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REVIEW ARTICLE

A CRITICAL STUDY ON THE HISTORY OF PANDYAN DYNASTY

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A Critical Study on the History of Pandyan Dynasty

Krishan Kumar

Assistant Professor, M.M. College, Fatehabad (Haryana)

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The **Pandyan** or **Pandian** dynasty was an ancient Tamil dynasty, one of the three Tamil dynasties, the other two being the Chola and the Chera). The Pandya King, along with Chera King and Chola King, together were called as Three Crowned Kings of Tamilakam. The dynasty ruled parts of South India from around 600 BCE (Early Pandyan Kingdom) to first half of 17th century CE. They initially ruled their country *Pandya Nadu* from Korkai, a seaport on the southernmost tip of the Indian Peninsula, and in later times moved to Madurai. Fish being their flag, Pandyas were experts in water management, agriculture (mostly near river banks) and fisheries and they were eminent sailors and sea traders too. *Pandyan* was well known since ancient times, with contacts, even diplomatic, reaching the Roman Empire. The Pandyan empire was home to temples including Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai, and Nelliappar Temple built on the bank of the river Thamirabarani in Tirunelveli. The Pandya kings were called either Jatavarman or Maravarman Pandyan. From being Jains in their early ages, they became Shaivaites after some centuries of rule. Strabo states that an Indian king called Pandyan sent Augustus Caesar "presents and gifts of honour". The country of the Pandyas, Pandi Mandala, was described as *Pandyan Mediterranea* in the *Periplus* and *Modura Regia Pandyan* by Ptolemy.^[6]

The first Pandyan king who has been mentioned in the Sangam works recovered so far is **Nedunj Cheliyan I**, who ruled from the coastal town of Korkai, at the mouth of river Tamraparni. During this time, the Tamil country consisted of several small kingdoms ruled over by independent chieftains, in addition to the three monarchies of Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas. In a bid to expand his territory, Nedunj Cheliyan I invaded the kingdom of Kudal which was under the rule of an independent chieftain, Akutai. He defeated Akutai and moved the capital of Pandyan kingdom to Madurai. This king also defeated an invading army from the Deccan and hence was called *Aariyap Padaikadantha Pandyan* or the king who conquered the Aryan army. He was succeeded by his son **Pudappandiyan**, who expanded the kingdom by conquering Ollaiyur (near modern day Pudukkottai) –

an act that earned him the name *Ollaiyur thantha Pudappandian*. Both Pudappandiyan and his predecessor, Nedunj Cheliyan I, were poets themselves who contributed to the *Purananuru* collection.

The successor of Pudappandiyan was **Nedunj Cheliyan II** also known as "Pasumpun Pandyan." Immediately after ascending the throne, he marched with his troops to the north of Vaigai and defeated the chieftain Evvi II. He then headed west and captured the Aayi territory controlled by another chieftain, Atiyan. Both Evvi II and Atiyan were made commanders of the Pandyan army for his battles against Kongu country that was further west. From here he expanded the Pandyan kingdom almost to the western coast, which earned him the title *Vidambalamba Ninra Pandyan* (the Pandyan whose kingdom was washed by two seas). Since he was responsible for expanding the Pandyan kingdom by annexing several kingdoms, he was also called *Pannadu thantha Pandyan* (the Pandyan who annexed many lands). His successor, **Mudukudumi Peruvaludhi**, was also a great warrior and carried the devastation into enemy territories. He performed yagas with the aid of Brahmin priests, similar to the tradition in northern India at that time.

The early Pandyan Dynasty of the Sangam Literature faