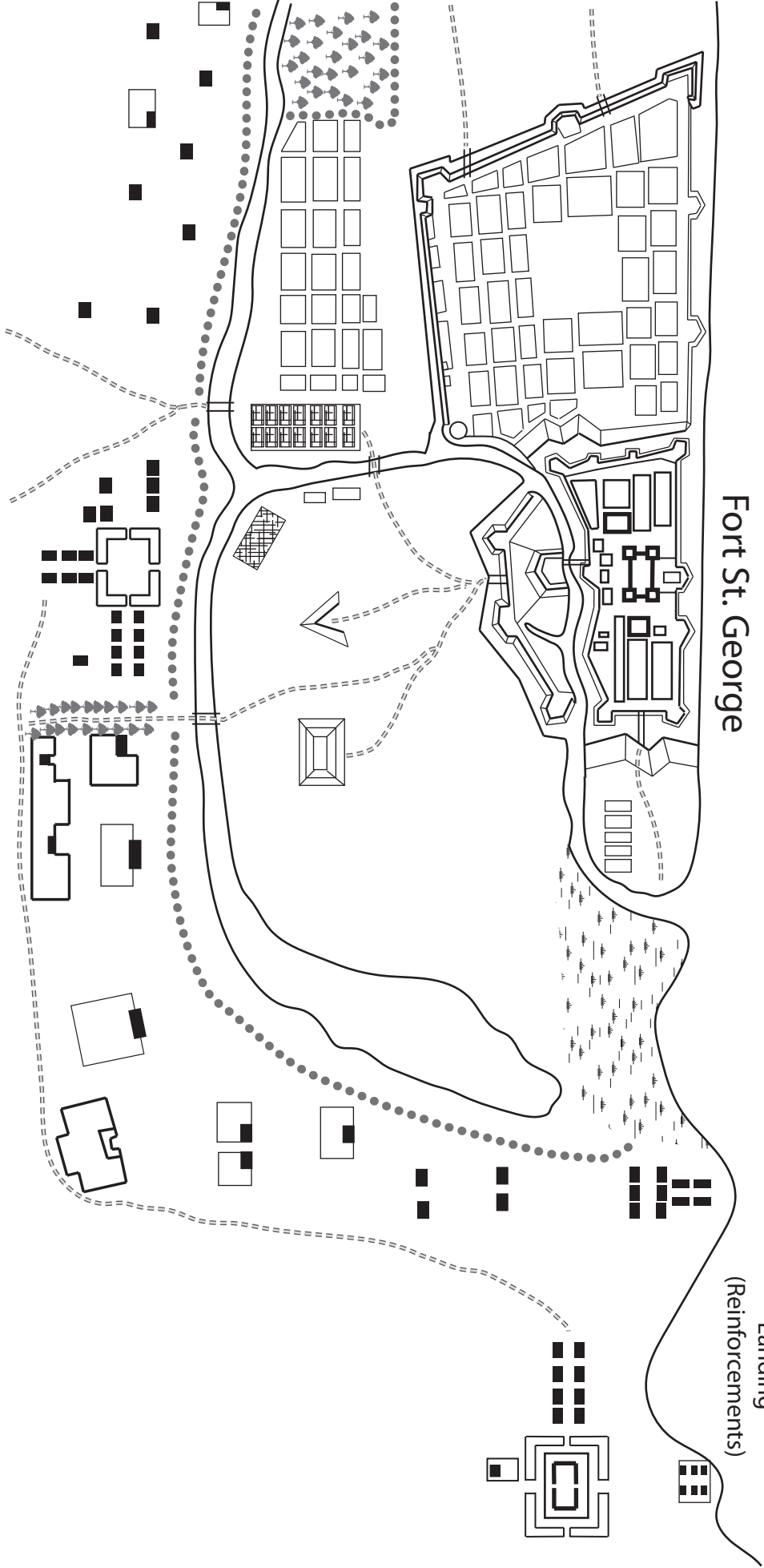


Cactus Hedge ●●●●

Trees ↑

Route =====

200 toises (390 metres)



# Madras

21 September 1746

Artwork makes Madras look like a strong position.  
Defences were in fact decrepit.

And, this is where the controversy starts, or rather, two controversies. Did Dupleix offer Madras to Anwar in order to avert worse trouble? And, what was the quarrel between La Bourdonnais and Dupleix regarding the surrender that supposedly ruined French chances of a successful outcome to the war?

## Controversy

To take the Nawab first, the stock British story is that yes, Dupleix did offer Madras, and yes, the Nawab accepted. And, thus, the trouble between La Bourdonnais and Dupleix, which came from each man trying to fulfil his own promise, the one to the Nawab and the other to the British. While much of the story can be verified by correspondence, it was Robert Clive, then a junior clerk at Madras, who put the following twist on the story. According to him, the deal between Dupleix and Anwar was prearranged. Anwar's character plays into this idea, so it was believable. But, it appears also to be false. Perhaps it was deliberate propaganda — Clive wanted to hit out at the French — or perhaps it was based on rumours circulating at the time. Ramaswami produces evidence that, though only at the last minute, the Nawab did assemble his army and did march, intending to assert his authority by attacking Pondichéri. That he was so slow in coming to a decision was probably because Indian sieges took months to prosecute and he simply had no idea how efficient the Europeans could be.

The Nawab's letter to Dupleix states (Ramaswami, p. 93):

*'In spite of our explicit instructions that you should forebear from attacking Madras, you have despatched an expedition thither. We are, therefore, not disposed to allow Pondichéri to remain in your possession. We, accordingly, propose to advance against your town. You transgress all bounds; this is improper.'*

Thinking quickly, Dupleix replied in a hurt manner, saying that the previous year La Bourdonnais had attack British ships chiefly for the Nawab's benefit, for had the Nawab not sought an alliance for a war against Madras? Nevertheless, if the Nawab persisted in his misguided attitude Dupleix would resist, and would, moreover, raze Madras to the ground in spite. Partly, this hard line was taken on the advice of his Hindu advisors. They said that if Dupleix was too apologetic he would be seen as weak and the Nawab would bully him even more. The threat to raze Madras became an issue which limited the Governor's options; some sources claim it was the Council that suggested burning the town, and that Dupleix was opposed, but put it in the letter anyway.

Regarding the argument between the two French commanders, the basic issue was this: Dupleix had either promised to hand over Madras to the Nawab, intended to burn it down, or intended to annex it. La Bourdonnais, who handled the surrender negotiations personally, had given his word he would ransom the town in exchange for a perfectly legitimate kickback. No matter what fate Dupleix intended for the town, La Bourdonnais' action interfered with it.

There are some points to bear in mind. Dupleix and La Bourdonnais were not in close cooperation and there was a two-day delay in messages sent between Madras and Pondichéri. Ultimately, Dupleix did not care what happened to Madras so long as the EIC were no longer there. He also wanted this affair settled quickly, lest the Marathas reappear or the Nawab decide to back the British, or some other crisis arise. La Bourdonnais was only interested in loot. The EIC could have the place back so far as he was concerned, provided he got something out of it. Also, while the sources lay out the historical surrender terms as if they were finalized, they were in fact conditional, and differed considerably from what was actually put on paper. But, at the same time, the EIC had offered La Bourdonnais a substantial bribe to see that the conditional terms were the ones that became official.

On paper, the British had surrendered 'at discretion', meaning the French could do as they pleased. It was worse than that, because the British did not ask for a copy of the treaty. The conditional terms were these. Fort St. George was to be handed over on 10 September, along with the town and all dependencies. The garrison and all British persons were to be prisoners of war; Company officers would be paroled and the troops likewise, but sent to Fort St. David. All merchandise and money reserves, including private property, were to be given to the French. *However*, if the EIC paid a ransom they could have everything back; the garrison could be exchanged for French POWs. This last operation was actually begun, with sailors being exchanged and the balance allowed to travel to England on parole.

Thus, in the Dupleix-La Bourdonnais correspondence, the latter sent two letters, one announcing the surrender and the other the terms, emphasizing the 'at discretion' part. Even in his memoirs he was careful to say that all the conditional terms were the result of hard bargaining and that nothing had actually been finalized. Dupleix, however, must have gotten wind of the backstairs dealing, because his own letter, which crossed paths with the second one sent by La Bourdonnais, warned him that Madras was being gifted to the Nawab and to on no account ransom the place. That letter arrived on 12 September.



*The Surrender of Madras*

With the wrathful Nawab lurking in the background, and with his long range plans of removing the EIC from India entirely, Dupleix would never agree to a ransom, and told La Bourdonnais so in followup letters (one from him, one from the Council) on 14 September. The next day, that is, before receiving the letters, La Bourdonnais wrote to say he had nearly secured a ransom deal and would not stop now. The Council had put his back up by writing on 13 September (received on the 15th) that they were sending a couple of commissioners to oversee the negotiations, so he tried to present the ransom as a *fait accompli*, saying the representatives would arrive too late and the deal could not be changed. Actually, he was still negotiating with Morse. La Bourdonnais also wrote directly to the Council saying undiplomatically that he had authority in the matter by right of conquest. The next day he sent a letter enclosing one from Morse that agreed to pay a ransom of 1,100,000 pagodas (40 *lakhs* of rupees), to be made over six months as

five letters of exchange plus three cash payments of 200,000 each, paid annually as the first European ship arrived. It was, or soon became, a matter of common knowledge that Morse had offered La Bourdonnais 100,000 pagodas, or £40,000, to see that the deal went through.

La Bourdonnais' reputation has taken a massive hit because of this bribery scandal. One should remember that accepting payments for things like this was not unusual. Indeed, many rulers had many 'pensioners' in foreign countries who would act in their interest, who lobbied for them, or who had simply done them a personal service at one time or another. Dupleix derived a large income from his position as a *nawab*. But, La Bourdonnais' own memoirs did not help his reputation in the eyes of later generations. For example, in them he argued against the option of razing Madras, which Dupleix advanced as a last resort after Anwár-ud-dín announced he would be coming to take possession, because it would have given the British the impetus to find a better location, whereas if the factory were held for ransom they would be tempted to keep it. As for the French keeping it themselves, Dupleix was also against this, since they already had Pondichéri, but La Bourdonnais used the justification that the Governor intended to annex Madras but La Bourdonnais' orders from France forbade such an act. However, those orders were dated 1741 and in his memoirs he suppressed the date. He also neglected to mention that by new orders, dated 1745, Dupleix was given sole authority on land. He did claim, with some legitimacy, that the Navy had given him an independent command <at sea>. He did not push that angle at the time, though it seems obvious he was thinking that way.

As a point in his favour, it seems La Bourdonnais did not accept Morse's offer until 15 September, when pressure from Pondichéri forced him to choose. So one might blame the Pondichéri Council for sending those commissioners. The next day, he pushed his claim to be an independent commander, while also asking Pondichéri to ratify the terms of the surrender. This shifted the affair onto the Council. They were not unaware of La Bourdonnais' situation, because he had been using his second in command, a very capable Swiss engineering officer named Louis Paradis (of whom, more later) to keep them in the loop without placing himself under their authority. The Council thus knew the situation from La Bourdonnais' perspective by 17 September at the latest. The next day Dupleix advanced his own cause in front of the Council. He was really stuck. If he could not present Madras to the Nawab there would be war. Just possibly if the place were razed they could give him the land back, but La Bourdonnais was refusing to do that, either. The Council swung behind Dupleix.

On 18 September they sent La Bourdonnais a letter of protest as well as letters for the military officers, reminding them of the chain of command. The protest was repeated next day, when the new French Madras Council set out for Sao Thomé. On 21 September a commission arrived at Madras, including Paradis. They bore letters disavowing La Bourdonnais' actions, and circulated a letter of complaint from the Pondichéri community. The commission then combined with the council to form a Council of Fort St. George.

*Early on the morning of October 2 [OS], six of the members of the newly appointed Provincial and Executive Councils, accompanied by their chief clerk, entered Madras, and proceeded to the headquarters of La Bourdonnais. By him they were received and conducted to the large hall. Here the business of the day was commenced by General de Bury handing over to La Bourdonnais a letter from the Superior Council, stating that he, the general, was authorised to reply to his letter of the 27th ultimo. The chief clerk then read aloud in the presence of a large concourse of people, who were attracted by the rumours of some extraordinary scene, the several declarations and protests we have enumerated above. Whilst this reading was going on, officers of all grades came crowding into the hall, the great majority of them belonging to the troops who had come with La Bourdonnais from the isles. As soon as the clerk had finished, La Bourdonnais replied. He stated that he would recognise no authority in India as superior to his own, as the orders which he had received from France concluded with a special proviso leaving him master of his operations. M. Desprémesnil [who was to supersede him], replied that the authority just quoted in no way invalidated the powers conferred upon the Governor General, and in fact bore no reference to the subject. La Bourdonnais, however, was obstinate, and seeing himself supported by a number of his own adherents, he assumed a haughtier tone and threatened to beat the general, and get the troops under arms. Immediately, a cry was raised in the assembly against taking up arms against one another. Upon this La Bourdonnais assembled in the next room a council of war, composed of the*

*officers who had come with him from the islands, and after a short sitting, communicated the result to the deputies from Pondichery. This was, in effect, that they considered he ought not to go back from the promise he had given to the English. Upon this the deputies retired.*

*Malleson, pp.163-164*

On 23 September La Bourdonnais even concocted a false report of the sighting of British ships off Pulicat. This gave him an excuse to order a number of troops, all from Pondichéri, onto his ships (about 50 men per vessel). When the deputies remonstrated again, he had them arrested (including Paradis). La Bourdonnais told them he was going to hand Madras back to the EIC, along with the POWs, on 4 October and that was final. That date was the one he had picked to depart. However, he was in a bit of a quandary. He worried that if he left too quickly he would not collect the ransom. If he and Dupleix had been working from the same script the latter could have handled it. Perhaps he would if approached carefully. Unwilling to simply apologize, La Bourdonnais sent Paradis to see Dupleix with an offer: accept the ransom, but set collection back a few months; they could divide it between them. He also offered 150 men to bolster Pondichéri's garrison.

After the arrest of his people Dupleix sent a letter of reproach. He then received La Bourdonnais' offer and wrote back the next day saying he was thinking it over. This was a delaying tactic, but Dupleix also seemed stuck. Then, on 27 September, a small squadron arrived at Pondichéri (*Centaure* (74), *Mars* (56), *Brillant* (50) and 1,520 men). More importantly it brought new information. There had been yet another round of musical chairs in Paris and La Bourdonnais' sponsor, Orry, was out. Also, a war with Holland was expected soon. And, finally, there were orders that explicitly put La Bourdonnais under Dupleix's authority. Informed of this, La Bourdonnais tried to brazen it out, saying he took his orders from the Navy and the instructions only applied to CIO captains. If he was a member of the CIO where was all the correspondence from them that he should have been receiving. He had only ever received a single letter. Then some enterprising clerk at Pondichéri rooted around and found the letters. They made it quite clear La Bourdonnais was in the wrong. He caved in, but tried to delay because it was now 2 October. He asked that one of his own officers be made Governor of Madras and suggested the British evacuation be pushed back to the start of 1747. Dupleix's counteroffer was that a Pondichéri man be Governor, with a Council of two of his men and two of La Bourdonnais'. He would accept the 150 men for the garrison, and would delay the evacuation until all the prize money was disbursed. The last point was his attempt to modify the ransom deal, because as it stood the British could keep half their ammunition and any leftover stores that were not taken for revictualing by La Bourdonnais. By now, Dupleix had also suggested to the Nawab that he might like the ransom instead of the town.

It was the weather that settled the matter between the two men. La Bourdonnais had waited too long. On 3 October a cyclone took his squadron. Richmond says the French suffered two dismastings, one wreck, and one complete foundering. Malleson says four out of eight ships lost, two being sunk and two written off. Beatson says five ships, including some small prizes, foundered, and three were dismasted, including the *Achille*, with losses in men amounting to 1,200 or more. There were 20 other ships in the Roads and all of these were either wrecked or scattered. (Ironically, the storm missed Pondichéri entirely, which saved six ships.) It took over a week to sort the squadron out. When the Governor's representatives began ordering the soldiers to collect the EIC's goods, La Bourdonnais sent his sailors to rough them up, ignoring Dupleix's sputtering protests. But, by then, La Bourdonnais had clearly lost his gambit.

Three of those ships at Pondichéri had just arrived but were under La Bourdonnais' command. The others had also just arrived, but they were commanded by a Captain d'Ordelin. Rather than placing himself under La Bourdonnais' orders he met with Dupleix. The CIO wanted their Governor to have his own navy. La Bourdonnais, considering he believed he had full authority over anything not resting on land, was incensed.

One last attempt at a compromise was attempted. On 11 October La Bourdonnais held a council of war aboard his squadron. It was decided that d'Ordelin should sail for Aceh with the six ships at Pondichéri, remain there until just before Christmas, then return, making landfall at Pulicat and proceeding down the coast to Madras. The captains were given their sealed orders that would have told them what to do next — probably depending on Madras' status at the time, and quite probably ordering them to cruise for

Malabar. La Bourdonnais then ordered his own captains to form up with him the next day. Most brief accounts of the affair have him sailing away on 12 October, fuming, into the midst of another storm, after obtaining a mild revenge on Dupleix by signing his version of the surrender terms with Morse, leaving the Governor General to deal with the consequences. But, there was one more act in the drama.

His first stop was Pondichéri, on 15 October. Here he tried out a new scheme on Dupleix, though he refused to meet the man in person and stayed aboard ship. Dupleix and the Council in turn refused to pay him a visit. He would take the entire French 'fleet' round to Malabar. This amounted to seven ships, four of which were in good repair (*Centaure*, *Brillant*, *Mars*, *St. Louis*). Damaged vessels (*Achille*, *Lys*, *Sumatre*) would be repaired at Goa and new ones purchased there and at Surat, while the rest harassed the EIC's posts on the Arabian Sea. After the monsoon, they would return in force and remove the British from the Bay of Bengal. The more he argued for it, the more the idea grew on La Bourdonnais. And, the more Dupleix stonewalled him. There was no way Pondichéri was going to give up all its ships while there was a British squadron somewhere east of them. They had also used up much of their stores in the Madras campaign and could not spare the rest. The Council then gave a loyalty test by telling La Bourdonnais' captains they should carry out their original instructions and sail for Aceh. Worried the Company captains might obey, La Bourdonnais gave up his scheme and agreed to do as instructed. He would form two squadrons, one in good shape and one a basket case, and sail to Aceh, detach *Lys* and *Sumatre* to Mauritius, and make repairs to *Achille*, then return to Pulicat by the end of December. If the squadrons got separated, d'Ordelin would follow the extended plan and go to Malabar, while La Bourdonnais would head for Mauritius. The fleet sailed on 17 October.

*[Malleon lists 4 additional ships, all disabled but still afloat: Bourbon, Neptune, Renommée, Princess Marie.]*

D'Ordelin's squadron, though it had the best repaired ships, fell behind. It arrived at Aceh on 26 October. La Bourdonnais, having lost contact, turned for Mauritius and arrived at Port Louis on 30 October. This separation does not appear to have been deliberate. La Bourdonnais was disgusted with the whole affair, but seems also to have been worried about the condition of his ships. He had only three: *Achille*, *Lys*, and the sloop *Sumatre*. In retiring to Mauritius he was not returning to the safety of a home base. There was a new governor, a M. David, who had authority to examine La Bourdonnais' actions and go through his accounts. In the event, he allowed La Bourdonnais to retain command of his ships, but presented him with orders to return to France, by way of Martinique. Malleon rounds out the story (pp.183-184):

*A storm shattered his ships off the Cape of Good Hope, but he succeeded, with four of them, in gaining Martinique. Here he learned that the homeward route was barred by English cruisers, whom it would be impossible to avoid, and who were too numerous to contend against. Impatient however to arrive in France to justify himself he proceeded under a feigned name to St Eustache, converted all his property into jewels, and took a passage to France in a Dutch ship. War, however, had been declared between England and Holland, and the Dutch vessel was taken and carried into an English port. Here La Bourdonnais was recognised, and was at once constituted prisoner of war.*

*[...] Regarded by the English, in consequence of his conduct at Madras, as the champion of their interests in India — a poor compliment to a French Admiral — testimonies of esteem and regard were showered upon him from all sides. By the Royal Family, by the Court of Directors, and by the public, he was treated with the greatest distinction. The Ministry even permitted him, on his own urgent request, to return to France on his parole, his anxiety to answer the charges brought against him being irrepressible.*

*But his reception in France was unfavourable. Accusations were lodged against him of having disregarded the King's orders, of having entered into a secret understanding with the enemy, of having diverted to his own use the funds of the Company. On these charges he was thrown into the Bastille, and was for three years kept confined in that fortress, deprived of the visits of his family, debarred even from the use of pen and ink. When, at the expiration of this period, his innocence of the charges brought against him was declared, he came out from prison only to die. By means, nevertheless, of handkerchiefs steeped in ricewater, of coffee dregs, and of a pen made out of a piece of copper money, he had succeeded in writing his biography — and this, published at a time when the fate of Dupleix was trembling in the balance, contributed not a little to turn the popular feeling against that statesman. La Bourdonnais died shortly after his release on September 9, 1753.*

*[Today Aceh may be recognized as the province at the tip of Sumatra that suffered a devastating tsunami some years ago. The name originally applied to several islands in that vicinity. To quote from 'The Acheen Islands and their Passages; with Directions for sailing from the Coast of Coromandel to Acheen' (1794), p.351:*

*"These islands properly belong to the Isle of Sumatra, but they are so connected by their several passages, with the navigating tracks of which we are now treating, that it is necessary to introduce them in this place, as well as the part of Sumatra adjacent to them...*

*The time of departing from the Coast of Coromandel to go to Acheen is generally limited to the middle of August, or at the latest, the middle of September. When you are got out to sea, you have the winds from W.S.W. to S.W. of which you must take advantage, and make the Isle of Sumatra in 5° north latitude, that is to say, 5 or 6 leagues to the southward of King's Point (called also Cape Acheen or Acheen Head), which forms the west point of Acheen Road. Here you commonly meet with southerly winds, at this time of the year; so by this means you will be to the windward of the Surat Passage, which, though the narrowest, is the best, because you can anchor in it."*

*The point of sailing to Aceh was to avoid the worst of the monsoon, yet be able to ride the counter winds back to India that started in December.]*

The controversy over the Nawab's own role continues, but the most coherent version is that Dupleix, to take the heat off, did offer him Madras, and he did accept, perhaps justifying the step in his own mind by thinking he might give it back to the British, perhaps after a suitable payment. However, that had now become unacceptable to the French. Dupleix would have preferred to give the town to the Nawab as he promised, but La Bourdonnais forestalled him. There seems to have been a mix of motives operating here, ranging from a desire to lay hands on the EIC's property to a desire to honour the treaty, now that it had been signed. Also, it would have given the increasingly hostile Anwar another fortification near Pondichéri, which he might hand back to the British in revenge. The Pondichéri Council recommended razing the town and leaving the Nawab with the land. He would still have the revenue from the outlying villages. Dupleix would probably gone with that option, but the French could hardly burn the town right in front of Mahfuz Khan, the Nawab's son, who was by then camped outside. The CIO did not need another trading post so close to Pondichéri, but the only option left seemed to be to hold the town.

## **Griffin's Squadron**

Meanwhile, what was the Royal Navy up to? Peyton, quickly hearing of the fall of Madras, became obsessed with preventing the same thing happening to Calcutta, and retained six ships for its defence throughout the winter. Admittedly there was no point going back to the Coromandel Coast during the monsoon.

D'Ordelin departed Aceh more or less on schedule and headed for Malabar on the wings of the counter monsoon, arriving at Cochin with the vessels *Centaure* (74), *Mars* (56), *Brillant* (50), and *St. Louis* (36), intending to patrol the Malabar Coast. At Cochin he learned he had just missed an inferior British squadron — newly arrived reinforcements for the deceased Barnett. They were the ships of Commodore Thomas Griffin.

Griffin did not bring much beyond a thick stack of orders that had lost all relevance. His squadron consisted of five EIC ships and the *Princess Mary* (60), augmented by *Pearl* (40) which he had picked up at Madeira. Leaving England on 8 April 1746 he had been told to water at Madeira and St. Augustine's Bay but otherwise not to stop until he reached the southern tip of Sri Lanka. Once there he was to look out for Barnett and put himself under the other's command. Failing a rendezvous he was to cruise alone until 1 August, then make for Cuddalore to obtain news. Griffin also had sealed orders for Barnett, which were much the same as regards movements. If any French ships were found at Pondichéri they were to be destroyed at anchor, if possible. Otherwise the British were to be at the EIC's disposal for escort duties.

*[Richmond discusses the routine for the EIC convoys. Escorts were to consist of two ships which would make a hand-off in the South Atlantic, usually at St. Helena. To be sure the convoy was met at the right time and place a dispatch was sent overland to Europe as soon as the convoy departed India. Considering there was no telegraph or railroad this was a remarkable achievement in itself. Of course the Company had agents all up the Persian Gulf and into the Levant, but it would still have been a dangerous relay, passing through four empires that were hostile to one another — Mughal, Persian, Ottoman, and Habsburg.]*

Griffin found he could not carry out even the first part of his instructions. He only arrived off Madagascar on 28 July and did not reach Cochin until 23 October. At Cochin he learned Barnett was dead. Given the season — the Northeast Monsoon had kicked in — there was nothing to do but make a zig-zag course for the Ganges, where ships would be preparing for the journey south. Arriving on 14 November without encountering d'Ordelin, Griffin located Peyton on 23 December and took command. The latter he sent home in disgrace (Richmond is of the opinion this was solely to curry favour with the EIC Directors).

The British squadron now consisted of the following: *Princess Mary* (60), *Medway* (60), *Harwich* (60), *Preston* (50), *Winchester* (50), *Pearl* (40), *Medway's Prize* (38), and *Lively* (20). There were also the fireship *Fogo* and the sloop *Calcutta*.

*[Beatson, as is his usual habit, records the prizes taken by the British. This year they took 11 in this theatre, including ships of the China trade and a privateer.]*

## The Battle of Sao Thomé/Aydar

Mahfuz Khan led the expedition to chastise the French. Because he actually marched on Madras instead of Pondichéri, the British version of the deal between Dupleix and the Nawab is given added weight, even though it may be inaccurate. The sources do not clearly explain why he marched to Madras instead of Pondichéri, but here is a probable sequence of events. First, the Nawab decided to support the British because the French disobeyed him. Then, because Madras had already fallen, he sent Mahfuz with the advance guard of 10,000 men to that place, where the French would be easier to deal with. This would still allow the Nawab to attack Pondichéri with his main army; now that a naval evacuation was no longer possible, Dupleix would have significant forces tied up at Madras. Mahfuz had orders only to observe.

He approached Madras from the North, but a French delaying action forced him to skirt around to the southern side, where on 22 October he drew up along the left bank of the Adyar, which flows from west to east into the sea about 7 Km south of the town. This secured his army between the Adyar on the South and the Cooum River on the North. The Church of Sao Thomé lies about a kilometre north of the Adyar, about 250 meters in from the modern beach. Similarly, Fort St. George, on the Southeast side of the town, was about 700 metres from the Cooum. At the present day each river has an island just up from the river mouth, Quibble on the Adyar, and 'the Island' on the Cooum. It is not clear if the latter existed at the time. The Quibble certainly did, along with a number of smaller islands and sandbanks in the Adyar. Today, the Cooum is about 170 metres wide at its mouth, and the Adyar roughly 400 metres, plus another 160 meters for the small branch that encircles Quibble Island. The island itself is roughly 850 metres wide. At this time of the year the water was very low, and both were fordable by men on foot.

By occupying this position Mahfuz Khan blocked the crossings that a French relief force would use but also cut the fort off from its only freshwater source, which was located outside the walls. Presumably the springs lay on the left bank of the Cooum (their location is not clear), but with the low water no doubt Mahfuz Khan could support an occupation force. Dupleix, meanwhile, had counterbalanced his bold words to the Nawab by ordering the Madras garrison to retire into the fort and not to challenge Mahfuz Khan when he approached. The town of Madras was completely abandoned. Fort St. George was held by an officer named Desprémesnil. He had a garrison of 5-600 Europeans and about the same number of sepoys. Thus, they lost their water supply, which had consequences, but not what one might expect.

*[One of the main draws of Sao Thomé is the very famous Christian church and tomb where Saint 'Doubting' Thomas the Apostle is reputed to be buried. Traditionally he is the Apostle to the Indians, and there is some evidence he did at least reach Cochin. Certainly the large Syriac community in the South bears witness to early evangelical activity. The church appears to have been built long after his day, but that does not mean there was no ancient tomb.]*

Despite his instructions, the rash Mahfuz decided to make an assault on Fort St. George. By now the Nawab himself was approaching, so it is very likely his son hoped to gain glory for himself. French gunnery from the fort was sufficient to drive off the initial enemy attack, which was hampered by the presence of the Cooum. On 23 October Desprémesnil risked a sortie. He needed the spring back. By now, the relief force was in sight but was still well south of the Aydar. Though it might distract Mahfuz it could not assist Desprémesnil. It amounted to 250 (or 350) Europeans and 700 sepoys, commanded by the engineering officer, Louis Paradis.

Desprémesnil marched out in battle order, 400 men with 2 field guns bringing up the rear. Mahfuz Khan massed against them and ordered a cavalry charge. Desprémesnil quickly parted his center to reveal the cannon, which opened fire. The first riders went down, but, after all, the guns were done. Or they would have been if they had Indian crews. But, of course they were only just getting started. The riders began to advance again, but after only a few more paces the cannon fired a second time, and again, and again. This was terrible. The charge shattered in confusion, the riders scattering and heading for the rear. In only a few minutes Mahfuz Khan had lost 70 men and his entire command had vanished. Desprémesnil's men were completely untouched. To add insult to injury, they took the enemy camps, still without loss, even tossing two 'useless' native cannon down a well.

By the morning of 24 October Paradis was observing the enemy from the South bank of the Aydar. Mahfuz Khan had been alerted to his approach right after his repulse and reorganized his entire army to meet him, lining the banks of the Aydar next to Sao Thomé. He may still have had 10,000 men, though numbers may have deserted, and some of batteries of guns. Paradis had no cannon, and was only supposed to make a diversion. What happened next was like a scene from a Cecil B. de Mille epic. The French stormed the enemy lines at 1:10 odds.

Paradis made no reconnaissance. He knew the river at its mouth was shallow, even though the monsoon had begun. If he tried to cross at a higher point the enemy would just follow him. The crossing to Quibble Island was executed slowly and safely. The next step in the operation has a couple of versions. In the first, Paradis' men plunged into the northern branch of the Aydar, stopped to fire one volley, then charged with the bayonet, routing the enemy. That is a simplification. The enemy cannon did fire, ineffectively, in some accounts while the French were still negotiating the island, which was large enough to have cover, and in others as they entered the water, in which case some of the batteries were probably unable to depress enough to hit anything.

Paradis knew his job. He had fought against an army from Tanjore once before and been successful. What he did, after the enemy's guns were discharged, was have his men deploy in line right in the middle of the northern branch of the Aydar. Then he commenced volley fire. Mahfuz had matchlock-men, and these were brought up, but they were a rabble, completely ineffectual, and fled as soon as they started taking casualties. The reader will say that Mahfuz should have charged, but this is where Paradis was clever. A charge into the river would have been futile. It would have been hard enough to execute with formed cavalry, but this was a medieval host. All impetus would have been lost, horses would have broken legs, riders would fall off. Well then, why not pull back out of range and force the French to come out of the river? Again, this was a medieval host. Discounting Mahfuz's pride and the pride of his officers, any order to withdraw even a hundred paces was bound to cause panic. The only reason Dost Ali gave himself a reserve at Damalcherry Pass must have been that he had no room to deploy his full force. These armies employed complex stratagems, but they did not employ any drills whatsoever. Also, as Paradis approached Desprémesnil sallied from the fort. From the Cooum to the Aydar was a good 5 Km, so although Desprémesnil could be seen he was not an immanent threat. But French infantry have always been fast movers.

As Mahfuz Ali's men in the front ranks began to fall their neighbours began to back their horses, then to turn them, and then to frantically try to push through the mass in their rear. At this point Paradis ordered a bayonet charge and the whole army broke, like a school of fish recoiling from a shark. Mahfuz Khan fled early, still aboard his elephant. His men were not so fortunate. Most of the horde rode back to Sao Thomé. It was only a small place. Emerging from the narrow streets on the northern side they were butchered by volley fire from Desprémesnil's men, who were waiting for them. Those survivors who stuck together fled all the way to Arcot before they stopped.

*It may well be asserted that of all the decisive actions that ever were fought in India, there is not one more memorable than this. Not indeed that there has not since been displayed a daring equal to that of Paradis, or that numbers as disproportionate have not within the memory of the living achieved a victory as important. The circumstance which stamps this action as so memorable is that it was the very first of its kind, that it proved, to the surprise of both parties, the absolute and over whelming superiority of the disciplined European soldier to his Asiatic rival. Up to that time the native princes of India had, by virtue of*

# Battle of the Adyar

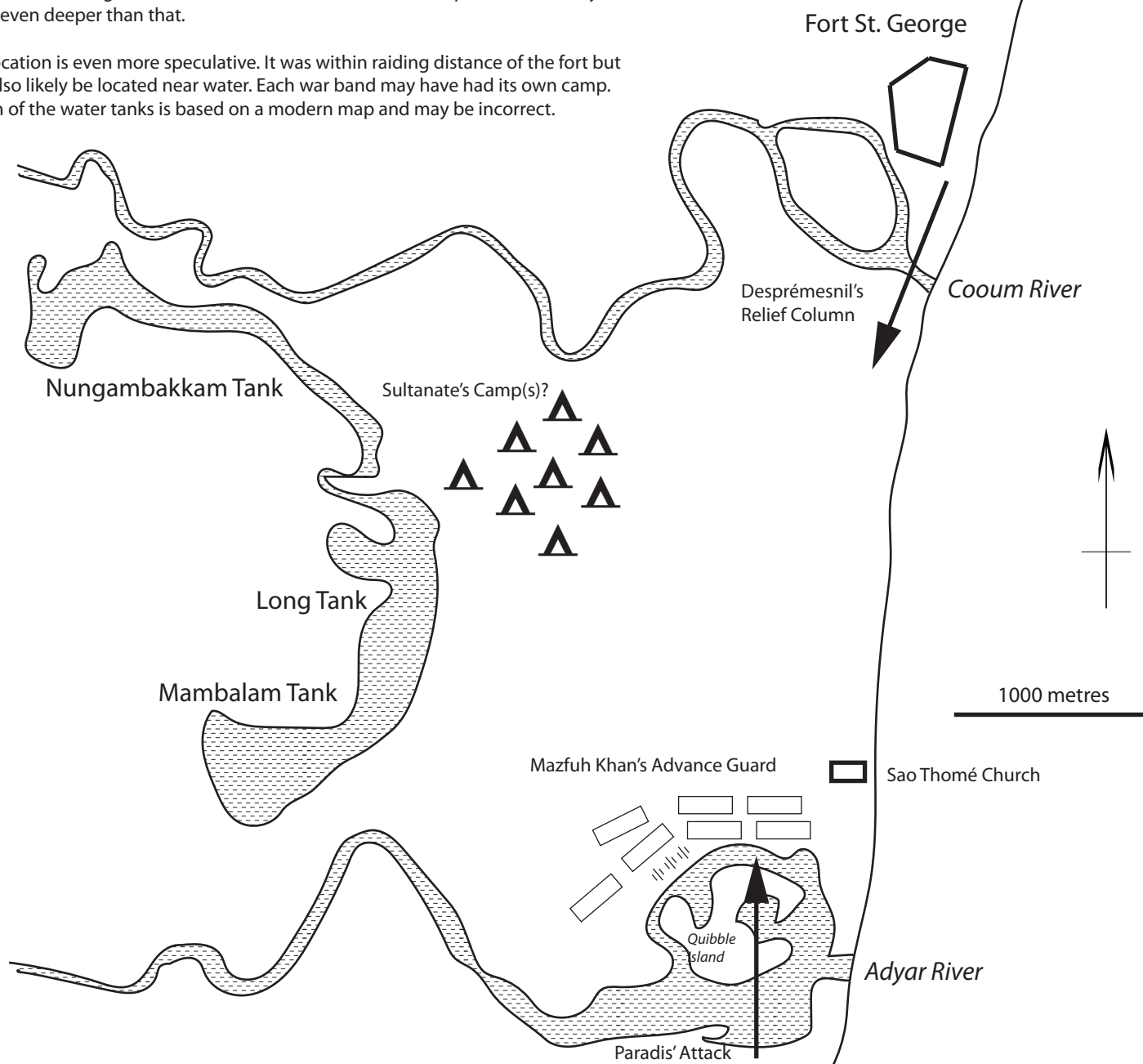
24 October 1746



Sultanate positions and camp are speculative.

It is known that Mafuz Khan had cannon deployed in several batteries facing across the Adyar. It is possible they were 'stacked' but the terrain is flat. His matchlock men were called forward, so were presumably in the rear. Probably, the cavalry shifted around until it was clear where the crossing would occur. Most likely there were batteries facing across the river that could not be brought to bear on the crossing. Mafuz Khan's cavalry was within musket range of Paradis' men when they were standing in the northern branch of the Adyar. Sultanate forces are broken into formations solely for artistic purposes. They probably comprised several war bands. Frontage of the whole army is based on a figure of 10,000 cavalry with each man having 3 metres of personal space (2 metres is common for heavy horse in tight formation), and an 8-deep formation. Mafuz' right was anchored on Sao Thomé. If the army was deployed in a single line 8-deep frontage would be 3,750 metres, extending as far as the bend in the Adyar where it approaches the Mambalam Tank. Assuming 2 identical lines, frontage is halved to 1,875 metres, as shown. It is possible the army was stacked even deeper than that.

Camp location is even more speculative. It was within raiding distance of the fort but would also likely be located near water. Each war band may have had its own camp. Location of the water tanks is based on a modern map and may be incorrect.



*their position as lords of the soil or as satraps of the Mogul, of their numerous following, their acknowledged power, arrogated to themselves a superiority which none of the European settlers had ever thought of disputing. With the French, as we have seen, it had been a maxim of settled policy to avoid even the semblance of hostility towards them. We have noticed how Martin and Dumas and Dupleix had toiled to effect this end. When at last Dupleix, to avoid a more dangerous contingency, accepted this dreaded alternative, he did so more in the hope that he might find some means of pacifying the Nawab whilst the siege was in progress, than in any expectation of routing him in the field. And now suddenly, unexpectedly, this result had been achieved. From being the suppliants of the Nawab of the Carnatic, — the vassals whose very movements depended upon his license, — they in a moment found themselves, in reality, his superiors. This action at St Thomé in fact completely reversed the positions of the Nawab and the French Governor. Not only that, but it inaugurated a new era, it introduced a fresh order of things, it was the first decided step to the conquest of Hindostan by a European power. Whether that power were French or English would depend upon the relative strength of either nation, and even more on the character of the men by whom that strength should be put in action. The battle which introduced this change was one then that well deserves to be remembered; and in remembering it, let not us, who are English, forget to record that the merit of it is due, solely and entirely, to that great nation which fought with us the battle of empire on Indian soil, and did not win it.*

*Malleson, pp. 192-194.*

Malleson is a bit hyperbolic here. It was not the very first such victory, but thanks to the character of Dupleix and later British opponents like Clive, it had decisive consequences.

One suspects that Paradis' men would have had an equal chance of success against the host of Frederick Barbarossa, or the army of an Italian commune, or even their own medieval countrymen. Each side fought with an entirely different mindset. The reader can refer to the earlier section on the Mughal way of war. At bottom, in a feudal host everything hinged on the leader. Mahfuz Khan fled after only a few minutes. Once that happened, his men had no interest in continuing the fight. They were not battling for their homes, while their mounts, that the French seemed so keen to butcher, were their entire property. The leader had fled, perhaps he was dead; there would be no compensation for dead horses or battle wounds. It would be interesting to know if Mahfuz Khan led the cavalry charge on the first day. Some commanders would do so, some would not, depending on their style of command. As the son of the Nawab, one would think it was incumbent upon him to display raw courage, and he had a reputation as a headstrong man. But, if he was in that charge, he might well have had good reason to flee at Paradis' first volley.

## **Aftermath**

In the aftermath of the battle, Dupleix was able both to fully overturn La Bourdonnais' deal with the British and to refuse to hand over Madras to the Sultanate. Paradis was made Governor of Madras on 29 October, after the original governor, a man named Barteley, balked at Dupleix's instructions to break the treaty. By proclamation the next day Madras was claimed by right of conquest. The British were ordered to leave within four days unless they took an oath of allegiance. They could keep their moveables but must leave all goods and property behind, and would be on parole. According to some accounts Morse and the chief men of the town were paraded in a Roman-style triumph through Pondichéri. Beatson (who has nothing but contempt for Dupleix) believed Madras was to have been razed but the British threatened to do the same to Louisbourg in Canada. (Louisbourg had been captured the previous year so its condition would have been known.) Malleson says the story of the triumph comes from La Bourdonnais, who was not there. The evidence he turned up suggests the prisoners were well treated. They were even permitted to lodge a protest, not that it made any difference.

Some of the junior EIC personnel broke their parole and escaped to Cuddalore. One of them was named Robert Clive. This fort was to be the next focus of the French effort to remove the EIC presence. Dupleix was concerned the British might reinforce. Paradis was pegged to lead the attack, meaning there was a delay of some weeks, since he was busy at Madras. Meanwhile, Mahfuz Khan plotted revenge.

During November the loot gathered at Madras was convoyed to Pondichéri. Paradis led this column, guarded by about 300 soldiers. Mahfuz Khan laid on an ambush at Thiruporur, about 22 Km northwest of the Dutch coastal fort of Sadras. He employed 3,000 foot and 2,000 horse. The convoy was properly organised, with an advance and rear guard, but the French do not appear to have expected trouble and put out no scouts. There are no details, but most likely Mahfuz used his infantry to block the route and attacked the rearguard with his cavalry. But the French held, so he pulled back, content to harass the column, picking off stragglers. Paradis needed to get to Sadras before nightfall, or things could get dicey. So, a few kilometres farther on the rearguard halted, prepared to delay the enemy, while the advance guard and convoy force marched for Sadras. The plan worked. Only twelve men were lost from the rearguard (and that count included stragglers), and the next day reinforcements arrived from Pondichéri. Mahfuz abandoned the pursuit at Sadras and Paradis made the 70 odd kilometres to Pondichéri without further incident. His troops camped on the South side of the town, at Ariancoupam (Ariyankuppam), about 5 Km away, on November 20, and began making preparations against Fort St. David.

Fort St. David, established in 1691, was located *south* of Pondichéri, about 20 Km away, on the other side of the Pennai River, and actually on the North bank of the Gadilam River, about 3 Km from the Pennai. It was a decent fortification, but lacked a wall on the seaward side (as had Pondichéri in the days before Dumas). This was not such an issue, though, because to get to the fort by water one has to sail up the Gadilam, and there are sandbanks and shallows; the back of the fort actually faces south.

Dupleix now had the following forces available: 900 Europeans, 600 sepoys, six field guns, and six mortars. Against this the fort had a garrison of only 200 Europeans and 100 sepoys. These last, since the EIC had never hired locals before, were probably warriors from Bengal. However, they also hired, for the first time, 1,000 'peons' or Indian irregulars — probably of mixed-race.

Malleson has an interesting side note. The French at Madras began using a captured English flag to lure merchantmen into the roads and attack them. He contrasts one surprised captain who fled to Bengal, refusing aid to the remaining British at Cuddalore, with another who was so angry he went down to Trincomalee, hired 20 soldiers and took them and his cargo of £60,000 bullion straight to the defenders. The fort also received 100 company soldiers from Bengal, and the same from Bombay. 150 recruits fortuitously arrived from England. By July next year there would be 2,000 troops and 600 sailors at Cuddalore, out of which would be formed the Madras Regiment.

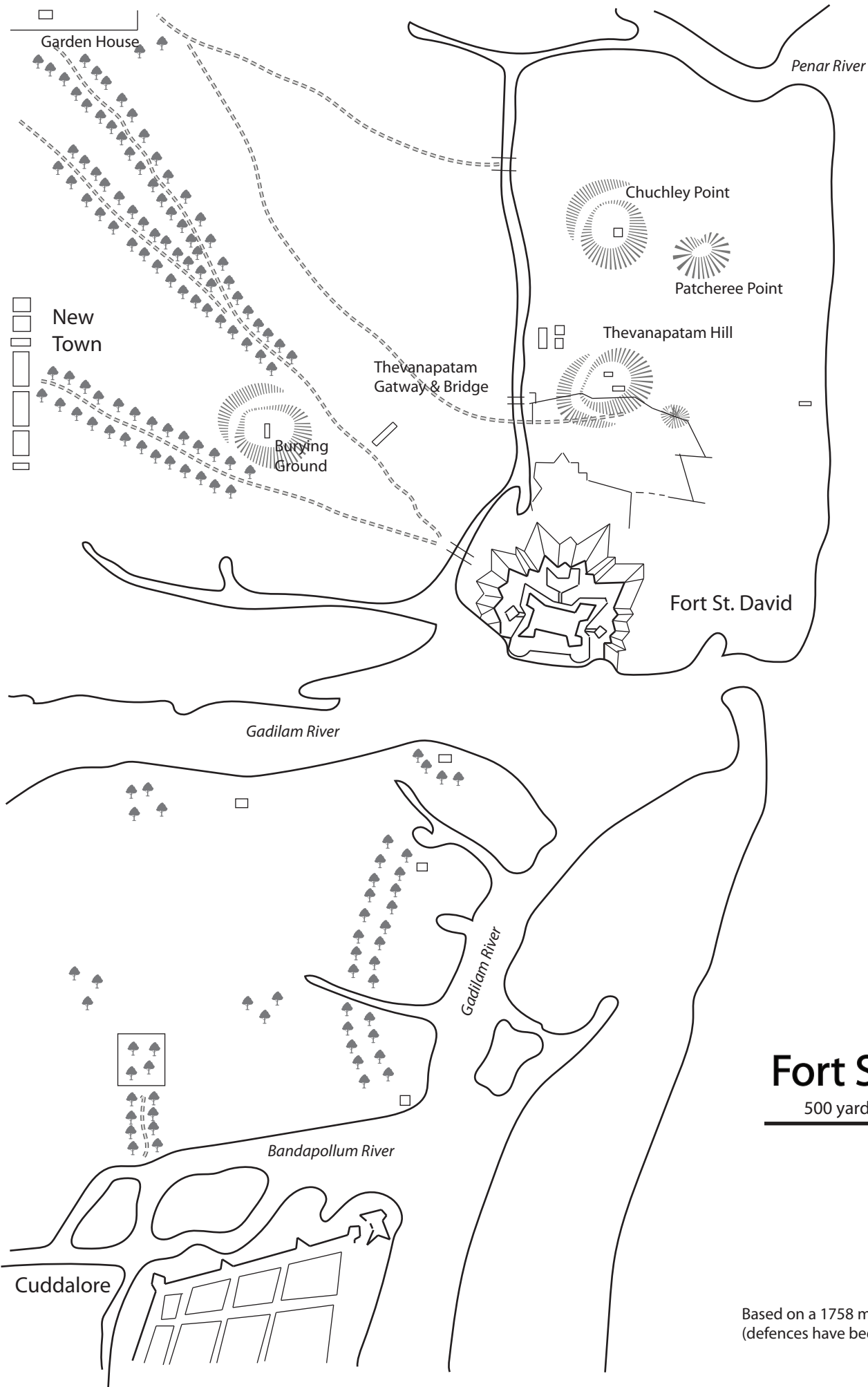
It ought to have been an easy win, but the French became their own worst enemies. Paradis had the drive and the expertise, but he already had enough glory — too much for a foreign mercenary. The Commandant of Pondichéri, General de Bury, demanded he be placed in charge. Bury was an old man, in every sense of the phrase. But, the Council backed him. The column set out on 8 December, crossing the Pennai River on 9 December and set up camp in a walled garden about 2,400 metres northwest of the fort and a kilometre south of the Pennai (possibly the one shown at the top of the diagram). Here, they settled in for a leisurely breakfast.

*[Richmond says the operation began on 7 December and involved 1,700 men. Ramaswami says 19 December, but that is simply OS/NS dating, equating to 8 December. Looking at a modern map, the French camp might have been near the St. Joseph's College complex, or the Police Quarters water tank.]*

The garrison did not have much hope, but they decided they would not surrender to a man like Dupleix. They sent word to the Nawab, asking him to attack the French as they began their siege. The Sultanate's forces were already in the vicinity. To a column under his other son, Mohammad Ali, with whom the British were developing good relations, was added Mahfuz's force.

Malleson (pp. 199-200) describes the affair:

*It is probable that had the French been led by a general of even ordinary capacity this attack [by Mohammad Ali] would have failed, but De Bury was wanting in all the qualities that go to form a general. In taking possession of the garden, and allowing his troops to disperse to cook their morning meal, he considered he had quite sufficiently acted his part. He took no care that pickets were told off or that sentries were posted. Not a single man was, therefore, on the look out. He did not even himself suspect the capabilities of the position he was occupying. Carelessly giving himself to the repose which his age*



*required, he acted, and allowed his soldiers to act, as though he and they had just completed an ordinary march in a time of peace through a friendly country.*

*Rightly was he punished for this neglect. His men were dispersed, their arms grounded, he himself taking his repose, when suddenly the alarm was given that the enemy were upon them. A panic seized them. Grasping at the first weapon that was at hand, some indeed half-dressed, they rushed disorderly to quit a place which they might have defended against the Nawab's whole army. Their one thought was to reach and cross the river, and towards it they ran without order or array. But the enemy, who were 6,000 horse and 3,000 foot of the Nawab's army, commanded by his two sons, were there before them. Notwithstanding this, the French rushed recklessly into the river, impatient only to gain the opposite bank. Fortunately for them their artillery, which was admirably handled, and to the troops composing which the panic had not extended, kept the enemy at a distance. More than that, its commander, not content with covering the disordered retreat of the infantry, deliberately transported his own guns, one by one, in face of the enemy, and, when on the other bank, served them so as to keep the Moguls at bay. It was not until the French had retreated for upwards of two hours that the natives could be prevailed upon to pursue them, and then only after they had been urged thereto by the English garrison of Fort St. David, which had arrived too late to take any part in the skirmish at the river Punar.*

Bury withdrew to Ariancoupan, arriving there the same evening. He had suffered 12 killed and 120 wounded but only lost a few arms and some stores. He claimed to have killed 2,000 of the enemy. The French remained camped here for the next three weeks. Dupleix decided he needed naval support, and wrote to d'Ordelin, then still at Aceh, to return with his four ships (*Centaure, Brillant, Mars, St. Louis*). He also wrote to the Nawab, to try and persuade him that the British were a bad bet — and, after all, he had had his revenge on the French. To add weight to the persuasion, a column was dispatched to demonstrate in front of Arcot. Anwar started to relent. Dupleix decided another demonstration, against the British, would prove his point.

Round Two was to be a surprise attack. On 30 December, 500 men embarked on boats and shipped from Ariancoupan down to Fort St. David. Things started well, with calm seas and no moon, but a sudden storm came up and drove them back. End of Round Two. D'Ordelin arrived on 9 January 1747 and Dupleix hoped for a third try, but the attempt was not made. Malleson thinks the Governor may have faced opposition from the Council or his own subordinates, perhaps for reasons not connected with strategy; possibly d'Ordelin advised against it, thinking the British might have a battery pointed seaward.

However, the arrival of his ships did swing the Nawab back to the French side (or it may have been the plundering undertaken by the French outside Arcot). A treaty was signed giving the French possession of Madras and confirming their other possessions. The Nawab agreed not to side with the British if they appeared to be having 'temporary' success. The French would make a formal apology to him and acknowledge his overlordship; he would also be allowed to fly the flag of the Carnatic over Madras for eight days, and he would receive substantial remuneration. Public opinion saw this as a triumph for Dupleix.

The third attempt on Fort St. David remained postponed, with no reason given. The soldiers were keen, but the higher-ups were not. To the reasonable excuse that the French thought the Royal Navy was about to return is the counter that on 8 February d'Ordelin sailed for Goa. Perhaps there was a general sickness. Or, perhaps it had something to do with hosting Mahfuz Khan, who visited Pondichéri at the end of February to ratify the treaty. Most likely of all, Dupleix wanted to secure the treaty before taking any more risky actions.

Eventually the attack did take place, on 28 February (or 2 March). Paradis set out along the coast by foot, camping that day on the North bank of the Pennai. He had with him the entire garrison of Pondichéri. The British garrison came out to oppose them. A crossing under fire was possible, but the fords were tricky and the British had three cannon, which they 'played' on the French. Paradis engaged in some counter-battery fire until evening. Then, he took his column upriver. The garrison, which had suffered two casualties, did not follow but returned to the fort. The French crossed the Pennai and occupied the same walled garden as before. The next day, 3 March, Paradis was preparing to open the

siege when a Union Jack was raised over the fort. That was not the EIC's flag. It could only mean Griffin's squadron was back. Paradis regained Ariancoupan the same day, apparently without mishap.

## Background Noise

One other reason Anwár-ud-dín's response to the French attack on Madras was so muted was the presence of yet another Maratha expedition in his rear during the campaigning season of 1746-47. This one was led by Sadashiv Rao Bhau, under the auspices of the *peshwa*, Balaji Baji Rao. As always, it was an attempt to shore up Maratha prestige in the South by making the rounds and demanding tribute. Murari Rao, now ensconced at Purukonda, contributed by raiding the northern parts of the Carnatic.

Adding to the Churn was the army of the Nizam, led by Nasir Jung. A three-way tussle ensued. According to Ramaswami the British intrigued with Nasir to help them against the Nawab and the French, while Dupleix intrigued with the Nizam and the Marathas to put pressure on the British and the Nawab. Either way, Anwar was getting it in the neck. As usual, both the Marathas and the Nizam had their own agendas but used the European requests as an excuse. Ultimately, the Nawab went on his merry way while Nasir Jung wound up fighting a battle with the Marathas at some unspecified location, in which he came off worse.

It came about this way. Early in 1747 Nasir Jung had been offered 10 (or 3) *lakhs* of pagodas by Griffin to put the French in their place and restore Madras to the EIC, by force if necessary. But, though he wrote to the Nawab and ordered him to sort the French out, Nasir assessed the condition of the country to be so bad — there was outright famine — that he could not possibly feed his army, and never put in an appearance. Instead, he intercepted the Marathas on their rounds. For the same reason, probably, the Marathas seem to have avoided that part of the country. Their victory over Nasir Jung still allowed them to regain much authority in the Carnatic, at least for the present. It is unclear whether the Nawab aided Nasir in the battle as a loyal vassal or not. He may have been too busy manoeuvring against the French and trying to suppress banditry. Dupleix's intrigues and the third attempt on Fort St. David in 1747, made so soon after his treaty with the French, annoyed the Nawab greatly, so that during the course of that year he slipped over to the British side again, despite the treaty.



*The French pay their respects to Nasir Jung*

## Further Adventures of Griffin and D'Ordelin

When the first attack against Fort St. David took place neither side had any ships nearby. As recorded above, d'Ordelin returned first, coming from Malabar after Dupleix sent a letter overland to Mahé requesting his help. D'Ordelin's sudden appearance threw the Madras Governorship, now working out of Fort St. David, into a panic. They imagined a renewed combined attack. Alas, the French were more divided than ever. Before leaving the theatre La Bourdonnais had ordered d'Ordelin to rejoin him at Mauritius; the squadron was to be reconstituted and only then set out against Griffin. Dupleix insisted on retaining an iron grip on whatever ships came his way. D'Ordelin, therefore, did not remain on the Coast but came up with a compromise, sailing for Goa. The French traders there had asked for protection, so he was still helping the Company.

The Union Jack at Cuddalore did indeed signal Griffin's return. He landed some men who joined in the repulse of Paradis. For the French it was a strategic reversal. The British were now in a position to blockade Pondichéri by sea, and though they were too weak to take it, Paradis felt he had better retreat there just in case. A stalemate ensued. For a few months Pondichéri remained unmolested, but a blockade was begun in May, and it lasted until September, with Griffin basing himself at Fort St. David. Dupleix was forced to play a waiting game. La Bourdonnais had gone home but his portion of his squadron, about four or five vessels, remained at Mauritius. D'Ordelin, with about the same number, lay at Goa and was not disposed to challenge Griffin alone. Only *Centaure*, *Mars*, and *Brillant* were fit for combat, but they were not in that great shape and their crews were of poor quality. D'Ordelin and his captains decided to sail for Mauritius. He sent a dispatch informing Dupleix of the fact and left before a reply could arrive. This was unfortunate. The unopposed presence of Griffin was causing the Nawab to waffle, notwithstanding his treaty with the French.

There was some point to concentrating at Mauritius. It was universally known that a large reinforcement had been sent from France; it should have arrived by now. The ships had indeed sailed, but unfortunately they had been defeated by Admiral Anson at the First Battle of Finisterre in May. The only vessels to make it all the way to Mauritius were *Lys* (returning after taking La Bourdonnais home), *Apollon* (54), *Anglesea* (40), and a couple of supply vessels. They, captained by a Bouvet de Lozier, arrived on 1 October. D'Ordelin arrived in December only to find himself superseded by Lozier, who had connections back in France and was the new Governor of Mauritius. Still, Lozier was helpful. He offered a 50-gunner and a 40-gunner, as well as the money and supplies they carried — d'Ordelin could have them as soon as they came back from a prize cruise. There were also three more small ships in the harbour. D'Ordelin thus had a force of seven effective ships: *Centaure* (74), *Mars* (56), *Brillant* (50), *Cybèle* (20), *Lys* (36), *Apollon* (54), and *Anglesea* (40).

[Malleson says a 74, two 50s, two 40s, and a 26. It may be that numbers and names varied over time, since they were there for several months.]

According to Richmond three other potentially useful vessels had by now been lost: *St. Louis* and a captured EIC ship, confusingly called *Princess Mary*, were wrecked, and *Neptune* (ex-EIC *Princess Amelia*) was burnt. The latter had been lost in the Madras Roads when, on 21 September, Griffin raided that place.

The British withdrew from the coast in November of 1747 to refit at Trincomalee, but returned in February 1748, effectively blocking the sea lanes until June. An equilibrium had been reached. The French were masters on the land and the British at sea.

## Convoy Run

At the beginning of May 1748 Lozier, taking command of the French flotilla, was forced to make a move. Dupleix was running low on supplies. Lozier was tempted to wait for another reinforcement, supposedly *Magnanime*, *Alcide*, *Arc-en-Ciel*, and *Cumberland*, but decided against it. Just as well; they met the fate of the first expedition in the Second Battle of Finisterre; only *Arc-en-Ciel* ever arrived. Lozier made landfall off Sri Lanka on 4 June with his squadron, the *Cybèle*, serving as scout. He learned pretty quickly that

Griffin was anchored at Cuddalore, having six ships and four frigates. *Cybèle* was dispatched to confirm this and the rest of the squadron followed slowly behind, reaching Karaikal a few days later.

At 11pm on 9 June the British learned of the French approach when cannon fire alerted them and the *Lively* arrived from her station off Nagapattinam with news of nine large French sail. Griffin, sleeping ashore, was notified around 4am but some of his captains were already preparing for combat. His ships were not all fit for service, two of his frigates (*Pearl* and *Eltham*) having disabled rudders, but he had a reinforcement of Indiamen. His squadron consisted of the following: *Princess Mary* (60) flag, *Exeter* (60), *York* (60), *Preston* (50), *Medway's Prize* (38), *Winchelsea* (32), *Bombay Castle* (32), *Lively* (20), and *Swift* sloop. Only one vessel was now missing, *Harwich* (50), currently monitoring Pondichéri.

Griffin took personal command at 5am on 10 June, sent a recall to *Harwich*, and ensured all his captains were ready. Otherwise, he waited. At 2pm six enemy sail were sighted to the South. It was now decided that the crew of the *Eltham* should be divvied up and the rudderless *Pearl* towed into action. While the captains were returning from their council, *Harwich* arrived. Still the British waited and watched. It was later said that everyone expected that so soon as *Eltham's* crew was redistributed they would make sail and engage but this did not happen. Meanwhile the French slowly came up the coast, but standing well out, with the wind to their advantage.

The reader can probably guess the outcome. There was no battle. Remember, the coastal current was very strong and the winds were almost always very light, and changeable. But for some reason the wind was this day quite fresh and remained in the Southeast, which favoured the French and made it hard for the British to depart. To have effectively engaged the enemy they would have needed to be at sea before dawn, be well out from land and much farther south, but at this time of the day all the conditions would serve to push them northward ahead of the French.

In contrast to Peyton, the controversy surrounding Griffin's decision not to engage actually stems from the fact that no record was kept at the council of war. His memory and that of his captains was 'selective'. He later stated that, on the question of either intercepting the French, or of sailing north to block Pondichéri, his council agreed that either way it would be better to wait for the wind to drop. But, most of his captains later said they opposed this course of action and were worried that he should be calling a council of war at all, so soon after they had decided to fight. They recalled that Griffin thought the British would be unable to catch the French if they remained stood-off, whereas they thought they could have at least kept pace, and used *Lively* or *Swift* to maintain contact during the night. They also said Griffin agreed to the idea of sending out a scout for exactly that purpose but did not actually do so.

And so night came on and the French, still to the southward, headed out to sea and were lost to sight. The offshore breeze dropped at about 11:30pm and the British at last made sail at 1am on 11 June with a northwest wind. They sailed about halfway to Pondichéri and anchored for the night. In the morning there was no sign of the French. Pickets were sent south as far as Nagapattinam but there was no news there either. Rather than expose Cuddalore, Griffin decided to remain where he was for the entire day. On 12 June he visited Madras, thinking perhaps the French had gone there. Seeing nothing, he sent a ship farther up the coast, to Vizagapatnam and its small EIC factory, bearing a warning, then returned south. Enroute he met a Danish ship who reported the French had indeed been at Madras, had unloaded their stores, and were gone again before the British arrived.

It was 14 June. Griffin had all his ships back in service, but no enemy. At 6pm that day he made another survey of Madras. There were no French ships but he received alarming news from Cuddalore. 2,000 men had come down from Pondichéri and made another assault. They had been repulsed but there was no guarantee they would not be back. Working against wind and current it took the British four days to return to Cuddalore. By the time they arrived the enemy had retreated.

What Lozier had done was to show the flag off Cuddalore, then feint south on the night of the 10th, circle around far out to sea, bypass Pondichéri, and make straight for Madras, where he deposited the long awaited supplies, including 300 more troops — two of his sail were the store ships. Lozier then made immediately for Mauritius, mission completed. The stores were packed overland to Pondichéri. It is not clear whether he avoided the latter place because it was too near the British, or because he did not want

to talk to Dupleix. Beatson and Richmond both say the attack on Cuddalore had primarily been a diversion, though it was known Griffin had embarked enough soldiers to significantly weaken the place, and the French were prepared to turn the assault into the real thing if the situation was favourable. It would have been a great coup if the French had captured the chief British supply dépôt. Malleson says the attack was serious, and intended to deny the British a base of operations. Apparently the grand expedition being formed in England (see below) was already known to the French.

Richmond agrees with the findings of the court-martial, that Griffin fumbled the ball — because Pondichéri was resupplied, it was able to withstand the immanent attack being prepared by London. But at the same time he points out that the French completely failed to make use of their advantages and cripple Griffin's squadron while it lay at Cuddalore. They had the advantage of wind, and, though this was not known, the advantage of numbers. At Griffin's subsequent court-martial opinion was divided. His faction argued that a sortie with conditions as they were would have risked them being pinned on a lee shore, while his detractors pointed out that *Harwich* had had no trouble coming south from her station off Pondichéri in time to join the fight. Ultimately the court split the difference, finding that Griffin made an error of judgement in not taking advantage of the early land breeze, and in not shadowing the French with one of his light vessels, but that he was not guilty on other counts. In the end, his suspension from service was laid aside thanks to his Parliamentary connections. He had already been promoted to Vice Admiral by the time the 'non' battle took place.

## Cuddalore Four

The final attack on Fort St. David, made on 16 June, marks the first appearance of Stringer Lawrence, a famous man in his day, though eclipsed by Clive. He was to be a key figure in the Second Carnatic War, and the founder of the Madras Regiment. Lawrence had come out to India in January of 1748. Aged 50, he had served in the British Army for over 20 years, was a veteran of the fighting in Flanders, and had fought the Jacobites in 1745-46 (some of whom accompanied Boscawen's expedition as pressed men). After the Rebellion he resigned from the Army and joined John Company, with the rank of Major. Ramaswami includes two quotes about him (p.100):

*In the field Lawrence exhibited all the qualities of a great commander, though opportunity to exercise them on a large scale was denied him... Never forcing a battle without necessity, he struck with all his force and with the greatest daring when the opportunity occurred. His decision once taken was carried out without faltering and always with the best results... Among the prominent men of that time he stands alone in having left no trace of personal ill-feeling attached to his name.*

And:

*[He was] the complete professional. [He knew] every facet of handling an infantry battalion, the basic skills of the battlefield and how the British soldier thought and reacted. His detailed mastery of his profession gave him a quiet and composed self-assurance; he accepted dictation from no man in matters that he considered his own province and was prepared to resign if his wishes were not respected. He was able through his own unassailable competence to impose his authority on his juniors without effort or needless self-assertion, and in consequence received the unstinting affection and loyalty of his subordinates. He was perhaps a trifle unimaginative, impatient of paper or politics, unable to understand the point of view of men who knew nothing of soldiering or to persuade them to understand his; but his integrity shone from him; he was an Englishman and proud of it, a soldier and proud of it. He would never do anything to demean himself, his profession or his country.*

The French attack involved 800 Europeans and 1,000 sepoys. This time they took an inland route. There would be no siege, but a midnight assault. Lawrence's scouts warned him what was up and he devised a surprise of his own. He had his garrison display itself in the fort, as if they expected the French and were going to resist a siege. But under cover of darkness he shifted most of his men and all his moveable cannon into the neighbouring village. When the French began scaling the walls of the fort they were assailed from the flank, the cannon firing grapeshot. They fled precipitately, all the way to Pondichéri. There is no record of who led this attack.

### Stringer Lawrence (1698-1775)

The Father of the Army of India came from Hereford. He joined the British Army in 1727, serving at Gibraltar, and then in Flanders during the War of the Austrian Succession; he also fought at Culloden. In 1748 he was a Major. Perhaps deciding advancement was too slow in the Army for a man of obscure birth, he joined the EIC and was put in command of its small military wing. After his defense of Fort St. David and subsequent capture he remained a POW until the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle — in other words, only for a short spell. By the time the Second Carnatic War broke out he had already begun his reform of the EIC's military, forming the Madras Regiment, which became the template for the rest. That year he formed a lasting friendship with Robert Clive, who was serving under him. He returned to Britain in 1750 but returned to India before the end of the war and participated in the siege of Trichinopoly. As acting C-in-C he arranged the truce that eventually led to formal peace. During the later 1750s he continued to serve, fighting at Wandiwash and defending Madras against the French in 1758-59. His health was poor and he again had to return to England, but in 1761 returned to act as C-in-C and complete his reformed of the Company's military, finally retiring in 1766. As his portrait shows, there is no correlation between being an Iron Man contestant and a good officer.



### The Siege of Pondichéri

Beginning in the spring of 1747 the EIC's Secret Committee had pushed hard for a much larger commitment of Royal Navy ships in the Indian Ocean. Their arguments were overblown, but effective. Preparations were taken in hand. The Dutch, now at war with France, were roped in, though they struck a hard bargain and (as usual) managed to obtain maximum concessions for as little effort as possible. The initial sailing day was set for 1 September 1747 but that came and went. An actual plan of campaign was not drawn up until October.

Rear Admiral of the White the Honourable Edward Boscawen was given command of the expedition, which consisted of the following: *Namur* (74), *Vigilant* (64), *Deptford* (60), *Pembroke* (60), *Ruby* (50), *Chester* (50), *Deal Castle* (24), *Swallow* sloop, *Basilisk* bomb, *Apollo* hospital ship, and 14 EIC vessels (or 11 transports). He had authorization from the Dutch to commandeer any of their ships that might be bound for India at the time.

### Edward Boscawen (1711-1761)

To quote Malleson (p.215):

*Admiral Boscawen was a man of birth and character. A grand nephew of the famous Marlborough, he had entered the navy at the age of twelve years and passing with credit through all the subordinate grades had found himself when only twenty-six years old captain of a man of war. Two years later the ship which he commanded formed a part of that fleet at the head of which Admiral Vernon took Porto Bello and failed at Carthage. In these expeditions, only partially successful as they were, Captain Boscawen lost no opportunity of distinguishing himself and he soon acquired a reputation for skill and enterprise such as combined with his high birth marked him out for future command. This was not long in coming to him. When it was decided in England to make a great effort to deliver a counter stroke for the capture of Madras Boscawen, then only in his thirty-sixth year, was selected to command the expedition.*

*The instructions he received were to endeavour to deprive the French of the base of their operations against India by the capture of the Isles of France and Bourbon and succeeding or not in that to deliver his main blow against Pondichery itself.*

Edward Boscawen was born in Cornwall, the third son of Lord Falmouth. He was a grand-nephew of the Duke of Marlborough on his mother's side. Though Cartagena des Indías hurt Vernon's career, Boscawen distinguished himself in command of some of the land forces. By 1742 he was a captain, commanding the *Prince Frederick* (70); he was later placed under Admiral Norris in command of the *Dreadnought* (60). He also took time out to obtain a seat in Parliament. Under Norris and then Anson he participated in the various engagements that took place in European waters, being promoted to Rear Admiral of the Blue in 1747 after the Battle of Cape Finisterre. His assignment to command the India expedition came at the same time, but it took many months for the expedition to sail, and many more for it to arrive at its destination. After the siege of Pondichéri he remained in India until 1750; his flagship, the *Namur*, was sunk in a storm with the loss of 600 men, but he was fortunately ashore at the time. Upon his return to England Anson brought him onto the Admiralty Board; he remained a Commissioner until his death. This did not end his active service, however. In 1755 he was a vice admiral commanding a squadron in North America before being posted back to the Channel. He signed the death warrant for Admiral Byng.



In 1757 he participated in the Siege of Louisbourg under Hawke, and in 1759 fought the Battle of Lagos. This earned him the rank of General of Marines. Struck by typhoid while serving off Quiberon Bay, he was brought home to die.

Malleson also notes that his appointment was the first since 1688 in which one man had full command of both land and sea operations. In summary, his instructions were to make best speed to Cape Town, gain any news, then sail for Mauritius and capture the main island, and if possible Île de Bourbon (Réunion). He could then refit in Madagascar before sailing to Coromandel. At that point he was to release all company ships from service, then set about neutralizing the French squadron and assisting the Madras Government. Once this was done he was to escort the annual homebound convoy with the bulk of his fleet, leaving only such ships as he deemed necessary to ensure British superiority in the theatre. Boscawen was to assist the EIC but remain under the Admiralty's authority. He was also given full command over both naval and land forces. At the time of the siege of Pondichéri this would amount to the following:

- 880 marines.
- 1,200 soldiers brought from England, formed into two provisional battalions. The men were mostly Jacobite POWs from the failed rebellion in Scotland.
- 750 EIC regulars, detached from the Bombay and Bengal Presidencies.
- 120 Dutch from Nagapattinam.
- 1,100 seamen who had been drilled to fight as soldiers.

- 1,100 sepoys; these came from Bengal, as the Madras Presidency absolutely refused to employ the 'soft' natives in their own environs.
- 70 EIC artillerymen.

The armada departed England on 4 November 1747, the first ships arriving at the Cape on 29 March 1748 and the last sixteen days later. At Cape Town Boscawen acquired six VOC ships and 400 of their soldiers. He departed Table Bay on 8 May, arriving in the vicinity of Mauritius on 23 June. Here he found himself unable to fulfil his instructions. Though Lozier had only 500 soldiers and 1,000 sailors the French had heavily fortified all potential landing spots and had eight batteries of cannon emplaced. The harbour of Port Louis, where Lozier had hidden his ships, was long and narrow, and flanked by bastions. One of the ships lay across the entrance. Heavy surf and reefs also limited the British options. In the opinion of later analysts a successful landing might have been possible, but it would have been a convoluted affair, prone to disaster. The British had no knowledge of the conditions ashore, or the size of the garrison. A feeble attempt made on 24 June was easily repulsed, which discouraged everyone.

Lozier's solution was similar to that adopted by the Spanish at Cartagena des Indías, and Boscawen may have gotten an eerie feeling of déjà-vu. The French wisely did not attempt to challenge Boscawen at sea. Probably, most of the shore batteries consisted of guns taken from his ships. The only naval action undertaken by the French between the time of Lozier's arrival at Mauritius and the present was by the latest CIO reinforcements, which had sailed as far as Bombay and taken a prize (which the Governor of Bombay managed to unload in the heat of the action before it was captured).

Boscawen gave up and crossed the Indian Ocean, abandoned by the Dutch ships, which returned to Cape Town; he kept their soldiers, and picked up 120 more at Nagapattinam. Beatson and Richmond say he rendezvoused with Griffin at Cuddalore on 27 July. Malleson says 11 August, which translates to 31 July when the calendar styles are reconciled. Griffin still had all his ships except *Medway*, which had had to be condemned. This gave the British overwhelming firepower — 30 ships, including 13 of the line — Pondichéri would surely be reduced. Griffin did not keep his command but sailed for England on 29 July, taking with him the *Princess Mary*, *Winchester*, *Pearl*, and *Medway's Prize*.

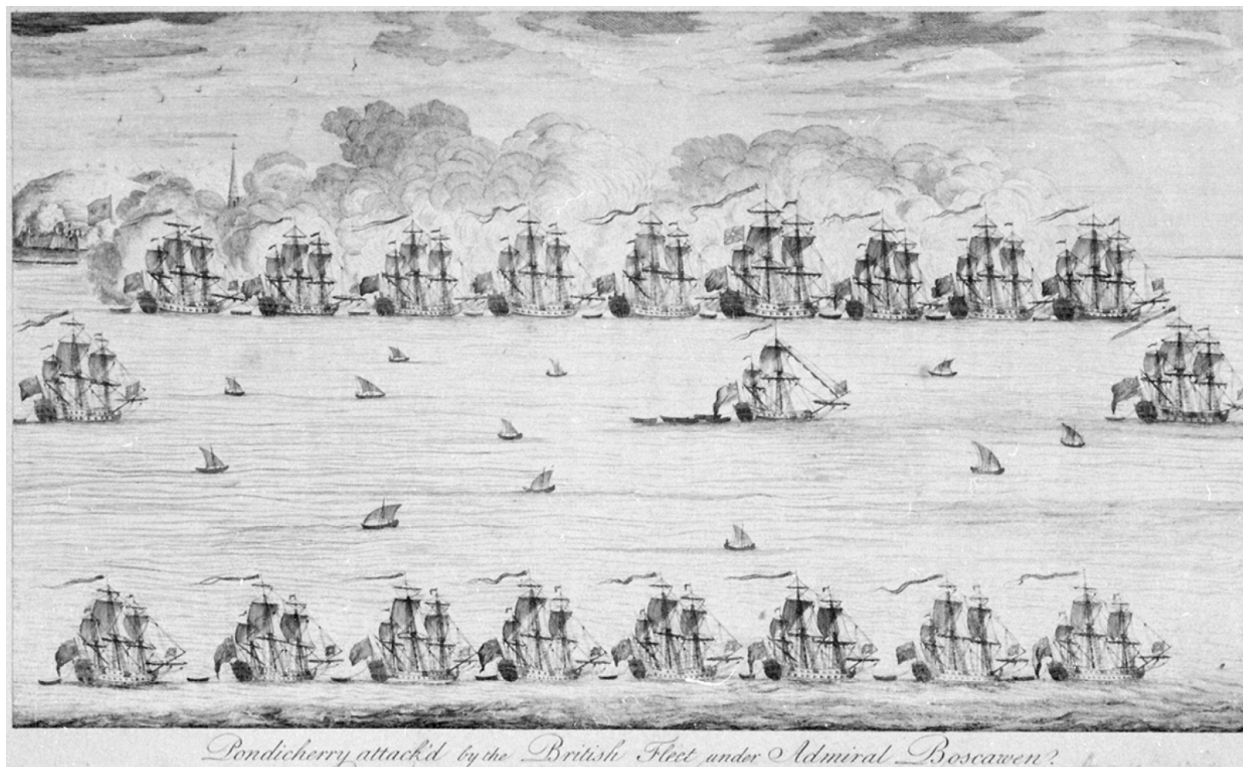
*[Actually, Griffin did not leave Trincomalee until 1 January 1749, but having resigned his command per London's orders he prudently got out of Boscawen's way.]*

Unlike Madras, Pondichéri was a tough nut. The walls, laid out in the modern 'Italian trace', had been strengthened and fields of fire cleared. The South side of the town was protected by the Ariancoupan River and the North and the West by extensive marshes. The garrison consisted of 1,800 Europeans and 3,000 sepoys. The town had also been resupplied and morale was high. To quote Malleson (pp.213-214):

*Forced then, once again, to depend upon his own resources, to resign himself to defence, he began, with characteristic energy, to strengthen as much as possible, before the enemy should appear, the places which he yet held. Of these, next to Pondichery, the principal was Ariancopan, a small post two miles from Pondichery, and about a mile and a half from the sea. To this place Paradis was sent, in his capacity of chief engineer, with instructions to make it as capable as possible of defence. He executed his instructions in a most effective manner. The fort itself was a triangle, with but few defences exterior or interior. Paradis set to work to construct three cavaliers within the body of the place, a deep ditch, and a covered way. The care of the works thus fortified was consigned to a young captain, named Law, a nephew of the famous Scotch financier whose influence on the affairs of the French India Company has been before referred to.*

*We have already recorded the noble manner in which Dupleix, in the early days of his administration, had devoted himself to the completion of the defences of Pondichery. The fortifications facing the sea, on which he had laboured with so much earnestness, consisted of two demi-bastions, one at each extremity of the face. On the three other sides the city was defended by a wall and a rampart flanked by eleven bastions. The entire works were surrounded by a ditch and an imperfect glacis. The side opposite to the sea, facing the interior, was also defended by several low batteries capable of mounting upwards of one hundred pieces of cannon, and commanding the approaches from that side. Besides these artificial defences was a formidable natural protection consisting of a hedge of prickly pear, which, beginning on*

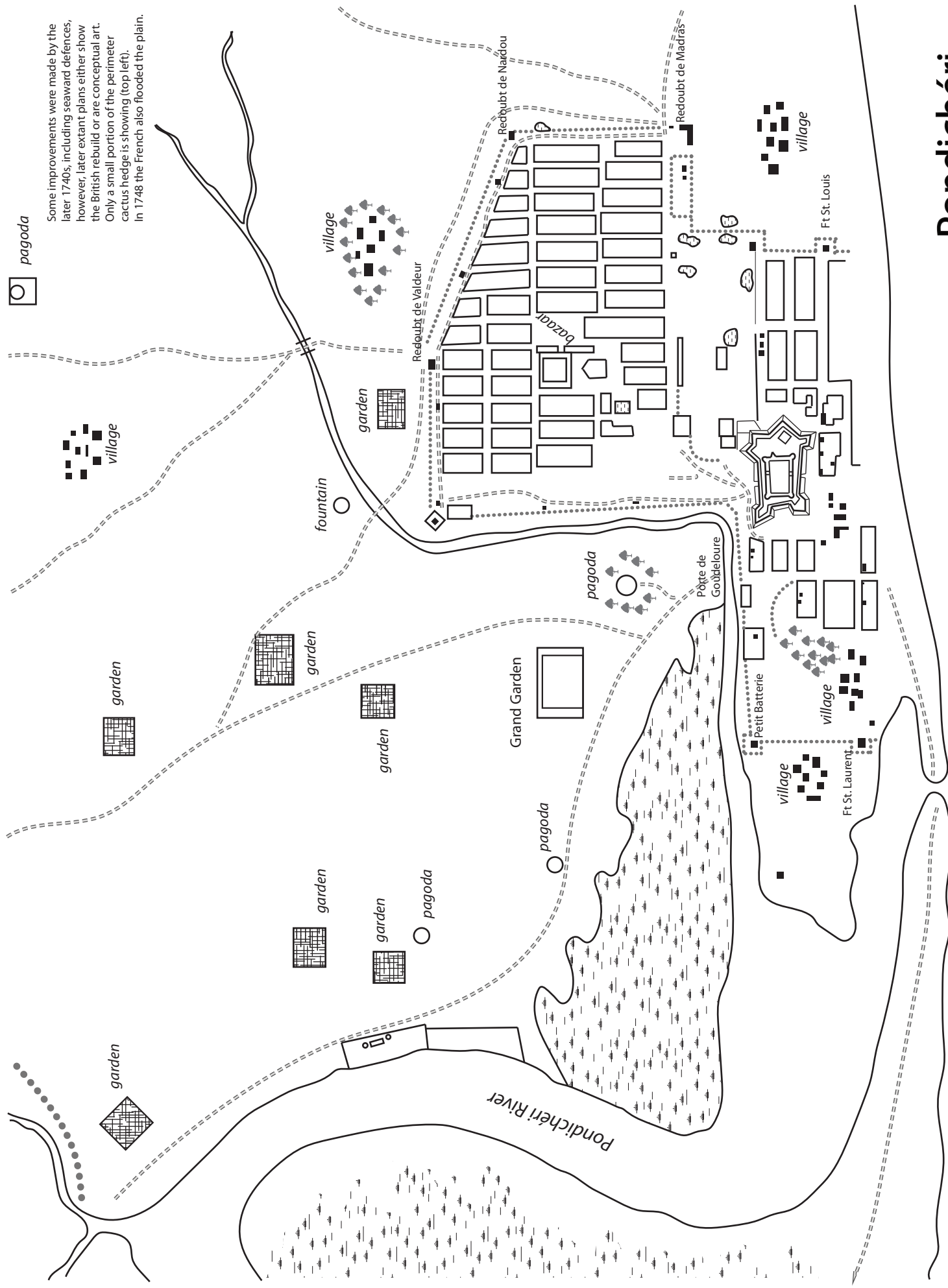
*the north side at the sea, a mile from the town, continued a semicircle all round it, until it joined the river Ariancopan, close to the fort of the same name; from that point the river continued the line of defence to the sea. Within this enclosure were cocoa nut and palm trees so thickly studded as to render the ground very difficult for the advance of an enemy. Of these fortifications, Paradis, after the completion of the defences of Ariancopan, was constituted chief engineer, and charged with the defence.*



Operations began on 1-3 August, when the ships *Exeter*, *Chester*, *Pembroke*, and *Swallow* were sent to establish a blockade of the anchorage. The troops set out on foot from Fort St. David's on 8 August, to establish a camp at Ariancoupun. Though located in the extreme southeast quarter, the position, which also boasted a dilapidated fort, would effectively lock the French in place. Boscawen took his command ashore, leaving a Captain Lisle to command the fleet.

The French still had their own camp at Ariancoupun. On 8 August it was attacked. The British attempted to rush the place. The commander of the fort, a Scotsman named Law, held his fire until the British were within 40 paces and unleashed a devastating volley. The British, lacking scaling ladders (because of course they did), hesitated to withdraw without accomplishing anything and lost 150 men. The French then erected a battery across the river to enfilade them. After two failed attempts to assault the fort the British erected their own battery. Law sortied against it with 60 horse and 150 foot, overran it, and captured several men, including Major Lawrence. Things might have continued to go well for the French, but a random shot blew up a barrel of gunpowder within the fort, inflicting over 100 casualties. Shaken, Law decided he could not hold. The walls were 'sighted' and the garrison withdrew to Pondichéri. It was this reverse that finally and irrevocably prompted the Nawab to side with the British. He promised 2,000 *sowars* (horsemen), though only 300 ever showed, and only toward the end of the operation. But, on paper Boscawen now had a total of 6,000 men (3,720 Europeans).

There is some confusion in the sources about this affray. The fort proved to be a stoutly built and well defended redoubt, a key to the approach to the town. Richmond blames the British engineers for taking a bad 'reading' of the situation while Beatson blames a French deserter, whom he claims was a plant, though he also blames the engineers. Either one of these statements might be true. The French often used fake deserters and British engineers were notoriously bad at their jobs. The fiasco seems to have



pagoda

Some improvements were made by the later 1740s, including seaward defences, however, later extant plans either show the British rebuild or are conceptual art. Only a small portion of the perimeter cactus hedge is showing (top left). In 1748 the French also flooded the plain.

village

village

garden

fountain

garden

garden

garden

pagoda

Grand Garden

pagoda

pagoda

Porte de Goubeloure

Petit Batterie

village

Ft St. Laurent

Ft St. Louis

village

Redoubt de Madras

Redoubt de Nardou

Redoubt de Valdeur

200 toises (390 metres)

Hedges

Trees

Route

Pondichéri  
from a plan by N. Fer 1705

dampened Boscawen's ardour. He spent five days repairing the fort, which was a pointless exercise. Perhaps he wanted to keep the men busy while other preparations were made.

The accounts of the siege itself are a bit confused, especially with regard to dates. In essence, it was a standard siege. The British established their camp at Ariancoupan, then crossed the river and closed in on Pondichéri. Since it was protected with detached outworks, these had to be reduced. Once this was done, siege lines were established, batteries erected, and approaches begun. It must also be said that the attached plan of the fortress and town dates from 1705 and thus shows none of the recent improvements, but the other extant maps are post-siege and useless, for the British, when they finally obtained the place, made a complete rebuild.

On 11 August, while the British were still south of the river, the French threw up a hasty fieldwork and made a demonstration with 300 foot and some horse, but soon retreated. This may have given the British a false sense of superiority, for the next day, when they attempted a dawn assault with 700 grenadiers on another redoubt covering the river they suffered heavy casualties from grapeshot — about 150, including the chief artillerist.

It is not clear from the accounts if these French outworks were north or south of the river. The river would have been shallow and fordable in many places. Ignoring the addition of a river crossing there were three problems with this attempt. First, what the engineers had seen was not the work itself, but a ruin that lay in front of it. Second, the redoubt was built to European standards, with angled trenches, 'cavaliers' at each angle, a dry moat with pits, and a covered way. There was also a flanking battery of heavy guns some distance away, protected by a squadron of horse. Third, it was fully manned, with 100 European soldiers, 300 sepoys, and 60 European horse, the latter deployed with the heavy battery.

*[In this author's opinion, if an engineer says that a position will be easy to attack, he should be invited to lead the assault.]*

It took until 20 August to capture the redoubt and clear the river bank. The British wasted a day mis-sighting their batteries — for some inconceivable reason they found there was an intervening belt of woodland only after they had deployed the guns — several more days in bombardment, suffered a French sally on 17 August that cleared their trenches (according to Beatson simply because the random long range killing of a man on the parapet of the British trenches sparked panic), then finally realized they should capture a flanking battery before assaulting the redoubt. A fortuitous event saved them the bother. On 20 August the British guns struck a store of powder in the redoubt and the explosion caused the French commanders to panic in turn and order the fort's destruction by firing the other magazines. Instead of pursuing and perhaps entering the town close on the heels of the fleeing troops (something a French commander would not have hesitated to attempt), Boscawen chose to consolidate his position. Giving an expedition a sole commander was a step up from the early war years, but Boscawen had apparently not found his land legs.

All the same, Dupleix's situation was not enviable. He was forced to call for reinforcements from Madras and had to contend with a very restless native population in the environs of the town. Madras sent him a company of grenadiers and best wishes.

The British remained cautious. The direct approach, by the Cuddalore Road, was deemed too strongly defended, so on 25 August Boscawen moved around the town to the Northwest. Here there was another redoubt. Malleison seems to suggest the redoubt was empty, and Beatson and Richmond do not mention it; there is a possibility this is actually the tough redoubt described earlier. Dupleix did not have enough troops to man every position. However, he was able to shift his men to keep them in front of the British. Nevertheless, around 28 August all the outposts, which lined a feature known as the Bound Hedge — a sort of town pale made of prickly pear cactus — had been cleared and the French penned in the town. On 30 August the formal siege began. It had immediately to deal with a wide swath of swampy ground covering the entire western approach.

*[Malleison says Boscawen marched around the town on 6 September — that is, August 26.]*

The first trench was begun at 1,500 yards from the covered way. The next day they had advanced about 100 yards, with a forward post of 150 men to secure the sap. This was attacked in a sally by Paradis and 1,500 men, supported by a feint through the South Gate. The main attack was also split into two. Unfortunately, one wing suffered heavy losses (100 men and 7 officers), including the gallant Swiss engineer. The second maintained a fire against the besiegers from the cover of some huts but were eventually forced to retreat. The loss of Paradis was a heavy blow. Unable to rely on his other senior officers, Dupleix took over the field command. Though no soldier he was a great motivator, and morale remained high. The British also moved sluggishly. Richmond says Dupleix made no further attempts during the siege, instead relying on the onset of the monsoon, now only a month away. Beatson says there were a few small sallies, including one in which two British guns were captured and dragged away.

*[Malleson says the sally involved 1,200 men. Perhaps the other 300 were the diversion.]*

Thanks to his engineers laying out the batteries in front of a swamp, Boscawen found he could not bring his guns closer than 800 yards from the walls. In fact, his engineers laid the first two batteries at 1,200 yards. *Basilisk* was able to come inshore and lob mortar shells, but the squadron as a whole could not approach close enough for effective fire due to a persistent heavy swell, and *Basilisk* had to retreat each night for safety after the enemy guns got the range.

The monsoon broke on 20 September. While the Northeast monsoon is nowhere near as wet as the Southwest summer monsoon it does still bring heavy rain, particularly as the front moves in; later, things dry out and get colder. Dupleix diverted the waters of the river to flood the British trenches. Fever and exhaustion followed. On 26 September the British unmasked their main batteries at the 800 yard mark, one of eight 18/24-pounders and another of four, plus a bomb battery of five large mortars and fifteen 'royals' and another mortar battery of fifteen coehorns. The French replied with a massive bombardment that made mockery of the British efforts. The fleet attempted to assist at a range of 1,000 yards, with little effect. They were supposed to draw off in the night but the wind obliged them to remain in position, so they gave the town another working over the next day. According to the French the only casualty was an old woman.

On 30 September a British council of war decided they had better abandon the siege before they all drowned, and a week later, on 6 October, Boscawen withdrew. The stores and cannon were put aboard ship but the troops made a mini death-march overland to Cuddalore. British dead amounted to 757 soldiers, 43 artillerymen, and 256 sailors. Native troops were not counted, but they did not actually suffer much, since they were relegated to guard duty (such men were as sticky of their rights as any union employee and could not be used to dig trenches). Officially the French lost 200 Europeans and 50 sepoys out of 1,800 and 300, respectively. Dupleix also sent some men away to strengthen other posts during the siege.

*From the 6th of September, the day on which Boscawen moved on Pondichery, to the 17th October, forty-two days of open trenches, the siege was pushed with all the vigour of which the English leader was capable. But his efforts were thwarted by the skill and gallantry of Dupleix. Constant sorties, more or less successful, always retarded and often effectually destroyed the approaches of the besiegers. The English having, after much labour, advanced the trenches to within eight hundred yards of the walls, it was found that owing to the existence of a morass, it was impossible to carry them further on that side, and it became necessary to raze the batteries that had been erected. When at last a heavy fire was opened on another part of the town, it was found that owing to the skill and energy of Dupleix, the fire of the besieged at that point was double that of the besiegers. The ships of the fleet which were brought up, as a last resource, to bombard the town, were compelled to sheer off after receiving much more damage than they had been able to inflict. So energetic, so determined, so successful was the defence, that the English Admiral found, at the end of five weeks, that he had actually gained no ground at all; that he had lost some of his best officers and very many men; that the enemy had been able to concentrate on his several attacks a fire far more destructive than that which he had been able to bring to bear on their defences. Added to this, the periodical rains which began to fall at the end of September had brought sickness into his camp, and had warned him that the real difficulties of his position were only about to begin. Under these circumstances, acting under the advice of a council of war, he commenced on the*

*14th October the destruction of the batteries, and the re embarkation of the sailors and heavy stores. On the 17th this vast army, the largest European force that had till then appeared on Indian soil, and which counted a Clive amongst its ranks, broke up and retreated to Fort St. David, leaving behind it 1,065 men who had perished either from the fire of the enemy or from sickness contracted during the siege.*

*Malleson, pp.221-222; subtract 11 days from each date to match the text.*

The British razed the fort at Ariancoupan before they withdrew. Boscawen sent five of his ships to Aceh and the rest to Trincomalee. He remained ashore at Cuddalore. On 13 October he learned France and England had been under an armistice since June (peace was signed in October). Once again the local princes esteemed the French and disparaged the British, sending Dupleix congratulations and many rich presents. The garrison of Fort St. David would surely have capitulated if not for the general peace. Though sacked in 1761, Pondichéri would not come under British control until the Revolutionary Wars. As a result of the peace Madras would be exchanged for Louisbourg in August of 1749, to Dupleix' towering rage. But, after all, it was just a backwater, while Louisbourg bore the King's name.



Malleson has had so many quotes in this section of the Commentary that he must be allowed to conclude it (pp.225-226):

*Thus, after a contest of five years, the two nations found themselves, in outward appearance, in the position in which they were at the outbreak of hostilities. Yet, if apparently the same, in reality how different The vindictive rivalry between both, exemplified in the capture of Madras, the attempts upon Fort St. David, and Pondichery, had laid the foundation of an eternal enmity, — an enmity which could only be extinguished by the destruction of one or other of the adversaries. Then, again, the superiority evinced by the Europeans over the natives in the decisive battle at St Thomé, had given birth, especially in the mind of the French leader, to an ambition for empire which, if at first vague and indistinct, assumed every day a more and more practical shape. Added to this, the expense of keeping up the greatly increased number of soldiers sent out from Europe pressed heavily on the resources of both nations, and almost forced upon them the necessity of hiring out their troops to the rival candidates for power in Southern India. Thus, during five years which elapsed between 1745 and 1749 their position had become revolutionised. No longer simple traders, regarded as such only by the rulers of the Carnatic, they were then feared, especially the French, by all the potentates in the neighbourhood, their alliance was eagerly sought for, their assistance an object of anxious entreaty. From vassals they had jumped almost to the position of liege lords.*

*A new era, resulting from this war, dates thus from the moment when the treaty of Aix la Chapelle placed the rival European powers in the position which they had nominally occupied in 1745. By the East India Companies in Paris and London this change was not even suspected. They fondly believed that the new treaty would enable their agents to recommence their mercantile operations. They hoped that the reaction after five years' hostilities would lead to a feeling of mutual confidence and trust. Vain dream! The peace that reigned in Europe, was it not then to extend to both nations in India? Alas! with ambition aroused, mutual jealousy excited, the temptation of increased dominion knocking at their doors, what had they to do with peace?*

### **Chaos in the Sultanate**

The local authorities, French, British, Mughal, and Maratha, began immediately to prepare for the Second Carnatic War. Indeed, Boscawen was soon asked to assist in a little war against the King of Tanjore, whom Dupleix had provoked into attacking the EIC (this in April of 1749). The Sultanate had always been part of the Churn of India but now it was sliding into the vortex. On top of his problems with the Europeans, the *poligars*, the Marathas, his neighbours, endemic banditry, and the general devastation of the countryside, Anwár-ud-dín learned that the Nizam ul-Mulk had died, on 21 May 1748. The man had been old, the man had been unsuccessful in many endeavours, but he had survived in an environment where most men of power did not, and, despite failures on the battlefield his name had inspired terror. Now there was a vacuum, and into it poured a veritable host of potential successors, the Marathas, Murtuza Ali the Vulture of Vellore with the remnants of his clan, the French, the British, and Chanda Sahib.

'To be continued...'

## **The Wars of Malabar**

As has been mentioned before, there were only a handful of conflicts taking place on the Malabar Coast during the time the British and the French were fighting, a highly unusual state of affairs. These included a major war between the VOC and the rising power of Travancore, as well as a significant Canarese incursion in the 1730s. Otherwise there were only a handful of raids by outsiders, while the Europeans actually dialled back their tussling and came to a peaceful arrangement that lasted through the 1750s.

### **Cochin v. Calicut**

Calicut's perennial struggle with Cochin had subsided by the 1740s, but it helped set the stage for the war with Travancore, if only because it made the Dutch focus undue attention on Cochin's northern flank. Around the turn of the 18th Century Malabar Command had to face a renewed bid for Cochin on the part of the Zamorin, who had been put up to the job by the EIC and CIO. Not perhaps coincidentally the threat came when a draw-down of VOC troops occurred and Cochin was experiencing heightened unrest among the nobility thanks to the Raja's administration tying itself into a financial knot. The kingdom was always in some crisis or other. This time, there were officers of the VOC in league with the nobles, against the Cochin Raja. He actually wrote to Batavia pleading for aid, claiming Malabar Command was refusing to help him. It is not clear if the Command was trying to execute a coup on its own initiative or if some of its officers were just being opportunistic. No one liked the Raja; keeping him on was merely a question of general political stability.

The Cochin-Calicut war, when it came in 1701, was not prosecuted with vigour on either side. The EIC, under the wily Tellicherry factor, Robert Adams, backed the Zamorin with as much money and supplies as he could spare, which was not much. The Zamorin had been reluctant from the start, and only carried it forward to appease his own fractious nobles and the particular Cochin royal faction he had been sponsoring. The VOC cheered Cochin on from the sidelines. Conflict remained 'background noise' until 1710, when there was some notable violence that led nowhere. The VOC intervened, going on the offensive, capturing an EIC ship and inflicting heavy losses on Calicut's army. They took a couple of strategic lagoon islands, named Pappinivattam and Chettuva, located 80 or 90 Km south of Calicut. Chettuva, the main prize, was just 30 Km south of the Zamorin's favourite coastal palace at Ponnani and controlled the estuary of the Karuvannur River that led to the important inland regional center of Thrissur, a bone of contention between the two states and a source of spices for the EIC.

The VOC erected forts on the islands and compelled the Zamorin to pay a war indemnity. But, the local VOC commander bumbled around and lost the forts to a counterattack by a combined force of Calicut and EIC troops; the VOC lost face. The EIC then erected a warehouse at Chettuva, leading in turn to a VOC counterattack, which also succeeded. But, the Dutch could not regain all the lost ground. Relations between Calicut and the EIC at this time were probably the tightest they had ever been. Company soldiers could be seen garrisoning the Zamorin's forts, and the British had permission to build several of their own.

Not until 1716 were conditions again favourable enough for Cochin and the Dutch to roll back Calicut and regain lost prestige, and their monopoly in the district. In 1717 the VOC brought in reinforcements and formed a 'coalition of the cowed' with Cochin and its vassals against Calicut. This completely flipped the situation (partly due to British complacency). The Zamorin collected his own vassals, plus those of Cochin's that had not been coerced, and struck back. But, the VOC laid a blockade on the entire coast that eventually forced a new treaty, signed at Ponnani. Though it was only a few years since the fight over Chettuva, the EIC proved powerless to help Calicut in this fight, through a mix of unpreparedness and having to deal with other issues. When Calicut asked the CIO for help they found conditions were exactly the same with them.

In the end, the war seriously weakened Calicut, which ran up huge debts and still had to pay that massive indemnity. This was the high point of Dutch Malabar's fortunes and they laid down the law from Cannanore to Cape Cormorin. But, not for very long. For the VOC there were two downsides. First, they found themselves the new Arbiters of the Coast, at least in central Malabar, with all the headaches that

entailed, and second, they remained fixated on Calicut, ignoring the warning signs coming from the direction of Travancore to the South. To be fair, they were not wrong to keep an eye on the Zamorin.

This is how things stood until the 1730s, a weakened but still rich Calicut dominating the center of the Malabar Coast, with the VOC entrenched at Cochin, propping up that rather pathetic regime, the EIC now focusing more on Kolathunadu, and the Zamorin involved in various coups, plots, and low-level feuding with his neighbours. In 1732 a new actor appeared: Mysore. That year, the year the Canarese attacked Kolathunadu (as will be described later) the Raja of Palakkad (Palghat) called on Mysore for help. Palghat was a small but wealthy kingdom sitting astride the most important route leading between Calicut and Madurai, a 30 Km wide gap in the Western Ghats. The Zamorins claimed the *nad* as a vassal. Cochin claimed it also. The rajas of Palghat said they were independent. In fact, Palghat claimed a right over the neighbouring town of Chittur, which actually was a vassal of Cochin. It was to help maintain this claim that Palghat called upon Mysore, which conducted large scale raids in 1732, 1735, and 1737, before fighting three pitched battles with Calicut in 1745 — it is ironic that Calicut defended Cochin's claim; some convoluted local politics at work. Fortunately for Calicut, this was not the Mysore of Haider Ali, but a weak regime, governed by feckless ministers and a figurehead raja. The raids, which were substantial but ultimately of little immediate impact, will be described later. In the mid 1730s Calicut also sent aid to Kolathunadu during the Canarese invasion. But her efforts were halfhearted and her armies were easily routed by the Nayaka generals.

To the distractions of Mysore and Bednur was added, beginning in 1739, the more threatening advances of Travancore. Not only was the latter gobbling up territory at a steady rate, she was playing the same manipulative games with her neighbours that the Zamorins had mastered. Furthermore, the ruler of Travancore was, very disturbingly for the Eradi priest-kings, restoring the traditional influence of the *brahmins*. However, Cochin would remain a buffer zone between them until after this narrative closes.

(In the end, Mysore would prove the bigger threat. Haider Ali annexed Calicut later in the century. This led the EIC, in its war with Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan, to offer Calicut and the other states of Kerala the status of protectorates, which, after some fighting and even more arduous arguing by the likes of the Zamorin, resulted in all Kerala coming under Company rule as part of the Madras Presidency. The Zamorin became a pensioner of the Company.)

## **Mahé, Tellicherry, and Dharmapattanam**

At the other end of Malabar, Pondichéri's poor relation was one factor among many that influenced the Canarese invasion, and the condition of Kolathunadu more generally. Likewise Tellicherry, and most expressly Dharmapattanam Island.

After the closure of Surat the CIO looked for a new base on the Arabian Sea. As the tale is usually told, in 1725 a squadron under *chef d'esquadron* Pardillan attacked a village called Maihi in the territory of the Kingdom of Kolathunadu. The actual raja of the district was that of Kadatha, and he saw advantages to lining up with someone other than the Dutch at Cannanore or the British at Tellicherry.

It was an ideal anchorage, at the mouth of the Mayyazhi or Mahe River, capable of hosting vessels of up to 80 tons displacement. The river itself was navigable by the small boats of the country for a distance of about 19 Km and was the main route by which pepper was shipped to the coast in that region. The river eased transportation for the neighbouring *nads*, too. In the short version of events, the French captured the place from the local chief in the following manner.

The town was situated high above the water behind a rocky beach. In theory, easier access could be had via a small river, but its entrance had been blocked by a natural rockfall, meaning a frontal attack was the only option. The expedition was initially repulsed by the locals, but fortunately for the French the town's headman was an independent chieftain, so no help came from his superiors. More fortunate still, La Bourdonnais was serving under Pardillan's command. He submitted a plan which proved successful:

*The plan which La Bourdonnais submitted to the commodore, was to land the troops on a raft of his own designing, in order of battle, under cover of the fire of the squadron. He pressed also that he might be permitted to lead them himself. M. de Pardailan, struck with the ingenuity of the plan, and with the*

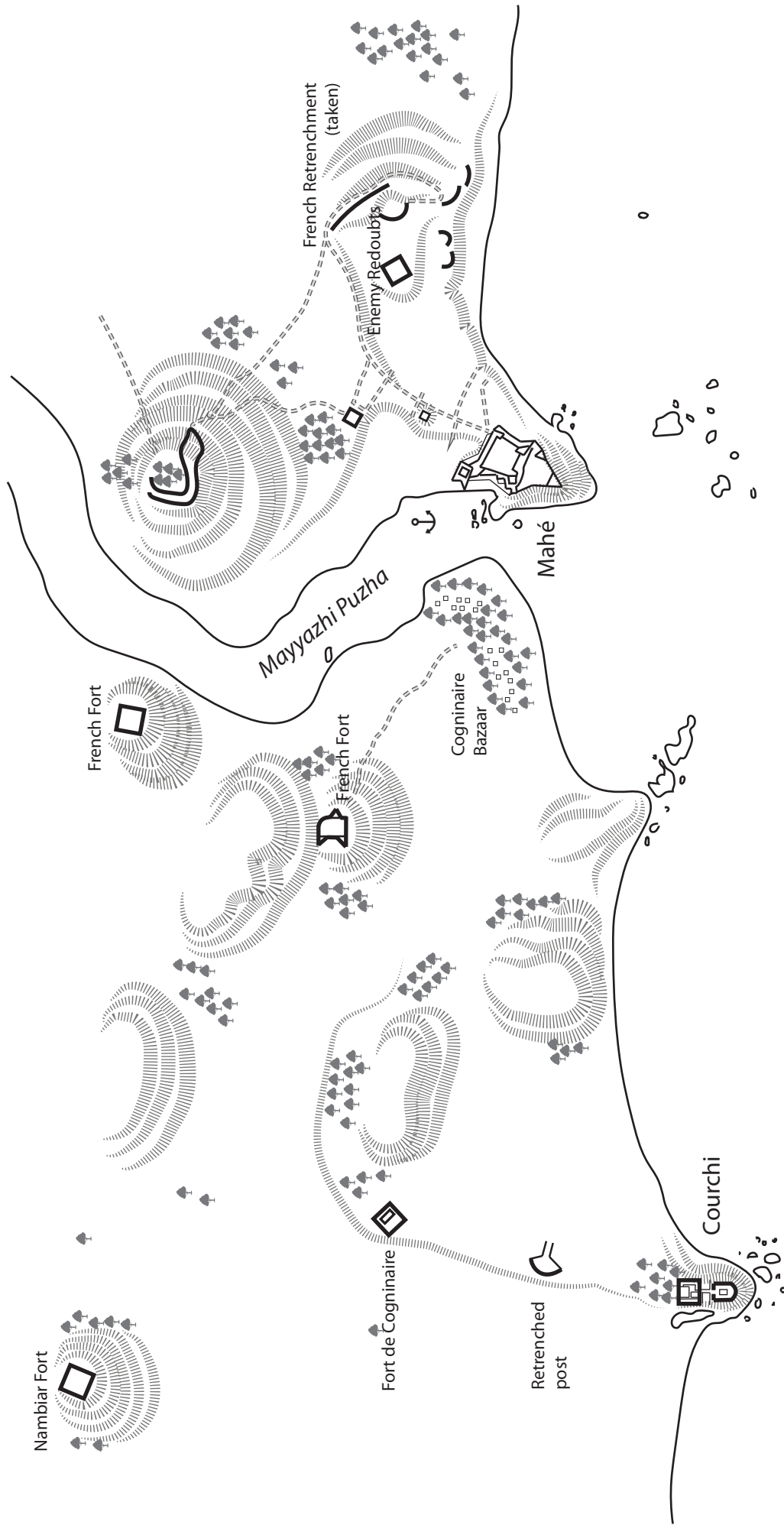
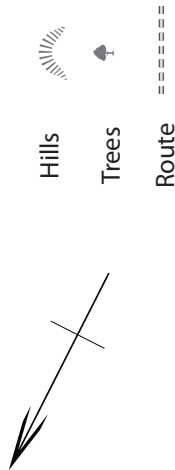
From a 1726 map (unknown cartographer).

The map was intended to show the progress of a siege by Bayanore conducted that year. (Bayanore = Kadatha). Most of the redoubts and retrenchments were erected by the besiegers; the Nambiaris also were allies of Kadatha.

The existence of the various redoubts and the position of the various hills serves to illustrate why the French spent the early 1740s erecting their own forts on those hills and capturing the ones belonging to the Nambiaris.

# Mahé Environs

200 toises (390 metres)



*energy and quickness of decision evinced by the young officer, gave his consent to the scheme. It was carried out almost instantly. The raft was made, the troops were placed upon it, and, piloted by La Bourdonnais, were landed with dry feet and almost in order of battle, at the foot of the high ground. This difficulty being surmounted the place was stormed. As an acknowledgment of the skill and enterprise of his young captain the commodore, by a slight alteration of the letters which went to form the name of the captured town, transformed it from the Indian Maihi or Mahi into the French Mahé — the first name of La Bourdonnais. This new name not only took root, but it gradually effaced the recollection that the town had ever borne another.*

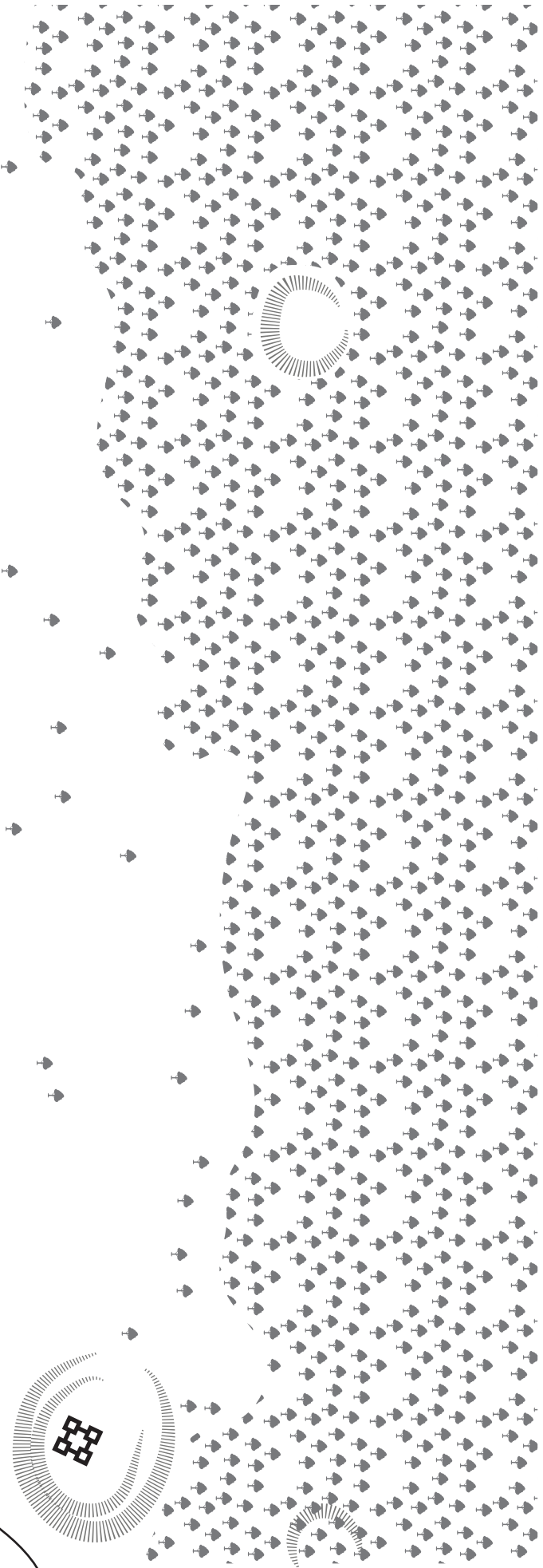
*Malleson, p.64*

What is usually overlooked in this account is that the French had already established a factory at Mahé in 1721, by agreement with the Raja of Kadathanad, a man known as the *Vazhunnavar*. They signed a mutual defence pact. The following year the treaty was renewed. But, in 1725 they were tossed out of Mahé by the *Vazhunnavar*. The action described above was therefore not the initial landing, but the French response.

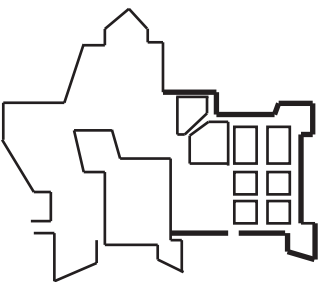
The backstory is this. The French formed a coalition against the EIC post of Tellicherry, only six Km up the coast, involving Kadatha, the Kurangoth Nairs, and the Iruvazhinad Nambiaris. These last two were vassals of Kadatha, enjoying a degree of autonomy and special rights, and were more allies than vassals — the Kolathiri themselves were accounted Nambiar caste; they are a subset of the Nairs. Kadatha suffered heavy losses in the attack and switched sides. (Also, the CIO were not buying as much pepper as the raja had hoped — the traders were not provided with enough funds to compete with the EIC.) It would be at this time that the French were kicked out. In turn, the French factor (stretching the truth) complained to Madras about the conduct of the English factor, Robert Adams, who was ‘out to get them’. The CIO formed another combination, this time with Kadatha’s rival Kottayam, and, with the assistance of three CIO vessels reoccupied Mahé as described. They were helped by the fact that the Kadatha were divided on the issue. The raja was pro-British but some of his ministers saw more advantage in backing the CIO. The other Nairs in the region were likewise pro-French, and Adam’s attempts to form his own coalition fell on deaf ears. To complicate matters further, Kottayam, who was friendly with both the EIC and CIO, asked the former to prevent the ‘Chirakkal Prince’ — that is, the Kolathiri Prince Regent — from aiding Kadatha!

The *Vazhunnavar* tried to enlist ‘his’ Kurangoth Nairs once again to help against the French, but they wanted money, and Adams had none to give; Kadatha was a bad credit risk, and he was even instructed by Bombay to demand repayment of an earlier loan when he met with the Kadatha representatives. This refusal in turn caused Kadatha to play on the Anglo-French rivalry, offering their alliance to each in hopes of securing more loans. Meanwhile, the Kurangoths joined the French camp in defiance of the *Vazhunnavar*, leading Adams to declare his open support for Kadatha, possibly without permission from Head Office. And all that took place within the span of a single year, 1726. On 8 November 1726 the conflict came to an end. Adams arbitrated peace between Kadatha and Kottayam, secretly hoping to create a new coalition against the CIO, but his plans backfired. The *Vazhunnavar* agreed to let the French erect a post at the mouth of the Mayyazhi River, named Fort Boyanore, which they used to blockade access to Tellicherry from the South. He also transferred the monopoly rights for pepper back to them. Unsettled conditions continued, nearly always driven by greed on all sides. In 1729 Adams was asking the Kolathiris to help him stop ‘friendly’ Kottayam from blocking pepper shipments on the Codoly River. Kottayam’s pepper was high quality, and they knew it. They wanted more money. However, relations between the companies improved. Mahé and Tellicherry agreed to fix the price between them, and the later 1720s were a more peaceful time, until a new price war started again in the 1730s, leading again to peace in the 1740s (despite the war in the Carnatic). Things went back and forth like this until the days of the Raj.

Robert Adams was perhaps the best factor to see service in Malabar, even if he did push dope. Whatever his faults, he could think on his feet and make his own decisions. The Tellicherry factory (now Thalassery) was established in 1694, with permission of the Prince Regent of Kolathunadu. By that point the English had been trading in the region for three generations, but without any local infrastructure.



Tellicherry



# Tellicherry Environs

Arabian Sea

Hills

Trees



Anjengo in the land of Travancore, established in 1684, served as the model. In 1708 the Raja of Kolathunadu granted permission for a fort and personally laid the foundation stone. Fortification was necessary because the Kurangoth Nairs owned the land and were not happy with the deal. Their attacks continued until 1719, when a friendship treaty was struck. This treaty was highly advantageous to the EIC, for it exempted them from paying duty.

But Tellicherry was not the best location in the neighbourhood. The fact that it was wedged in between the Dutch at Cannanore and the French at Mahé could not be helped, but the fort was located on a promontory well away from the rivers that gave access to the interior. (See the attached map.) The nearest of these is the Kuyyali Puzha, which enters the sea about 2,500 metres north of the fort. Right at the mouth is a confluence between that river and a branch of the Anjarakandy River called the Dharmadam. Heading up the Kuyyali one immediately turns south almost as far as Tellicherry, and then east; the bend is about 1,200 metres inland from the fort. This was not efficient. The Anjarakandy is a larger river than the Kuyyali, and was the route to the best pepper. It enters the sea about 5 Km north of the fort, but the entrance used to be blocked with mangrove swamps. Access to the river was therefore by the Dharmadam, which joins the main river about 8 Km north of Tellicherry. As can be seen from the map, this creates a large island, Dharmapattanam. If the EIC could establish a post on the island they would have much better access to the interior, and much better control.

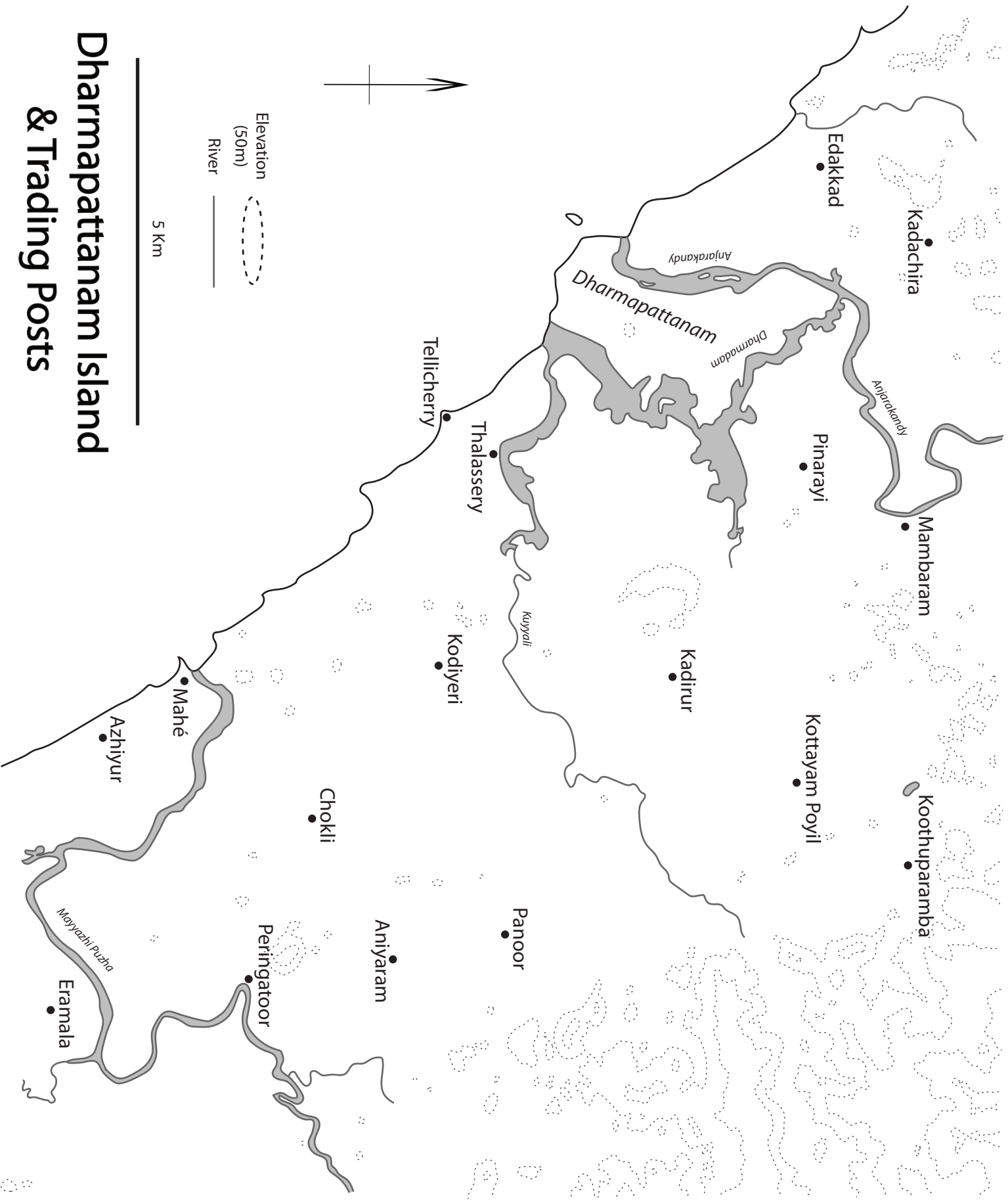
But, everyone wanted Dharmapattanam. The population on the island was *mappila*, and it was the traditional homeland of the Ali Rajas, so Cannanore claimed it. Kadatha claimed it. The Prince Regent claimed it as head of the Kolathiri, the overlords of Kadatha. The French periodically negotiated for it and were already making visits to the island for the purposes of trade. The Kingdom of Bednur coveted it as a 'stretch goal'. The ebb and flow of the Canarese invasion (see below) would be influenced by the current situation at Dharmapattanam, if only because the EIC used Bednur and Cannanore as levers against their rivals to secure possession.

The Canarese invasion will be discussed shortly. To round out Anglo-French affairs beyond that conflict, the 1730s price war led to a real war between Mahé and Kadatha over the winter of 1739-1740, of which little is recorded. Apparently the Iruvazhinad Nambiars, vassals of Kadatha, were interfering with CIO trading operations, so the Company sent out a punitive expedition. The EIC in turn sent aid to the Nambiars, who defeated the French, killing many of them, including the column commander. After the lodging of protests a kind of peace was restored in December. The CIO managed to gain two strategic hill tops in the hinterland (called Poitra and Chembra). Early in 1740 they grabbed another hill without permission. To be pedantic, they paid the *Vazhunnar* for it, but his mother rescinded the deal. This led to a French blockade of Kadatha, which interfered with the EIC's operations and brought them back in. In April of 1740 the CIO captured an EIC ship; the British protested and got it back. On 5 September the French took yet another hill but were defeated by Kadatha after the latter received more British aid. Again, the *Vazhunnar* agreed to let the CIO built a pair of forts, only to have his mother object. A further armed clash occurred, after which the French gave up on the construction.

These hills were nothing to write home about. The only identifiable one, Chembra, is about 3,300 metres north of Mahé, or about halfway to Tellicherry. That bit of country, which was the heartland of the Iruvazhinad Nambiars, features rolling forested hills; from their physical arrangement they would make very nice sites for mutually supporting stockades, and some already had native forts on them. But they do lie beyond the far bank of the Mayyazhi River, meaning the whole operation was likely an attempt to exert permanent control over the Nambiars.

Pondichéri objected to Mahé's shenanigans. This would be because at the time Versailles was hoping to make India a no-conflict zone. Despite being rebuked, on 16 September the CIO seized another hill. The reader may have guessed by now that La Bourdonnais was residing at Mahé at this time. The Kadatha counterattack involved 700 men, who inflicted 40 casualties on the French. The CIO lodged a protest with the EIC, complaining they were selling arms to the natives. A ceasefire was not arranged until 2 May 1741.

Around this time the Marathas showed up. It will be remembered that after failing to shake down the French at Pondichéri they sent a column against Mahé. There is evidence to suggest the EIC promoted



# Dharmapattanam Island & Trading Posts

this endeavour as part of the shadow war between Tellicherry and Mahé — the former place, for instance, was not attacked. A likely scenario might be this: the EIC paid the protection money — the *chauth* — at Madras and could thus claim vassal status with the Marathas; they could then ask their 'patrone' for help against the CIO.

Some sources make it sound like the French were only blockaded by the Marathas and others make it sound like they were forced to abandon Mahé temporarily. A Maratha blockade is more likely, not only because the French factory was fortified, but because they apparently continued to prosecute their war with Kadatha and the EIC, though the presence of the Marathas is likely the reason why reports of other activities die down around this time. On 13 November the British learned La Bourdonnais was assembling four ships (three already at Mahé and one from Calicut) to make some sort of naval raid. Later British sources assume La Bourdonnais was going to attack Tellicherry, but it is more likely that the squadron was assembled — at least initially — to deal with the Marathas. Nothing came of the naval attack so far as Tellicherry was concerned, but the Marathas soon departed. Also, the French made a major assault against Kadatha, engaging an entrenched position with heavy casualties on both sides. This is something they would not have done if the Marathas remained in the vicinity.

The French claimed a win in this last attack. But they also tried to persuade the British to join with them against 'the natives'. Adams pretended to agree, but during the peace negotiations wangled the role of arbiter. A formal peace was concluded on 1 January 1742. The French paid two million pagodas in compensation and agreed to surrender two hills in exchange for land closer to Mahé. Tellicherry and Mahé then agreed to split the take in the pepper trade, so that during the Carnatic War — even though La Bourdonnais popped in from time to time — there was no war in Kolathunadu.

## The Canarese Invasion of Malabar

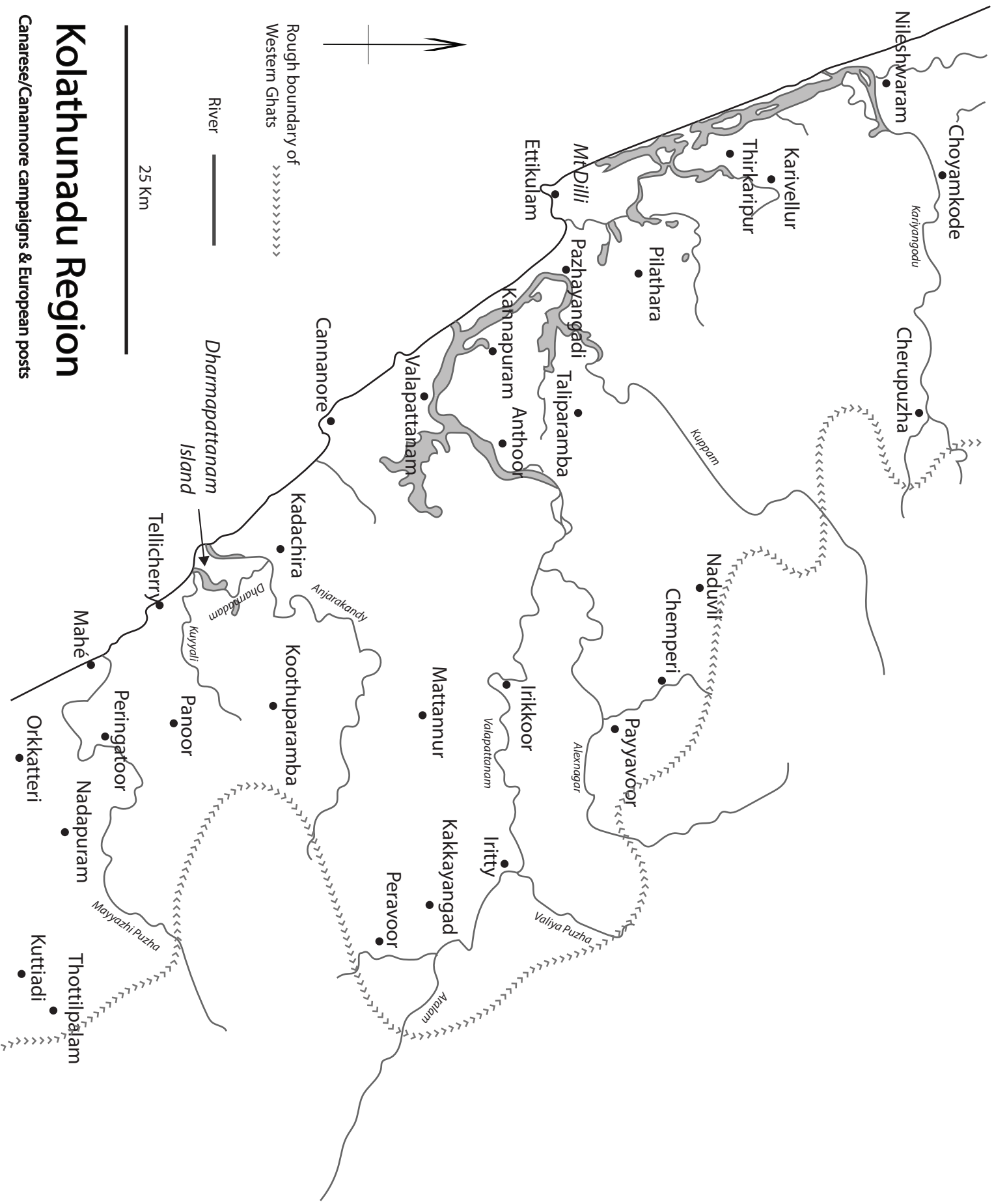
As for so much of Malabar's history there are very few details readily available about this campaign. Apparently, in April of 1730, Raja Somashekara of Bednur decided the time had come to retake the lands his ancestors had lost to Kolathunadu during the latter's glory days. The land in question was the province of Nileswaram (Neelakanteshweram), which lay on the border between the two states. The titular capital, Nileshtar, sits on the right (northern) bank of the Thejaswini River. The province ran inland from the coast, between that river and the Chandragiri, on which sat the important Ikkeri Nayaka town of Kasargod.

If the reader remembers, Nileswaram had its own dynasty with ties to both Kolathunadu and Calicut, and was always semi-independent. It was a culturally significant region, with a number of famous sacred groves and attendant festivals, critical for boosting the authority of the ruler, and which provided a link to the geographically distant Zamorin of Calicut. The Kolathiri laid claim to the region and intermarried with the local royals, but the latter never gave up their claim to be independent. The Alladam Swarupam, as they were styled, requested aid from the Ikkeri Nayakas against the other factions of the Kolathiri but Somashekara may also have been engaged in a simple land grab. The Kolathiri gave him a golden opportunity.

The Raja of Kolathunadu in that day was still a minor, while the *Udayavarma*, the Prince Regent, was an unreliable character. There were a great many other players in the drama. All three trading companies, for instance. There was the Northern Prince, the *Vadakkilamkur*, who had allowed the EIC to build a fort at Tellicherry in 1708. There was the Southern Prince, who belonged to the rival House of Palli. There was also the Zamorin. And Coorg. And Mysore (tangentially).

Bednur swiftly took the province and there was an uneasy peace for a couple of years, until a new crisis gave the Nayakas another opportunity. Conflict was endemic between the Prince Regent of the Kolathiri and the Ali Raja of Cannanore, his theoretical vassal, and around the same time as the takeover of Nileswaram the latter's dynasty made another bid for full independence.

This brought in the EIC. By 1730 the latter had secured a virtual monopoly on trade within Kadatha, in both pepper and cardamom, with access to the Pudupatanam River, a number of warehouses in the hinterland, and leases on various plantations run by middlemen. They were on fairly good terms with



# Kolathunadu Region

Canarese/Canannore campaigns & European posts

both parties in the coming conflict and feared the damage war would do to trade, but they were also still engaged in their own land dispute with Cannanore over Dharmapattanam, so offered to support the Prince Regent.

## **The Cannanore War**

The Cannanore-Kolathiri war of the 1730s started with the Ali Raja challenging the Prince Regent and the latter trying to find a way to lay siege to the city. Or the spark may have been when a combined force of Kolathiri and men from Kottayam landed on Dharmapattanam and evicted the native *mappilas*. This sounds like a move the EIC would have been in back of, and Adams did indeed line up with the Prince Regent 'in the interest of preserving good relations'. But, remember that Bombay had blackballed the Udayavarma as a bad risk for loans. This meant he had to turn to the VOC for help. That was how the Dutch became involved, and once on the scene they would not go away. They could smell the pepper. Which caused Adams to ignore Bombay's instructions and go all-in. The VOC then naturally backed Cannanore. The situation became dire when Cannanore also called in the *siddi* pirates. With EIC naval support the Udayavarma fought Cannanore to a standstill, but it was touch-and-go, and not really settled when in January of 1732 the Canarese invaded, at the request of the Northern Prince.

The details of this 'foreign intervention' are even more murky than the rest of the affairs described so far, so one can only guess at the motivations. At bottom it could have been simple jealousy of the Prince Regent on the part of the Northern Prince. Bednur does not seem to have been bent on conquest but only acting as an ally. While it is possible the VOC put him up to it because at the time the EIC were backing the Prince Regent, it is more likely the Northern Prince's affiliation with the Alladam Swarupam of Nileswaram made Bednur seem like a natural ally. They had just 'freed' Nileswaram. Did the Northern Prince promise vassalage? Or, did he intend to pay a one-time tribute for services rendered? Given what is known of Somashekara, the former is perhaps more likely.

The Udayavarma met the Canarese in battle and was routed. Very probably some of his contingents were disloyal. This allowed the Canarese, possibly led by Somashekara himself, or by his chief general, Gopalayya, to advance as far as Mount Dilli. Now... the Prince Regent's capital was at Valapattanam, on the South bank of the river of the same name. It will be remembered it was just outside Cannanore. Mount Dilli is about 20 Km northwest of Valapattanam, on a stretch of coastline that juts out into the sea; Ezhimala (Ettikulam), the ancestral home of the Kolathiri, lies on the coast just south of the hill.

From here the Canarese marched east, along the Kuppam River's right bank as far as Taliparamba, where they crossed (that town is on the left bank). The Kuppam does not enter the sea near Mount Dilli but bends southeast to join the Valapattanam just before it enters the sea, creating a kilometre wide coastal strip that would have been foolish to march down, if it was even possible to do so — again, this was an area of mangrove swamps. But, the main reason for going to Taliparamba was the prestige value of that location's temple complex.

After fortifying Taliparamba the Canarese seem to have debated the next step. They still had the Valapattanam to cross before they reached the capital, if they decided to cross in front of the capital. If not, they would also have to cross a third river, the Pullooppi, that shielded the palace's eastern flank, and it had a wide, swampy flood plain. Where they crossed is not certain, but Somashekara brought down his coastal flotilla and with its aid not only blockaded the Prince Regent but succeeded in crossing the Valapattanam and sacking his palace.

## **Interventions**

At this point there was a lull in the fighting. Probable causes for this are the approaching rains and perhaps unexpectedly stiff resistance. Alarmed, the trading companies had formed a combination, and even the Portuguese made noises. A shaky truce was patched up between Cannanore and the Prince Regent. Control of Taliparamba Temple may also have been the main object of the campaign, and the sacking of the palace merely a warning.

The Zamorin was one of the five Protectors of Taliparamba Temple, and was therefore only too happy to come to the aid of Kolathunadu. He sent 40,000 men to steamroll the Canarese, who promptly sent them

packing without even a battle. Poor generalship was claimed. But, at least no one could say the Zamorin failed to do his duty as Protector of the Temple. He tried.

The other reason for the strategic pause was some intense diplomacy. Faced with invasion, the actual Raja of Kolathunadu, Ravi Varma, sent an urgent plea to Somashekara's kinsman, Dodda Virappa, the Raja of Coorg, begging him to intervene diplomatically. This effort met with success. Though reluctant at first — at least, he pretended reluctance — Somashekara agreed to evacuate the country, provided he was paid 18 *lakhs* of rupees. Dodda Virappa agreed to stand security for the money, believing Coorg had good relations with Kolathunadu. Good, but, as it turned out, not that good. When his men went to collect the final instalment of 9 lakhs they were fobbed off and almost insulted.

5,000 of Coorg's finest under the general Boni Muthanna were sent into Kolathunadu to collect the balance. They arrived in a timely fashion but were met with endless delays, as the Kolathiri plotted to destroy the column. Warned by a letter from the Ali Raja, Dodda Virappa sent orders for his men to remove themselves from the capital just in time. As the Kolathiri were now blocking the passes to his own country, Boni Muthanna found it easier to march to Cannanore, crushing an intercepting force enroute. From here they marched up the coast to Kumbala, in Kanara, and thence circled back to Coorg.

Despite this treachery, Dodda Virappa paid his kinsman the balance of the tribute out of his own pocket, solely to keep his word, and as a consequence of this act of generosity Somashekara withdrew. Dodda Virappa was later rewarded for his fidelity by the Ikkeri Nayaka.

## Negotiations

During the calm, the Canarese general, Gopalayya, played politics. The Prince Regent was not liked within his own family and there were a number of influential people willing to listen to Gopalayya's message, which was to mediate their disputes and offer the Prince Regent an acceptable treaty. He also played on animosities toward the Europeans. This might have been clever, or it might have been a mistake. It did cause the EIC to sell out. Adams approached Somashekara through the Governor of Mangalore, offering to mediate a peace treaty himself if he could be guaranteed the use of Dharmapattanam no matter who legally owned it. All these negotiations, documented and undocumented, probably started in the summer and were still going on by February 1733. However, by then Somashekara had withdrawn per the arrangement with Coorg and the Prince Regent had made a treaty with him (October 1732). The Udayavarma was to hold the country north of the Valapattanam as a vassal of the Raja of Bednur and rule the rest of Kolathunadu himself (in Ravi Varma's name, of course). In return for this the Canarese would help him quell any rebels — to include the Ali Raja and the general *mappila* population.

This was what the Udayavarma wanted to hear. In short order he and the Canarese troops were assaulting Cannanore. The latter received aid from their erstwhile enemies, the EIC, who, despite blockading the Ikkeri Nayaka's ports continued to negotiate with both sides about Dharmapattanam.

And then the *mappilas* called Jihad against the Canarese for the killing of a Muslim holy man and started burning Hindu villages.

In March of 1733 the local Dutch commandant at Fort San Angelo received orders to blockade food shipments being sent to the Canarese army. Trade had virtually ceased and Malabar Command insisted the war had to be ended somehow. Since they were not trying to negotiate for Dharmapattanam their blockade was much more effective than the EIC's. This and the holy war caused the Canarese to withdraw once again, harassed by the *mappilas*.

A very long period of uneasy calm followed. The Canarese continued to 'bicker' on the frontier. Meanwhile, in a series of bilateral agreements with Cannanore (1734), Kadatha (19 February 1735), and the Prince Regent (26 February 1735), the EIC at last obtained legal title to Dharmapattanam. The treaty with Cannanore was obtained when the EIC agreed to help the Bibi return her people to the island and at least went through the pretence of acknowledging the Ali Raja's claims. The other treaties came after the Canarese invaded the island. Both the EIC and the CIO had asked for permission to augment their presence on Dharmapattanam in case the Canarese made such a landing. The local authorities were

agreeable, but prevaricated, hoping for a bigger bribe, until it was too late. On 5 February 1735 5,000 Canarese troops arrived. Dismayed, the local rulers begged the Europeans for help, but only the EIC acted, sending 400 men. However, they actually left the locals to do most of the fighting, for they were still negotiating with the less unpredictable Somashekara. It may even be that the EIC invited the Canarese in the first place and the whole thing was a sham. The affair certainly improved the EIC's trade position — witness the treaties signed a few days after the Canarese landing. It is not clear if the Canarese withdrew from the island or not. A nonaggression pact was finally fixed with Bednur in 1736. It stipulated that if the Ikkeri Nayakas controlled Dharmapattanam they would respect the EIC's existing trade arrangements. That suggests they were still there, but they could also have left the island.

By 1736 the VOC were the ones propping up the Prince Regent, but the EIC actually held the stronger position, since they were now backed by the Canarese. In fact, the Udayavarma tried to conciliate them by allowing them a fort on Madakkara Island, within the mouth of the Valapattanam (with the not so subtle goal of using them as a tripwire against the Canarese flotilla); he also granted them a monopoly on the pepper and cardamom trade. They were also given another fort inland at Edakkat, north of his capital, to protect their sources in the Renetara district, possibly the richest pepper zone in North Malabar. Finally, he allowed the EIC into the regime's councils, and Adams became his chief advisor. This did not all happen at once, but it meant that eventually the EIC would be in the driver's seat. The sources are not exact with all their dates, and deals were made and broken on a regular basis, but on 10 September 1736 the VOC had a falling out with the Prince Regent and stated they would no longer assist him against the Canarese. That is likely why the Udayavarma brought Adams onto his council

If the situation sounds complex so far, the French contribution has yet to be described. The CIO, squeezed by the VOC and the EIC, had spent the months since 1733 inciting local princes — including members of the Kolathiri — to openly attack the British. The French made a league with Kottayam and Kadatha, plus Cannanore, against the EIC. The fighting did not amount to much, but there were landings on Dharmapattanam, and trade was intermittently stopped. Fortunately Adams was able to individually persuade his opponents to back down; they were mainly in it for the French loans, anyway. In the process the CIO fomented a succession crisis among the Kolathiri, because the Company wanted to back the Raja of Udayam, the so-called Fifth Prince of Kolathiri, against the Udayavarma, who was leaning toward the British again.

If by this point the reader feels like tearing out their hair or bashing their forehead against the wall, go ahead. Time to sort all this out:

- 1) Bednur attacked the Udayavarma Prince Regent of Kolathunadu at the request of his discontented brother the Northern Prince; while,
- 2) The Udayavarma and the EIC were attacking the Arrakal Ali Raja of Cannanore and his VOC allies.
- 3) Things went badly for the Prince Regent, so all parties joined loosely to resist the Canarese, but had not got very far in the process before;
- 4) a) The EIC started talking to Bednur behind everyone's back, and b) the Prince Regent caved.
- 5) H.R.H. the P.R. then got Canarese aid against his original enemy, Cannanore, which was still supported by the Dutch. During this campaign;
- 6) Some Canarese 'loose cannon' started a holy war. Then;
- 7) The Canarese were forced to pull back, and things simmered down, though there was some low-level fighting; until,
- 8) The EIC managed to secure its position on Dharmapattanam and switched to backing the Canarese. To try and slow the British down;
- 9) The CIO decided to evict the EIC from the coast by raising Kottayam and Kadatha against them and sponsoring one of H.R.H. the P.R.'s rivals; which,
- 10) Set off a succession crisis in Kolathunadu.

The fighting between the CIO and EIC began in 1736 and was mainly conducted by proxy. By now the EIC was back on the Prince Regent's side and the French were sponsoring the Raja of Udayam, who had the lukewarm support of Kottayam and Kadatha. Little is recorded of the fighting beyond the fact that the Prince Regent's side won the day and the CIO lost significant prestige on the Coast. There are reports of Company troops engaged in active fighting, which would make this perhaps the first occasion that the British and French actually fought each other in India, at least in the South.

But, behind the Udayavarma's back the EIC was providing support to Bednur, perceiving that regime as a better investment. However, before the end of the year the Canarese were at last driven back from some of their gains. This enabled the Udayavarma to win back EIC support. Naturally, the alliances then reversed and the CIO-backed rival, the Raja of Udayam, obtained aid from the Canarese. A tough second round ensued, in which the Canarese invaded Dharmapattanam Island again and the British had to call on the VOC for additional troops.

Ultimately, however, the Udayavarma's own cavalry (the *cavalry*, of all things) routed the enemy in battle and with EIC support chased them as far as Nileswaram. In 1737 the Canarese agreed to talk once more and peace was concluded, the EIC acting as mediator. Kolathunadu lost Nileswaram to Bednur, but the latter agreed to respect the remainder of Kolathiri territory. The young Raja of Kolathunadu, Ravi Varma, abdicated in favour of his heir, the Udayvarman Raja of Palli — the other main branch of the family.

In 1738 there was talk of a preventative counter-invasion of Kanara. This would be supported by the EIC but paid for by the Raja of Palli — or, in other words, by taking out a massive loan from the EIC. The campaign was to start in October, but seems to have come to nothing. Both the Ikkeri Nayakas and the Kolathiri were too exhausted to do much of anything during the 1740s, and as already recounted the EIC and the CIO buried the hatchet after a few more years. Eventually the EIC became influential enough to act as peacemaker.

## **Mysore Raids into Malabar**

The centrally located state of Mysore had its fingers in every pie, and 1745 was not the first time they raided into Malabar. Incursions had taken place in 1732, 1733, 1735, and 1737. But this was not the Mysore of Haider Ali; the attacks were mainly to obtain plunder and bribes, though always made at the request of an ally, usually the Raja of Palghat (Palakkad), whose lands straddled the main trade route through the mountains, and usually directed at the filthy rich Zamorin of Calicut.

The Zamorin was interested in eastern expansion and was always nibbling away at Palghat's territory, using one quasi-legal excuse or another. By 1732 Palghat's raja had had enough. Mysore's effort seems to have been fairly feeble, though perhaps they only intended to occupy Palghat to protect it (and collect a salary for doing so). Depending on the source, Calicut's army either came up and pushed them back, or was repulsed. Either way, not much came of it.

Something different happened in March 1733, at the height of the Canarese invasion. The Kolathiri coalition was so desperate they asked Mysore for troops. 1,000 cavalry and 5,000 infantry were promised but much less was actually sent. Even those forces were too expensive for the Raja of Kottayam who was the one promising to pay them. They marched into his territory in May, and after not receiving their pay, went on a rampage, besieging the fort where the raja was residing and attacking his party. Interestingly, though the Canarese general, Raghunath, tried in turn to hire them, they refused his offer. Eventually the Raja of Kottayam got rid of them and had them ambushed as they were returning through the passes.

In May 1735 there was a stronger effort by Mysore, which sent 2,000 horse and 20,000 foot to attack the Zamorin. It is assumed Palghat had again requested aid, but they may have just decided to do it on their own account. They made a deep penetration into Calicut, burning at least two palaces and nearly reaching Ponnani, the Zamorin's coastal residence south of Calicut. The Zamorin had been taken completely off guard and was reduced to begging the EIC factor at Tellicherry for help. Adams refused, for the Zamorin was holding captive some of his officers and had impounded some EIC ships. Mysore was induced to withdraw, probably by a massive bribe. In 1737 the process was repeated, but again with no

lasting results. Probably, the rulers of Mysore were more interested in extortion than conquest. Also, by 1737 they had shifted their focus to Trichinopoly.

1745 saw the most significant fighting between Mysore and Calicut, with three pitched battles. But, again, they proved inconclusive. The attacks were a combination of traditional raiding on a grand scale and maintaining good relations with the neighbouring petty rajas, like Palghat, by acting as their champion. The next attack did not occur until 1757, when Palghat placed itself under Mysore's protection and Hyder Ali assaulted Calicut.

## Colonial Template?

The events in the Carnatic did not lead to a weakening of the EIC's position in North Malabar, thanks to the general confusion there. What did them the most harm was the installation of a new factor in 1749; from all accounts the man was an idiot. But, of course, the reader already knows who gained supremacy in the end.

Earlier in this Commentary it was noted that none of the European Powers, with perhaps the exception of the Portuguese, were interested in political control of even a small part of India; the Dutch had their role foisted on them. But North Malabar was the exception that proved the rule.

In many small ways the EIC gained authority and the rajas lost it. For example, it was the custom of Malabar that the people of the coast had salvage rights over all wrecks, but in the case of the EIC all property was to be returned to them. The Company had long offered loans to the various rajas. Now they began taking over various land debts and were granted rents on the land they occupied. This would eventually transform into full sovereignty.

Gradually, the EIC ousted the VOC, but the CIO would cling on to Mahé, and the Kolathiri, despite growing British influence (or because of it), later adopted an anti-British stance that lasted for some years. The French had a hand in this. It led to such things as a pepper embargo by the Raja and some harassment of the British forts by Kolathunadu and Cannanore; after the unstable Prince Regent died in 1746 things improved — for the British, in a classic play, had sponsored the heir to the throne and arranged his installation. After the end of the 1740s the Europeans had become the dominant players and the native princes their debtors.

Beginning with the Second Carnatic War a similar trend began in the rest of India, and the root cause seems to have been the same — political chaos. Robert Adams' activities in North Malabar can be seen as a template, but it was not one consciously adopted, rather stemming from the dynamics of the situation. Given the same dynamics in other places, the results would be the same. If the French had defeated the British in India, it would have been their Raj. Either way, a foreign merchant company was going to rule India, unless more than one native ruler awoke to the danger at the same time and agreed to pull together to stop the merry-go-round. Since even the visionary Dupleix and Robert Clive could not see what their endeavours would ultimately lead to, that was never going to happen. In the Churn, one either sinks to the bottom or rises to the top.

## The Dutch-Travancore War

*[Varma's unification campaign] 'was the first and the most important blow struck against the Malabar political system. With it went the feudal conception of Malabar polity. The old idea was that the Nayar lords could not be punished even in case of treason... Marthanda Varma swept away those notions of chivalry and exterminated without scruple the families that had so long dominated the state.'*

*Principal Rajas, p.52*

Travancore in its own way also broke the mould and played a part in ushering in a new era.

The keys to this war were the pepper trade (of course) and the relationship between Travancore and Cochin. The Dutch found it necessary to prop Cochin up in order to maintain the balance of power on the Malabar Coast. Only if the political situation was stable could the VOC collect the pepper that was

their reason for being on the Coast in the first place. Thus they found themselves in a war against India's answer to Louis XIV.

## The Rise of Marthanda Varma

Attingal was a small town, with its own petty raja. In a European context its queen would have married a king of Venadu, bringing the territory along as dowry, but remember, this is Malabar. Her identity remained tied to her own family, but as Senior Queen, her son was given precedence over the other potential rulers. Furthermore, the 'petty queen' of Attingal was immensely rich. She belonged to an all-female *swarupam*, and had a private income based on a core estate of 15,000 acres of some of the best pepper producing land in the world; they called her the Pepper Queen. It was thanks to an earlier pepper queen that the EIC gained a toehold in the far South, at Anjengo (Achu-Tengu, or Five Palms — now Vizhinjam); she had become dissatisfied with the highhanded Dutch. Good relations continued, so that Marthanda Varma also leaned toward the EIC and sought what aid they could provide, though he distrusted all foreigners. Since the VOC had made their lives miserable for decades, the EIC company officers were very helpful.



(Anjengo had both advantages and disadvantages as a site. It lacked a good water supply and despite being fortified was in a poor defensive location. But, it had water access deep into the interior where the pepper was obtained, and served as an early warning post against VOC deployments out of Sri Lanka, or the arrival of vessels from Europe. Eventually it became the most important factory on the Coast, surpassing even Tellicherry, though not Bombay, and served as a *dépôt* during the British wars with the French. The EIC had two smaller posts in the vicinity, but they were unfortified warehouses.)

To return to Marthanda Varma. Thanks to his heritage, though some of the chiefs may have attempted to snuff him out illegally, no one could question his right to be the Raja. However, the situation remained perilous. The kingdom's finances were in arrears, with tributary debts owed to neighbouring Madurai. Every petty chief within the realm had set himself up as an independent kinglet, while the young raja was manipulated by the puppeteers of the Royal Council and of the Temple Committee (he was, like his peers, a *samantan* priest-king). There was no royal army. Marthanda Varma's rule was immediately challenged by a pair of his brothers, notorious as the Kunju Thambies. Furthermore, though the Europeans were in only light contact with Venadu proper, they, and particularly the VOC, had separate deals with every petty prince and their monopoly seemed airtight. This meant the petty rajas were collecting all the customs dues. Beyond the borders, too, trouble brewed. The VOC was clamping down with a tough blockade against interlopers, Cochin was adrift, the Dutch short of money and manpower after a long struggle against Calicut. The *mappilas* were unhappy with all this foreign intervention. The temples of the land, also, were short of funds for things like poor relief and civil administration, fuelling discontent.

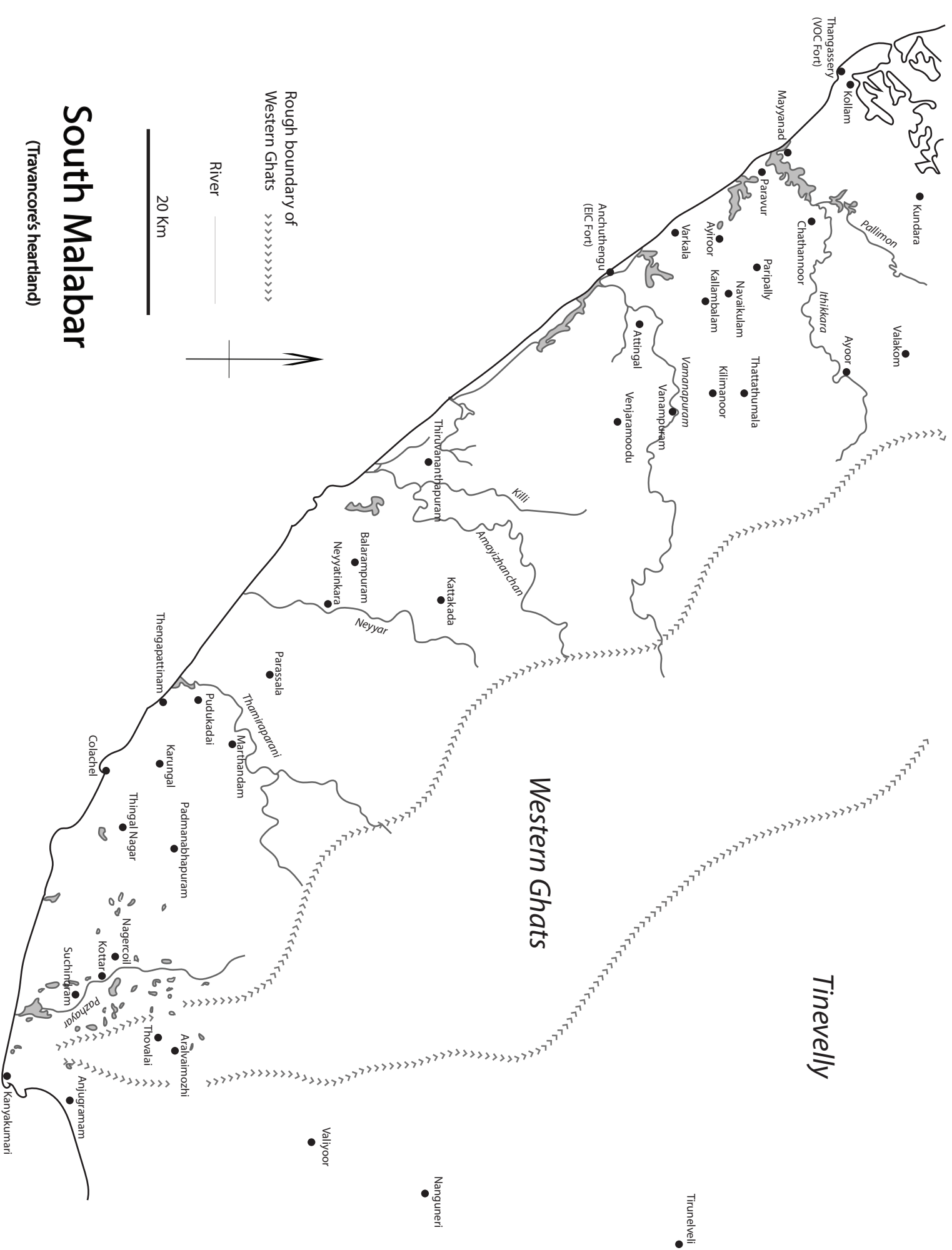
*[To emphasize the importance of religion in the lives of these rajas, not only did Marthanda Varma fund and restore temples, in 1750 he dedicated his entire kingdom to his tutelary deity, Padmanabha, and declared he and his descendants to be the Servants of Padmanabha. The dynasty's temple remains to this day; it is the richest Hindu temple in the world. Padmanabha is one of the benevolent aspects of Vishnu, the supreme being.]*

Fortunately, Marthanda Varma had a couple of levers he could pull, left him by his predecessor. First, he had an old alliance with Madurai. By treaty they could supply 1,000 horse and 2,000 foot. There was some slight difficulty with the money, which led to his prime minister being kidnapped and forced to take out large loans from the merchants of Kottar to pay the men, but Travancore now had an army. It was augmented by mercenaries, several hundred Pathans and some of the wilfully independent Maravar chiefs of Tinnevely. These were assigned to guard hastily erected mud wall positions facing Madurai that stretched for some 7 Km — the first in a long succession of fortified lines that Travancore would become known for. Overconfident, Marthanda Varma then dismissed the Madurai contingent and cancelled the arrangement. This was a mistake, quickly leading to renewed rebellion and the rise of his two puppet brothers, who sought aid from the now-miffed ruler of Madurai. Fortunately, the emissary the Nayakas sent to arbitrate the matter was convinced of Marthanda Varma's claim, and readily lent him half his own escort — which had come in case the raja needed to be overthrown by force — to help put the rebellion down. This quietened matters for a couple of years. By 1731 Travancore's army had been augmented by a number of 'regiments' of foot armed with matchlocks (presumably supplied by the EIC). Marthanda Varma made a treaty with the EIC factory at nearby Anjengo and spurned the VOC. In response the VOC began considering an alliance with the Zamorin (shudder) and Kayamkulam.

Details on just how Marthanda Varma secured his place are scanty, but it appears that the initial force he commanded was enough to give the rebels pause, so that by the time he had raised and trained an indigenous army it was too late for them. Also, his policy of rebuilding the temples brought the *brahmins* onside. He seems to have bided his time, pretending to be unconcerned with the earlier affronts to his dignity, then quietly rounded up his opponents one by one and dispensed with them. They were so disunited that they refused to aid each other. With the temples and European trade functioning the Raja also paid off his debts to Madurai and began to amass a surplus in the treasury. This he used for public works, gaining the support of the people.

Nonetheless, the rebels kept trying. The two Kunju Thambies, Papu and Raman, were still alive, and still willing to have their spurious claims upheld. About 1731 there was an attempt to assassinate Marthanda Varma after a religious procession. But the plot was discovered by a spy — it would appear that the Raja had already developed a vast network of informers. He dealt with the matter by beefing up his public security arrangements, which so intimidated the plotters that they dared not act. Marthanda Varma coolly waited until 1733 before he dealt with the brothers. One was cut down by the Maharaja's guards when he was prevented from passing into the royal chambers as was his right — offended, he had drawn his sword and tried to attack the attendants — while the other, seeing this affair, rushed into the Maharaja's chambers and tried to kill him. Raising his arm, his sword caught in a roof beam and the Maharaja jumped him, knocked him down and sat on him, then plunged a dagger into his heart. Apparently this was all according to plan, and the brothers' followers were quickly rounded up and slain, or fled in disarray. The leaders of the rebellion were placed on trial. Forty-two pled guilty and were hanged. Those who were *brahmins* were exiled after having their foreheads branded with the image of a dog. The men's families suffered a different fate. Marthada Varma had no desire to slaughter them so he ordered the wives and children be given to the fisherfolk of his realm, turning them into out-castes. Their wealth was appropriated by the State.

Having eradicated all the unruly elements, Marthanda Varma proceeded to create a modern centralized state. The prime minister, the *dalava*, was also a senior general, and the chief economist. From 1737 to 1756 the position was held by the same man, the battle-winning Ramayyan Dalavay. The problem with all these Nair states was the unruly temperament of the Nair caste. To overcome this, all senior command positions were given to *brahmins*. As religious leaders of higher caste than the highest Nair their authority could not be questioned.



## First Campaigns

Even before he secured his base, Marthanda Varma moved to acquire Attingal, which had fallen under the Dutch proxy, Kollam, but which he claimed as his birthright. The spark for the next event was one of those heir-adoption disputes, taking place in East Kallada, a small realm a short distance up the Kallada River from Kollam. Here, Kollam's (read the VOC's) choice of successor threatened to deny Marthanda Varma's own rights on that front, for East Kallada was supposedly under Travancore's umbrella of protection and Kollam looked to be annexing it. In 1730 war broke out, and in 1731, after a lengthy campaign, Kollam's forces were defeated in battle and her city occupied. Both the East Kalladan proxy-*raja* and Kollam's ruler were carted away to exile in Trivandrum. Marthanda Varma had palaces built for them — gilded cages. Kollam's *raja* was Unni Kerala Varma, and as the name suggests, the two were related. Notwithstanding this, his cousin was forced to sign away his kingdom (though he retained its revenues for the duration of his life). Kollam's army was absorbed into Travancore's.

Marthanda Varma did not stop. He installed a puppet queen at a place called Marta, probably Maruthurkulangara, located to the north of Kollam, to shore up the East Kallada front. This sequence of events provoked another of Cochin's quasi-vassals, Kayamkulam, which attempted to raise a coalition to rescue Raja Unni, who just happened to be the nephew of the Raja of Kayamkulam. The alliance included Cochin, Purakkad, Elayadathu, and Vadakkumur. Thekkumkur, a sister state to Vadakkumur, seeing itself next on the list, also lobbied the VOC hard. Agents were sent to Trivandrum to rescue Raja Unni and bring him to Kayamkulam, after which a strong force stormed Kollam and liberated it. This was in 1733. The *raja* returned to his city to find Dutch troops improving the fortifications. Kayamkulam meanwhile erected a cordon of forts along the Kallada River with assistance from the Dutch. The alliance was renewed, just in time to repel a Travancore assault on Kollam by Ramayyan Dalavay.

During these campaigns Marthanda Varma got to see the land and was attracted by the riches of neighbouring Nedumangad and Elayadathu; as part of the process of preventing the armies of Vadakkumur and Elayadathu from joining with Kayamkulam, Marthanda Varma now invaded both the hinterland of Kollam and Kayamkulam with a large army under two of his best generals, Thanu Pillay and Sthanapathy Kumaraswamy Pillay. In a rare case of forbearance, the VOC decided not to intervene, and it went hard with the defenders. Very early in 1734 the invaders captured Nedumangad, home of the Rani of Attingal, a close relation of Marthanda Varma's, and the site of the politically significant palace of Koyikkal.

Now the Dutch began seriously to be alarmed. Marthanda Varma was developing a new policy of maintaining state control of the pepper plantations and with each new conquest their income stream got smaller. But, concerted action against Travancore proved very difficult. A window of opportunity opened up when Ramayyan's attempts to retake Kollam town led to very heavy casualties, thanks to VOC muskets. His army withdrew. Kollam now became emboldened and counterattacked in concert with Kayamkulam, retaking East Kallada as well as Mavelikara, laying siege to Nedumangad, and causing the princess to flee.

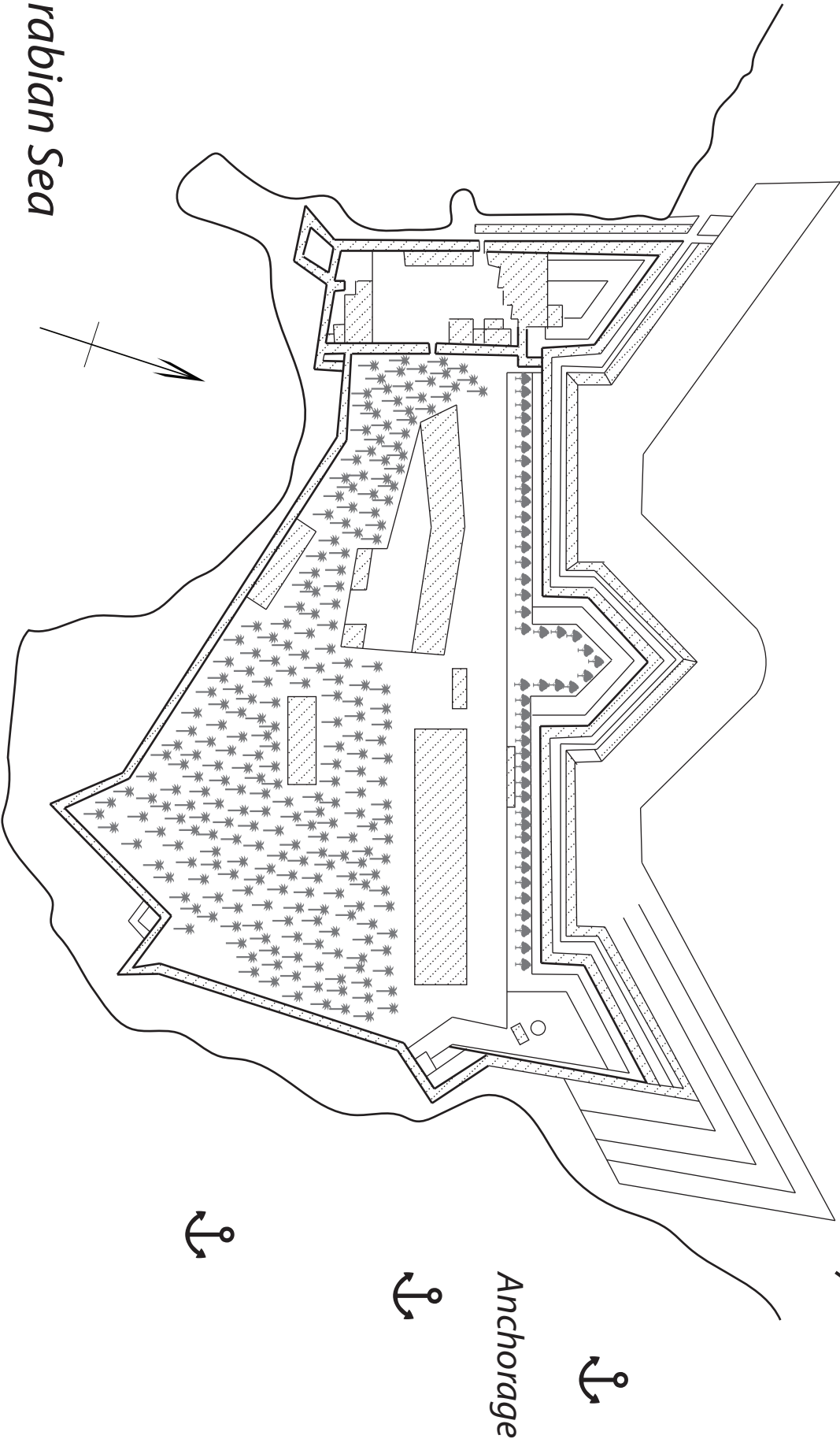
Nothing daunted, Marthanda Varma regrouped and came on again (18 April), trying to cross the Kallada at Kunatthur and fighting two battles there against Kayamkulam's army, on 23 and 26 April. Though outfitted with arms purchased from both the EIC and CIO his forces suffered heavy losses and retreated. A third, indecisive battle took place on 1 May. Marthanda Varma next tried to turn the river line with a flank march. This had limited success. He failed to crush his enemies but did manage to retake East Kallada. Then, on 1 June the Raja of Kayamkulam was slain in battle, supposedly shot by a mounted trooper. This prompted 300 of the *raja's* death-or-glory *chavers* to march into Venadu, where they caused havoc until they were all eliminated.

The brother of the dead *raja* of Kayamkulam took command of the coalition. A new offensive was planned for 1735 but was preempted by Marthanda Varma, who invaded Kollam in great strength, his army augmented by a flanking column composed of Maravar foot troops and 1,000 mounted *poligars* from Tinnevely. Kayamkulam's army was signally defeated in battle, which was something of a first for

# VOC Fort at Kollam (St. Thomas Fort)

Thankassery Village

to Kollam Town  
4-5 Km



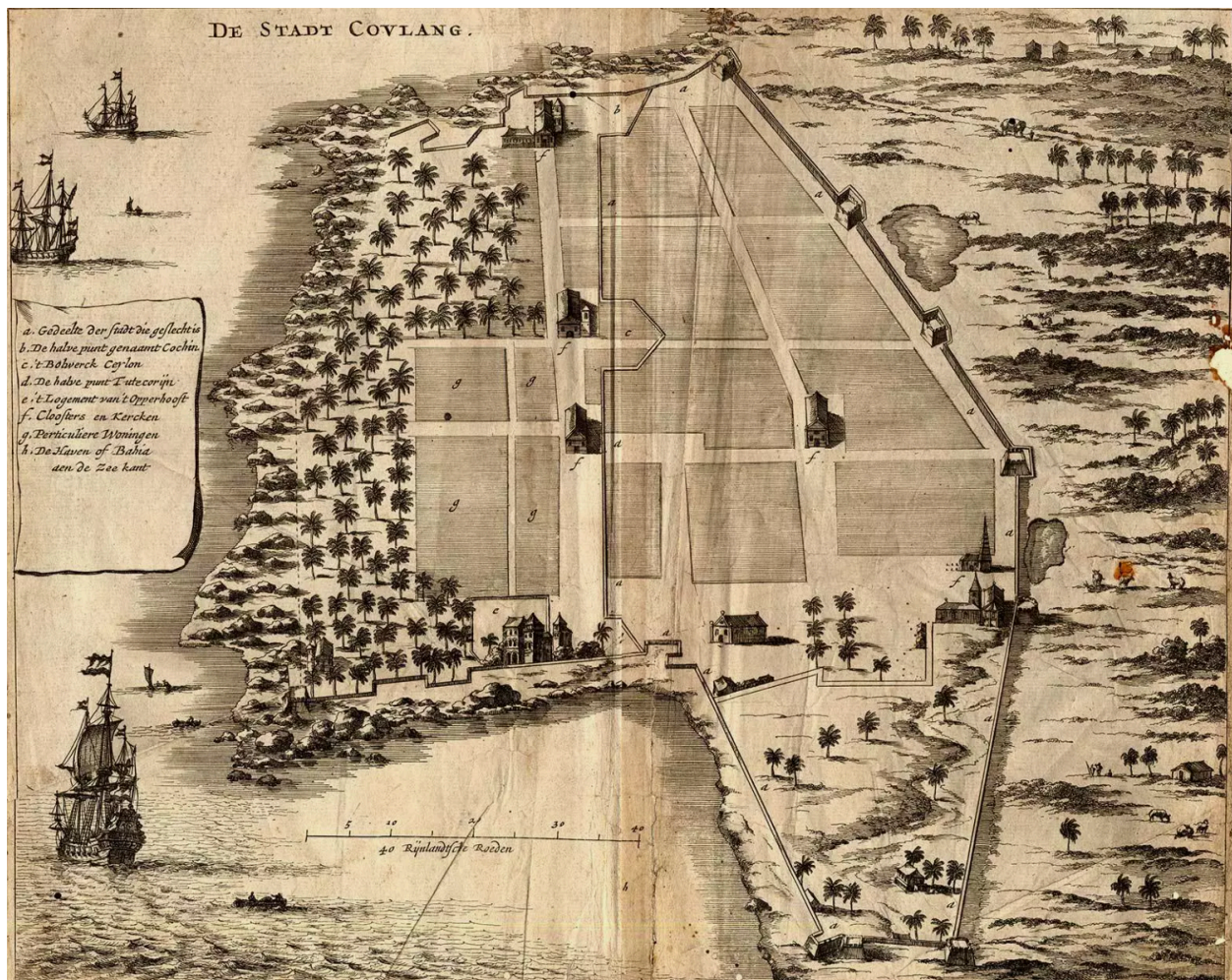
Arabian Sea

Anchorage

50 metres

Travancore. So far, their successes had come through persistence and the disunity of their enemies, rather than skill. Reinforcements never came for the Coalition and Kollam's garrison was overwhelmed.

The circumstances in 1735 illustrate some of the attitudes behind these wars. The renewal of fighting in 1735 was to a great extent on the shoulders of the Raja of Kollam/Kayamkulam. As nephew of the dead Raja of Kayamkulam it was simply expected of him that he should seek revenge on Marthanda Varma and either strip him of as much territory as possible, or die in the attempt. The latter demanded the coalition either sue for peace or be crushed. Dutch negotiations amounted to them suggesting to Marthanda Varma that he was perhaps piling up enemies against himself. As for European involvement, as has been seen, the Dutch were willing to assist but not to get actively involved. Batavia was unwilling to supply enough men. Moreover, Adriaan Maten, the Governor of Cochin, was unable to attract the attention of Malabar Command, which at the time had its eyes locked on a nonexistent threat from Calicut. The EIC and CIO, meanwhile, were openly supplying Travancore with arms, though applauding Dutch efforts (Travancore's rise was disturbing, even if it was an opportunity to kick the Dutch under the table.)



The VOC's fort at Kollam, closer to the time of the narrative. Notice how the works have expanded in comparison with the other diagram.

Dutch mediation failed to prevent the town's capture, and the new raja of Kayamkulam, seeing he could get no more help from the VOC, sued for peace. Before the end of 1734 Raja Unni also died, and Kollam was unilaterally annexed by Kayamkulam, its new raja claiming the late ruler had adopted him as heir. Marthanda Varma responded by saying he had a better claim, not needing the excuse of adoption, being descended from the Chera kings who ruled from Kollam, and anyway, the adoption had been nullified by

Raja Unni back in 1731. But, for the present an uneasy calm prevailed. The Maharaja was playing his usual game of pretending not to care too much what his neighbours did, until he was ready to exterminate them.

The war just ended marked a change in the VOC's policy. It may seem that they had been dictating policy from the start, but in fact they were doing their best to remain neutral — selling arms was not regarded as a breach of that neutrality. It was just that Cochin kept getting involved in these affairs, and they were responsible for Cochin. And, Travancore's new ruler seemed very anti-Dutch. At least, he refused to enter into bilateral trade agreements with them, on the grounds that they had for many years prior to his accession bought from his political rivals within Venadu, and thereby funded rebellion against himself. Dutch 'neutrality' ebbed as Travancore grew stronger. By 1737 Matan was sending messengers to Marthanda Varma warning him to 'lay off'.

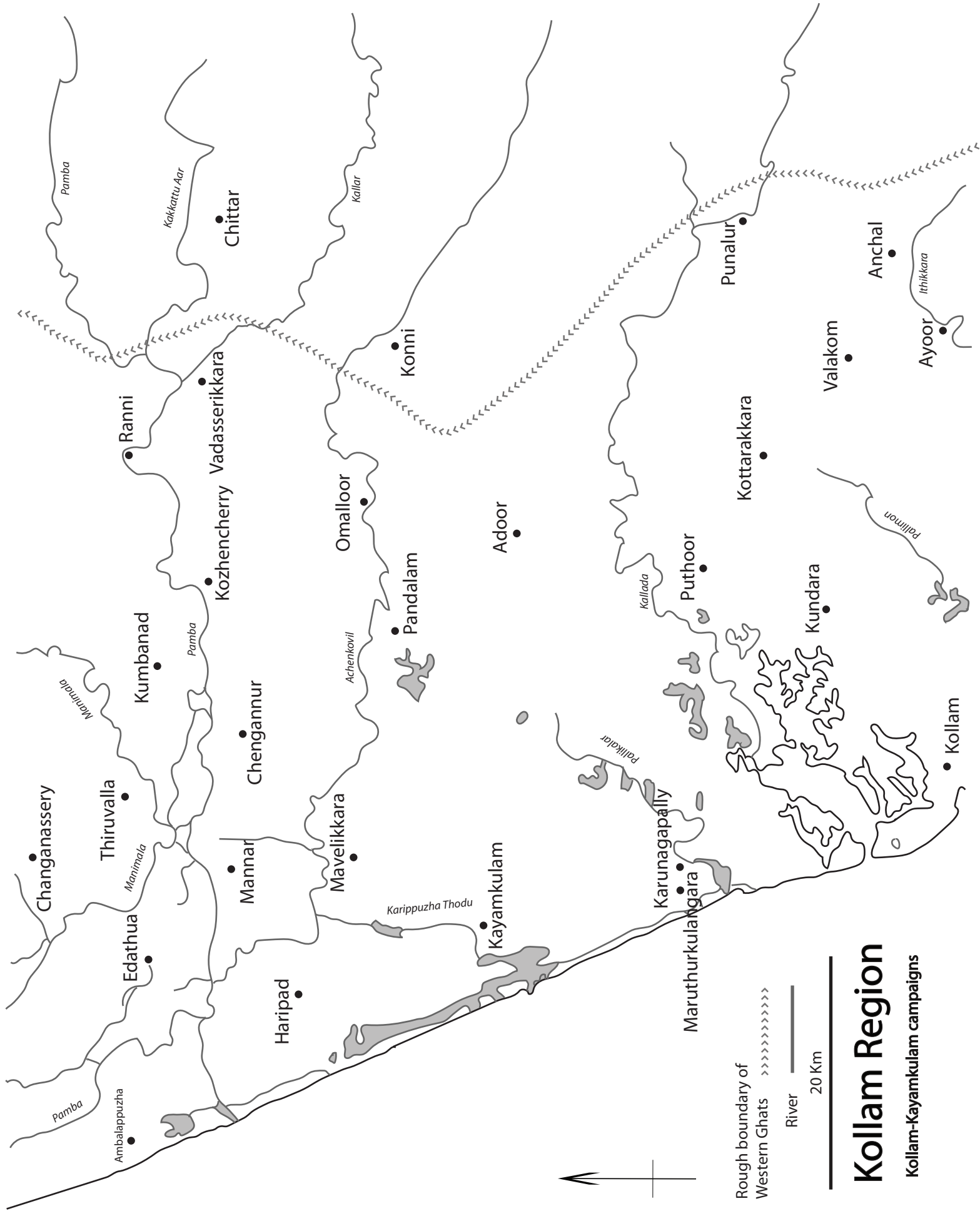
The Maharaja paid no attention. Instead, in that year he annexed Elayadathu. The country was an extensive pepper producing region and its capital, Kottarakkara, was very rich. The region was known as the Land of Palaces and had immense cultural significance. Supposedly, the annexation took place because the raja, yet another relative of Marthanda Varma's, had just died, and though the neighbouring states and the Dutch approved of the princess who now ruled, her administration was in the hands of a shifty courtier who was ruining the country. The Maharaja thus stepped in to 'save' the princess. In some accounts the princess was allowed to remain in her capital, Kottarakkara, though she had no hand in government. In other accounts she was carried off to Trivandrum, from whence she managed to escape to Thekkumkur. Matan's 1737 message was two-fold. First, he requested there be no war, and second, he protested the annexation. The Maharaja was polite, but questioned what right the Dutch had to interfere in his internal affairs. They should stick to buying and selling pepper. Matan took this as an insult against the VOC.

*[The annexation either took place in 1734 or early in 1737, depending on the source. The latter date seems the best attested. Seeing in both versions the princess put herself under the VOC's protection, is unlikely Matan would have waited three years before complaining about her treatment.]*

After a list of place names, a geography lesson is probably needed. Kollam (Quilon) is a port city about halfway between Cochin (Kochi) and the southern tip of India. Immediately to its north is the Kallada River. The Kallada flows out of the Western Ghats from the Southeast before bending west to enter the Arabian Sea. It thus bisects the entire coastal plain and formed an excellent barrier, especially against armies that were not good at building bridges. East Kallada, Maruthurkulangara, and Mavelikara, are extremely small sections of country arranged in an arc around the North end of a very large lake, Ashtamudi, into which the Kallada flows. The river's exit to the sea is by comparison quite narrow, yet still so broad it could not be bridged. Kollam lay south of both lake and estuary, so that it was effectively isolated, except by boat. That was why the Dutch were so useful. These campaigns on the Kallada line thus all took place within a very tight area. Kottarakkara and the Elayadathu were inland, lying on the eastern flank of Marthanda Varma's march when he went to deal with Kayamkulam.

By 1738 Marthanda Varma was preparing to annex Kayamkulam, assisted by his new commanding general and prime minister, the brilliant Ramayyan, who assumed those roles in 1737 on the death of the incumbent. He received offers of assistance from the EIC, and also from Madurai, but refused both. This war now was intended to demonstrate the invincibility of his army. But, he was unable to begin operations before the rains and was content to wait.

The VOC Governor General van Imhoff paid a visit to Cochin in 1739 (probably in March) and was briefed on the situation, which was very tense. Travancore's army was already in motion. The captive ruler of Kottarakkara had just died, leaving as a potential heir that senior princess, who was living in asylum in Thekkumkur. It was clear the EIC was behind this renewed aggression. Marthanda Varma was diverting the pepper trade to their rival in exchange for arms; the EIC in turn hoped to push the Dutch off the coast. At least, that may have been van Imhoff's perspective. Malabar Command was still fixated on Calicut, where the EIC had most recently played a significant role, but that had been twenty years ago. In reality, the Maharaja was working to his own timetable. He preferred the British traders, who seemed to



Rough boundary of  
Western Ghats

River

20 Km

# Kollam Region

Kollam-Kayamkulam campaigns

have no territorial ambitions, but he was not about to grant them special privileges or assist in their schemes farther than it suited him. Kayamkulam was a threat and it was time to finish with them.

Van Imhoff assessed that the VOC's best option would be to sponsor the princess and have her reinstalled on her throne. The attempt would either resurrect a buffer state between Cochin and Travancore or bring matters in the South to a head. He also assumed Travancore's neighbours would all be keen to line up behind the Dutch, so that the expense of the war would be relatively low. But first, some diplomacy. A pair of messengers was sent. Their message was essentially the same as the one Matan had sent a couple of years earlier. The reply was also the same, which put Van Imhoff's back up, just as it had Matan's. He decided on a personal interview.

That is one version of affairs. The sources vary the emphasis, although the events are the same. Van Imhoff is always portrayed as arrogant, treating the Maharaja like a second rate petty chief who could be brought in line by a firm hand. But in one version the princess only appears as an afterthought, an excuse for a personal meeting after the first embassy failed. Van Imhoff agreed to sponsor her if she would help him gain an audience. This he got. However, the weight of evidence suggests that the Dutch had been willing to sponsor the princess for some time, and were also prepared to back Kayamkulam.

The meeting did not go well. Van Imhoff demanded the princess be placed on the throne of Kottarakara and that the whole territory of Eladathu be returned to her. The Maharaja refused. Depending on the source the embassy either descended into a shouting match, with the Dutchman threatening to lay Travancore waste and the Raja threatening to invade Europe, or, alternatively, that the Maharaja remained calm in the face of van Imhoff's bluster. In the latter version Marthanda Varma pointed out that conquering Travancore would be extremely difficult and that he could always hide in the forests, at which van Imhoff declared the Dutch would pursue him anywhere. The reference to invading Europe was more along the lines that van Imhoff had as much chance of conquering Travancore as the Maharaja did of invading Europe with a navy of fishermen. The latter version is a lot more coherent.

Thus began the Dutch-Travancore War, which did more than anything else to destroy the VOC's power in Malabar. Open warfare began for the Dutch at the end of the year, taking advantage of the absence of much of Travancore's army, which was already engaged in fighting Kayamkulam.

## **The Dutch Strike**

In November 1739 Dutch troops were shipped down to Kollam, under command of a Captain Johannes Hackert. There is little to say about this operation, which was something of a 'cakewalk'. In some accounts the VOC is said to have been fully prepared for war, but this is an exaggeration, to say the least. Van Imhoff's recommendation for war was dispatched to Batavia in July, giving the Malabar Command two or three months to prepare, but Batavia had not yet replied with permission, nor earmarked additional troops, though some men and artillery were got from Ceylon, which was under van Imhoff's personal authority. As an aside, something could be made of the 'illegality' of the operation because of these circumstances, but van Imhoff doubtless expected no cavilling by the Council, since he pretty much ran it. There was just not much material to prepare with.

The landing was made on the beach south of Thangasseri, perhaps 4 Km from the heart of Kollam. This is where the VOC had its fort, situated on a promontory just to the north. Kollam city was about 4 Km northeast, fronting a southern branch of the giant lagoon known as Ashtamudi Lake; it had no access to the sea except by the mouth of the Kallada River which connected the lake to the ocean, some 8 Km northwest of the city. A column from Travancore was besieging the place. There is a question whether the city or the fort was being attacked, but the weight of evidence is on the city. The fort was impregnable and not the target of the offensive; before the Dutch arrived its garrison would have been too small to interfere.

There was some sort of a fight, notable for the prolific use of hand grenades by the Dutch, which suggests an assault on a prepared position; the VOC probably attacked the flank of Marthanda Varma's siege lines. One of the grenades blew up the Travancore powder magazine, after which that army fled, though not very far. The sources say they retreated to Thangasseri, which makes no sense, since they

who have had to run through the Dutch and would have a) wound up under the guns of the fort, and b) been cut off from further retreat. It seems much more likely they fled southeast or east, toward their main army. Also, whatever place they rallied at was burnt to the ground by the Dutch, palaces and all. 16 cannon were taken out of the siege lines, including 236-pounders. The VOC column followed up by marching southeast down the beach under the protection of the ships' guns to Paravur, 13 Km away.

(There is an alternative version, in which the Dutch landed at Paravur and marched north to Thangasseri, liberating Kollam in this way, possibly with assistance from the warriors of Kayamkulam north of the city. Either version makes sense, but it is more likely they landed beside their fort.)

Kollam's forces rallied and joined the war as part of Kayamkulam's army. Paravur was also inland, by about 2 Km, and bounded by lagoons north and south (Paravur Lake and Edava Nadayara Kayal), so unless the Dutch used ship's boats or rafts, which they may well have done, they likely stuck to the beach. Though pretty densely inhabited, this was a region of mangroves. The EIC had a warehouse at Edava, 6 Km southeast of Paravur, and the factor at Anjengo sent his congratulations and requested the Dutch leave it alone. Which they did, suggesting they no longer believed the British were complicit with Travancore. The Dutch camped at Paravur for several days, accepting submissions from local chieftains, a notable holdout being the puppet ruler of Nedumangad.

The next part of the campaign is a little confused. In some sources the Dutch marched to Varkala and then Attingal, and in others they marched to Attingal and then Varkala. Marthanda Varma met them in battle with his diminished forces at whichever of the two places was second on the list. From the lay of the land it is more logical that Varkala was the first target, and then Attingal. Following the expected Dutch line of march, Varkala lies about 4 Km beyond Edava. This also is by the coast, so the Dutch probably still stuck to the beach. If they took the inland route they might have gone to Attingal first; the latter place is about 12 Km to the East, but going that way would mean not only that the Dutch marched in a circle, but that Marthanda Varma moved to the West and allowed himself to be cut off at Varkala, which never happened. Attingal was the ancestral home of the Maharaja and far more symbolically important, so it is almost certain the fight took place there.

Acting on the assumption that the battle was at Attingal, the Dutch did not reach Varkala until early December. Varkala opened its gates and the local chieftains submitted, but the Travancore army was concentrating at Attingal, where Marthanda Varma had erected a stockade and several artillery batteries to defend it. To get to Attingal the VOC could either continue down the beach to Anjengo (8.5 Km) and then strike inland in a northeasterly direction, or head directly inland. Doing so would force them to circle yet another large lagoon, Puthuval Lake. Because the EIC factor at Anjengo was corresponding with the Dutch by letter and there is no mention of an interview, it suggests they took the inland route. It is also possible the Dutch still stuck to the beach and their allies took the high road, such as it was, through the countryside. If they did march by way of the coast, it increases the possibility that the fight took place at Varkala after all, but marching inland would allow them to link up with their allies coming down from the North.

Marthanda Varma had concentrated most of his army to meet the Dutch, who were now joined by the forces of Kollam and Kayamkulam. However, at this moment Chanda Sahib enters the picture. This is when he (or his brother Bade) chose to invade Travancore from Tinnevely. By now his forces had already brushed aside the small corps of observation left to guard the regime's back door, in an engagement at Thovalai, just on the Travancore side of the border with Tinnevely. Almost nothing is recorded of this incursion.

There are also two versions of the action that took place at Varkala/Attingal. To be accurate, if the fight occurred at Attingal Marthanda Varma won using the bulk of his army, and if it happened at Varkala the allies won an action against his rearguard. Similarly, the first account has the Maharaja present at the battle, while the second account has him off dealing with Chanda Sahib's troops. The combat involved 5,000 defending Nairs and an unspecified number of attackers, possibly 10-15,000, since this was a combined army. There was also, according to the Attingal version, a second battle at Navaikulam, 8.5 Km north of Attingal, shortly after, while the Varkala version has a mopping up operation against a garrison of 900 Nairs plus local militia at Ayiroor, 23 Km to the North of that place.

This author begins to suspect the big battle with Marthanda Varma present, in which he routed his enemies and chased them back to Kollam, is spurious, just another court panegyric. It seems far more likely that, having had to dispatch a strong column to deal with Chanda Sahib, the rest of his forces were arrayed in a number of garrisons, at Verkala, Ayiroor, Attingal, and possibly other locations. The strongest concentration may have been the 5,000, likely at Verkala, which might have been deployed to block the Dutch advance. If so, perhaps the allied forces turned the position, masked it, and after Attingal was captured returned to deal with it, with the assistance of VOC ships. Or, the 5,000 were dealt with first and Attingal fell in consequence. Then the coalition forces laid waste to that section of country, taking out the various garrisons. It would appear the presence of the ships frightened the populace, who evacuated all that coast.

Following the most logical of the source material, the fight at Navaikulam, if it actually took place, occurred on 30 December. Travancore lost this battle, too, and their forces retreated over the Vamanapuram River toward Attingal. That would mean the coalition forces made no attempt to occupy positions this far south but had merely laid waste the country and demanded submission of various petty chiefs. Reports that trade was being ruined and that Attingal's defences had been 'slighted' bear this out. On 25 January 1740 there was intense fighting at Attingal Ferry, resulting in heavy losses to both sides. The coalition gained a technical win, but Kollam lost half its force (4,000 out of 8,000) and both its army and that of Kayamkulam fled the field, leaving the Dutch to hold the ground alone. They suffered 40 wounded. Regarding this as a debacle, the Raja of Kollam/Kayamkulam tried to kill himself, but was prevented.

## **Second Campaign**

The sources dry up for many months after this. Both sides were probably exhausted and unable to do more than skirmish until the rains passed. In November 1740 Malabar Command sent a request to Batavia for additional troops, but these would be slow in coming, because in 1740 riots broke out at Batavia. This was no nationalist revolt against the Dutch, but a response to bazaar rumours that the very large Chinese community at Batavia, who were mainly employed as labour, were about to be deported. Counterintuitively, it was they who suffered the most, as the locals plundered their shops and even killed some. The situation was dire enough to start an inquiry back in Europe.

It meant the Dutch were ill-equipped to continue the fight, though they opened a second offensive anyway in that month. On 26 November two ships and three sloops bombarded Colachel, roughly 110 Km south of Kollam (and roughly on the same parallel as Kottar). A tiny garrison made up of troops from Ceylon was landed and erected a stockade. Other bombardments and landings were made all along the southern coast. Including the force landed at Colachel, the soldiers involved numbered only 175 men. This was part of a plan conceived by the leader of the Malabar Command, van Gollennesse, to 'blockade' Travancore until Marthanda Varma was willing to sell pepper to the Dutch again. The only ships permitted to pass the blockade were EIC ones bound for Edava with goods (again, so much for 'evil British machinations'). On 13 January 1741 there is a record of the VOC ship *Maarseveen* being stationed between Colachel and Thengapattanam (10 Km farther north). A flotilla of seven ships and some other vessels dropped another landing party just north of Colachel. Another detachment was landed at Kanyakumari, beside Cape Cormorin. The latter force was strong enough to be given orders to attack the enemy, but no engagement is recorded. They may have driven off a local garrison.

The blockade had some effect, but the Dutch could not stop Marthanda Varma from shipping pepper overland to the Coromandel Coast. They needed to occupy the plantations. And for that, they needed more men. Unable to obtain them from Batavia, van Gollennesse requested 3-400 from Ceylon. There was a lull in the fighting, with only minor skirmishes until late July 1741. The forces of Travancore made no headway against Kayamkulam, nor did they clear the Dutch off their beachheads. No reasons are advanced, but one can imagine that the Maharaja may have had to replenish his losses, or repair infrastructure, or even been involved in a string of religious festivals. His was also the sort of character that could wait and judge a situation favourable before acting.

One operation yet to be discussed is the liberation of Kottarakkara (Eladathu). There are two versions of this operation, too. Either it happened in December of 1739, or it happened in 1741. It is possible the country was liberated in 1739 and the princess who ruled it was not restored until 1741. As far as the actual campaign went, a column including VOC and local forces, marched from Paravur by Thangasseri to Kottarakkara town, about 20 Km east from Kollam on the banks of the Kallada. The place had a strong Travancore garrison, but its loyalty was suspect, and in fact the coalition forces occupied the whole of Eladathu without a fight. The reinstalled Rani awarded the VOC some land at Bichoor in Vadakkumur, where they erected a redoubt, and added her troops to the coalition. But, Marthanda Varma did not react until 1741. He was a patient man, but this seems like a very long delay, suggesting the event took place in 1741, or the Rani was at least not put back on her throne until then. Alternatively, everything may have occurred over the winter of 1739/1740.

Marthanda Varma reacted by marching north with a large force, overwhelming the VOC and allied troops protecting the Rani in a single battle, and annexing her country again. She fled to Cochin. The victor then proceeded to capture every Dutch warehouse in the vicinity and seized all their goods, before assaulting Kayamkulam again and laying siege to its capital. It is this second act which makes Travancore's response more likely to have taken place in 1741.

## **Colachel 1741**

Eventually, the reinforcements from Ceylon arrived, under command of 'admiral' Eustachius de Lannoy. Arriving at Cochin they were shipped down to the outpost at Colachel, which he fortified even more. Descriptions of Lannoy's subsequent land campaign vary. In some, he marched on Kottar, about 20 Km east of Colachel. In others he headed for Padmanabhapuram, where Marthanda Varma had his palace, a distance of 13 Km northeast of Colachel. He may have done both simultaneously, for all accounts say he ravaged the countryside. Most sources state that his men committed atrocities. Interestingly, Marthanda Varma lodged a formal complaint with the VOC government at Cochin, and also took the time to write to the Council at Batavia. It would seem the legality of this war was a real issue. The Maharaja also sent to the French at Pondichéri, which led to an agreed alliance in exchange for permission to build factories on his land. This deal never came off, though, due to the Maharaja's victory at Colachel.

Slowed by the resistance of some 2,000 specially-raised Nair militia, De Lannoy took too long to accomplish his mission. News of the approach of Ramayyan with the bulk of the Travancore army — the Maharaja was at Trivandrum at this time — led him to fall back on his base. Ramayyan, joined by Marthanda Varma and camped at Kalkulam, 7 Km east of Colachel. Though he outnumbered de Lannoy, and though his army included both cavalry and cannon, he was reluctant to assault the Dutch stockade, backed as it was by ships' guns. He laid siege.

He also called on the Mukkuvars for help. These were a coastal community, specializing in diving. They were also predominantly Catholic, and hated the Calvinist Dutch. The latter tried to buy their services as labourers to help with the fortifications, but were rebuffed, leading to an atrocity, when the local church was bombarded, one Jesuit killed, and three more kidnapped, taken aboard ship, and tortured to try and force them to persuade their flock to switch sides. This had the opposite effect. When the Dutch hired a mail boat crewed by Mukkuvars to take a dispatch officer down to Kanyakumari to bring reinforcements, the crew capsized the boat and took the Dutchman to Marthanda Varma's camp, where he was made to divulge much useful information. There are other stories, one where the Mukkuvars assembled like a body of soldiers and used their oars to simulate spears, and another where they constructed fake cannon out of logs to keep the Dutch ships at long range; they are also supposed to have lured some of the reinforcing troops into an ambush. (Though a devout Hindu, Marthanda Varma had nothing against Christians; most of his traders belonged to the Syriac community of Coromandel. After the battle he ordered the church rebuilt at his expense, while the locals named a village after him.)

Yet again, there are two distinct versions of events. Well, at least this time they are distinct. In one, this was a proper siege, lasting a couple of months, that ended by chance when, on 5 August, a ball fired from one of the Maharaja's cannon struck a barrel of gunpowder inside the stockade. There were few or no casualties, but the fire burned up the garrison's entire stock of rice. Two days later de Lannoy

surrendered on terms. These were that the garrison could march to Kanyakumari with their weapons — the usual honours of war. But, Marthanda Varma did not play by European rules and the small garrison was seized and imprisoned. The captives included De Lannoy and 23 other officers of the Company. Marthanda Varma also acquired quite a number of cannon and muskets. After he had felt they had learned their lesson, he gave at least some of the garrison their weapons back, on condition they fight for him. A few agreed, including De Lannoy, who served his new master faithfully for over twenty years until his death, rising to become High Admiral, *Valiya kappithan*. Over those years he reformed the Travancore army along European lines and also constructed many fortifications, including the Nedumkottai, or Lines of Travancore, that were instrumental in the resistance against Tipu Sultan in 1789.

*[7 August seems to be the most accurate date, but others are given, including 10 August and 31 July.]*



*Memorial of the Battle of Colachel; the column is located right across from the church.*

The other version has the Maharaja's army deployed between Nagercoil and Eraniel, a line of about 10 Km, with Ramayyan's headquarters in the center. This puts the right of the line opposite Colachel and about 7.5 Km away from the fort, but the left more like 18 Km away. This is actually not that unusual. In Europe, such an arrangement allowed for either marching off in road column or forming for battle. Seen one way, it is almost as if Marthanda Varma was leaving a 'golden bridge' for the Dutch to escape north. Seen another way, he had pinned them, even though they were not closely surrounded. This version also includes months of minor skirmishing, which seems unnecessary and begins to have the flavour of a court panegyric. In June the Maharaja went to Thiruvattar to visit the family temple, where he offered his sword to the god and swore to defeat the Dutch. The battle is said to have commenced on 10 August. His Mukkuvar allies surrounded the single Dutch ship that was providing fire support but did not interfere with the landing of reinforcements. Both sides formed for battle and Ramayyan led the charge, breaking through the enemy line. The Travancore cavalry were very numerous and were able to outflank the Dutch, who had no horses at all. Their army fled to the fort, abandoning the wounded and dead, and the 24 men who became prisoners. An assault on the fort took place four days later and after a brisk fight of a few hours, was entirely successful. The remaining Dutch fled to their ship (or ships) and scarpered. The booty included 389 muskets, some swords, and a few cannon. In this version of events the prisoners were well treated from the start and were so overcome with the Maharaja's kindness that they willingly agreed to serve him.

The latter version makes a much better story, but it is so much like the account of a European battle of the day that one suspects it was written to cover the fact that Marthanda Varma never got the battle he was hoping for. It is possible that the magazine explosion on the 5th of August actually took place on 14 August (British OS/NS dating error), in which case there could indeed have been a battle, with the loss of the magazine forcing the final capitulation. Nair cavalry was pretty useless, but Marthanda Varma employed Pathan mercenaries from Coromandel, and a charge by Nair light infantry was no joke. Some of them were armed with British muskets. And, there is the story about the Mukkuvars ambushing the reinforcements. But, if there was a battle, it is odd that perhaps 100 Dutch stood in line, without cavalry, potentially without cannon, and without allies present, to fight an army of many thousands.

### **Eustachius Benedictus de Lannoy (1715-1777)**

De Lannoy was born at Arras, France; his family were noble immigrants from the Belgian town that bears his name. His early history is obscure, but he was a naval officer who specialized in the art of fortification. By 1737 he was serving at Colombo in Sri Lanka, where he came to the attention of Van Imhoff, accompanying him on the 1739 fact-finding expedition to Malabar. He had sufficient seniority and 'pull' to be given command of the Colachel operation. After some time in a Travancore jail, he was given the option to serve Marthanda Varma, which he did for the rest of his life. He became respected as a brave and resourceful commander and valued for his skills as a siege master, constructing a number of important fortifications during his career, including the Travancore Lines that saved the kingdom from Mysore's invasion, besides training and commanding the Maharaja's experimental Nair Brigade. He was made *Valiya Kappithan* (Great Captain), and hailed as such even by the common people. After Marthanda Varma died in 1758, De Lannoy served his successor until his own death.

De Lannoy is a unique individual in one other respect. While researching his career, this author discovered someone has created a *manga* about him and Marthanda Varma. What other obscure historical figure has his own graphic novel?!

*[The custom of employing foreign experts in Travancore did not end with De Lannoy. One of this author's own ancestors was seconded from John Company to serve the Maharaja of his own day as Court Physician and Chief Medical Officer to that same Nair Brigade. He also served two maharajas, the second bearing the name of Marthanda Varma II. As for the Nair Brigade, it remained in existence as such until the early 1950s; today its traditions are carried on by the 9th and 16th Battalions of the Madras Regiment.]*



*De Lannoy surrenders to Marthanda Varma. This scene has been painted many times by different artists, but curiously, the Dutch are almost always shown with blue coats. In reality, they wore red, and are thus depicted in some local murals which can be found by searching online.*

## Later Campaigning

However, it happened, it happened. Now the Dutch were in disarray. They had lost much 'face' as well as irreplaceable troops. Bazaar rumours said their days were numbered. Their troops at Kanyakumari sought to advance on Kottar, but were blocked by 5,000 of the Maharaja's men. 150 Company soldiers were sent to Paravur and Ayiroor, near Varkala, which was now their 'front line' against Travancore. In October Kanyakumari was abandoned, as the blockade was now unworkable. However, the VOC did succeed in taking a small enemy fort near Attingal and holding it for a brief time. This was presumably to help the new coalition against Travancore.

As part of the 1741 Dutch offensive, Kollam and Kayamkulam had formed a league, but they were too slow about the business to provide help to De Lannoy. Fortunately, there had been a second irruption by the forces of Chanda Sahib and his brother Bade. Entering the country by the Aramboly Gate (even today the main highway to Tinnevely) they captured Nagercoil, Kottar, and Suchindram (all within a 5 Km radius and now part of Kottar). There was an important shrine at Suchindram, which they plundered, burning its famous processional car and defacing the images. Ramayyan was sent to deal with them but their cavalry was too strong and he was defeated. He was forced to buy them off, after which he was recalled north. There are a few suggestions that this expedition was an attempt to change Chanda's base, perhaps because he had pretty much looted Madurai and did not want to deal with the Marathas or the Sultanate any more.

Also, Travancore's crown prince, Rama Varma, was ill, and Marthanda Varma would not initiate further campaigns until he was sure he was out of danger. This swing in the initiative allowed the Coalition to, early in 1742, capture Vamanpuram, 9 Km east of Attingal on the South bank of the Vamanpuram River. VOC and Kayamkulam troops also marched on Kilimanoor, 6 Km to the North, and occupied the fort there. Ramayyan came up against the first position, hotfooted, and sent the defenders packing, then laid siege to Kilimanoor on 3 February, taking it after a siege of 68 days (10 April). The remainder of the Coalition army, commanded by both the Raja of Kayamkulam and the Governor of Cochin, fell back on Kollam, where they were blockaded, and subsequently besieged.

Travancore's army was split in three, the columns commanded respectively by the crown prince, Marthanda Varma himself, and Ramayyan with de Lannoy as his second. The latter, and even more a cavalry host lent by the *poligars* of Tinnevely, proved decisive in the first encounter. Tinnevely had been the last province to hold out against Chanda Sahib, but by 1742 the Hindu Marathas were in charge of the rest of Madurai, allowing the Tinnevely men to send their cousin some much needed aid. The troopers seem to have been the usual mix of Maravars and Pathan mercenaries. As for de Lannoy, his dignified conduct and bravery in battle had brought him to the attention of the Maharaja. He was already hard at work drilling a force of 5,000 Nairs. The Raja was extremely pleased with their performance and de Lannoy was made a general.

Pinning the enemy in place, Marthanda Varma bypassed them and marched on Kayamkulam itself, fighting a series of encounters that lasted well into the year. Ramayyan suffered a rare repulse in front of the gates of Kollam. He had 6,000 men, but the commandant, a government minister from Kayamkulam named Autchutha Warriar, sortied and drove them as far as Kilimanoor. This did not affect the campaign in Kayamkulam. Despairing of success, the raja sued for peace (Treaty of Mannar, 1742). By the treaty he was to give up the bulk of his territory and become a vassal of Travancore, with a nominal yearly tribute of 1,000 rupees and an elephant.

This treaty can be taken as the end of the Dutch-Travancore War, since it was the last major attempt to stop Marthanda Varma that had VOC backing. But, this was not the end of the Maharaja's wars. Fighting had been planned against Kottiyam and Vadakkumur, who were also part of the alliance, and this continued. The Crown Prince led the campaign, and greatly distinguished himself. The fort at Kottiyam was taken and the raja captured. Vadakkumur's raja abandoned his country and sought exile in Calicut. Ramayyan was given the task of stamping out the last embers of resistance so the kingdoms could be properly annexed. Meanwhile, the Raja of Kollam continued to hold out for a while with covert Dutch aid — as an appanage of Kayamkulam he was supposed to have surrendered already. Kollam fell on 13 August, 1742. The fighting here was more intense and Travancore suffered significant casualties in three battles in the outskirts of the town (two on 1 June and one on 15 June), plus a series of engagements for the crossing at Kureepuzha, 4 Km west of the city, where there was both a ford and a bridge giving access to the seaward approaches. Hard fighting continued until 2 August.

Menon (*History of Travancore*) includes entries from the Maharaja's diary covering 10 January through 13 August 1742. There are some interesting items. On 31 January he visited the EIC post at Anjengo and arranged for ammunition and weapons to be delivered to Attingal. More ammunition was supplied by the French at Mahé. Unfortunately the full size of his army is not given. De Lannoy's 5,000 may have been an addition to the core force, which was infantry, or an integral part of it. Cavalry is not numbered but was in addition to the core, and there were an additional 4,000 newly levied Foot — several times over the years the Maharaja raised short-service militia in this manner. Camps were set up in the country round about Kollam during the siege of Kilimanoor, and one of these, where the crown prince commanded, was attacked, but unsuccessfully. The diary also includes casualty figures, which are generally quite low. Also, the Raja of Vadakkumur is recorded as a pensioner as of 10 May, suggesting he submitted after all. A camp seems to have been set up near the Kureepuzha battlefield, probably to interfere with Dutch seaborne supplies, because ammunition was sent there.

*[Menon regarded the discovery of the diary as a real find, and so it is. Such things are not common for Europe in this period and are nearly impossible to find in India. Unfortunately he only includes certain entries.]*

As for the VOC, they were quite ready to come to terms. Business was at a standstill. They tried to force Cochin and Thekkumkur to make peace also, but those rajas feared Travancore was about to bring the Dutch on board as allies and refused to do so, hoping the Dutch would be forced to continue fighting. Instead, the Malabar Command offered peace unilaterally. Once source even hints — and it is probably true in Cochin's case — that the rajas had from the start goaded the VOC just so the company would not make a deal with Travancore. But, negotiations stalled anyway. The terms were harsh, and Malabar Command needed to consult with Batavia... and Marthanda Varma changed his mind. So hostilities continued, but there was no fighting. The VOC was now far too weak and Travancore far too strong. A second conference was broken off by the Dutch, and a third fizzled out.

Officially, a Dutch-Travancore treaty was agreed to and the war terminated on 22 May 1743, but Batavia did not like the terms and Marthanda Varma was only too ready to 'alter the deal' if given the opportunity, so formal peace was not achieved until 1753 (Treaty of Mavelikkara). By that treaty the VOC bound themselves to non-interference in local politics and broke all local alliances. In exchange, Travancore would collect the pepper for them. Even then, fighting continued in southern Malabar until 1757, as Travancore sought to pacify the territories it had conquered. However, after 1743 the VOC never took up arms against the Maharaja again and made it a policy to act as if signing the peace treaty was a mere formality that could be done at the Maharaja's convenience. The draft was sanctioned by Batavia in 1748.

This brings the timeline to 1746. In that year Kayamkulam broke its treaty with Travancore. The root cause seems to have been the raja's discontent at losing most of his property. A new coalition was formed between Kayamkulam, Vadakkumur, Thekkumkur, and Purakkad. Cochin, afraid that Calicut would invade and realizing the VOC could not help as in times past, stood out, as did the VOC itself. The combination was not as strong as the list of participants makes it seem. Vadakkumur seems to have backed out, if it was ever 'in'. The others, usually identified in the sources by their capitals, Chunganacherry (Changanassery) and Ambalapulay (Ambalapuzha) respectively, encouraged Kayamkulam to stand firm.

Marthanda Varma was aware of their machinations and regarded Changanassery and Ambalapuzha as the chief source of Kayamkulam's defiance. Beyond the spy network he must assuredly have had, the Raja of Kayamkulam had not once paid the annual tribute — because it was beneath his dignity. Before the alliance could combine the Maharaja ordered Ramayyan north with a large army. The enemy Raja was at his palace in Mavalikara and Ramayyan met him there in his other capacity, as Marthanda Varma's chief minister. He demanded what was owed. The Raja prevaricated. Given a week's grace, he sent off his family and treasury bit by bit. The family was sent 'beyond Trichoor' — Thrissur, in the Cochin-Calicut border lands. The treasure was shipped to the backwaters about Kollam and sunk in a swamp. The last man out of his own palace, he distributed his official papers among the neighbouring rajas and stole away north in the night. Ramayyan, who had withdrawn from the vicinity, which allowed all this to happen, sent a messenger on the tenth day. There was great surprise when it was learned the bird had flown. Unfortunately, the raja, whether in error or by design, did not remove all his correspondence or all his armaments. From the logos on the swords and from the papers came proof of the complicity of Thekkumkur and Purakkad. Kayamkulam was first annexed, and then preparations were made to deal with the rebels. They promptly switched sides, which did not save them from being crushed in 1748.

There was a battle with Purakkad that year at Thottappally, led on Travancore's side by the ubiquitous Ramayyan, right on the coast at the mouth of the Pampa River, about 50 Km north of Kollam on Purakkad's border. The enemy raja made great use of poisoned arrows and inflicted many casualties. Travancore's army retreated and could not be persuaded to advance the next day. It was believed that the household deity of the enemy raja had taken a personal hand in the battle. Ramayyan had to wait for reinforcements, Muslim and Christian troops under de Lannoy. With the help of field artillery de Lannoy slaughtered the enemy archer corps, and after a few hours of battle the Hindus became convinced the enemy deity was no longer present and joined in. The Raja's principal advisors counselled capitulation but he would not listen, and after a lull in which a truce must have been discussed, the battle resumed, until the Raja's army fled the field. Ramayyan sized his capital. Apparently, the Raja remained obdurate almost to the end, but as the enemy approached his advisors went over to them. At this, he stoically pulled out a chess board; he was captured in the midst of a game and sent to Trivandrum as a prisoner. But, because of their 'wise' actions, the advisors were confirmed in their old privileges when the kingdom was annexed.

In the case of Thekkumkur, the raja was just as stubborn, but his heir apparent, who was also his brother, counselled full surrender. After a quarrel, the heir made his way to Trivandrum and explained the situation. Marthanda Varma agreed to make him his pensioner and kept him at Trivandrum. The enemy raja then employed a number of stratagems to lure his brother back home. Alas, the excuse of a sick mother worked. Marthanda Varma appears to have been hoodwinked for once. The heir was murdered

on the road, but punishment was swift. Ramayyan was sent against Thekkumkur. In another curious incident, his army's path was blocked by a crowd of *brahmins*. Killing a Brahmin was (in theory) forbidden, but Ramayyan was also a Brahmin. After failing to persuade them to disperse and witnessing them throwing stones and sand at his men — and uttering curses — he ordered de Lannoy's contingent of Muslims and Christians to drive them off physically. It is quite clear they were not killed, only slapped around. The ploy did give the Raja time to flee 'in a base and cowardly manner'. But, this campaign goes beyond the artificial cutoff date of 1748.

Menon considers the VOC was driven to accept peace because the Maharaja had transferred the entire pepper trade to the EIC. However, other sources suggest the EIC did not fare much better. Their aid to Travancore during the war — mostly arms shipments — had been spotty and weak. Marthanda Varma's monopolization of the pepper trade, which was essentially fulfilled between 1743 and 1744, was undertaken in large part because he wanted to buy arms directly from Europe. After much negotiation the EIC was granted its own 'economic zone' where it could trade for pepper, but they could find few independent sellers. The Maharaja also pushed much of the trade to the Coromandel Coast, where prices were higher than what he was charging the EIC. Some of his agents even used monies advanced them by the Company to open new trade routes! This tactic seems to have had multiple motivations. On one level it was an attempt to blackmail the Company into providing arms on a regular basis. On another level Marthanda Varma had started a bidding war between the VOC and the EIC. For the factory at Anjengo the problem was Head Office; Bombay instructed them not to deviate from the old methods of business. Ironically, it was the Dutch who ultimately bought the pepper, though at an unsustainable price. In 1746 the EIC merchants of Anjengo warned Travancore that they would intercept seaborne shipments of pepper, and in 1748 they had ships patrolling the coast. But, from 1747 through 1749 the EIC collected no pepper at all, by any means. Lucrative dealings with the less squeamish VOC led to the Maharaja's rapprochement, and thus the treaty of 1753. In this, as in his politics and way of war, Marthanda Varma broke with tradition — he became a merchant prince.

To skip ahead through the decades, Travancore's pepper monopoly also led to later violence against Calicut. When Marthanda Varma said he would collect all the pepper, he meant ALL the pepper. Travancore continued a slow expansion, but the Dutch held on to Cochin until 1795. Calicut, on the other hand, was defeated by Marthanda Varma at the Battle of Purakkad in 1755. In 1788 his dynasty accepted the protection of the EIC in the face of major threats from the North. The Company later helped put down a number of rebellions and propped the regime up during a period of weak rule. Under the aegis of the EIC, and later the Raj, Travancore emerged as a progressive state. But, at the same time it was notorious for its rigid imposition of the Caste System, which it turned into a quasi-religious institution. The last Raja stepped down in 1949 when Travancore was fully incorporated into the new state of India.

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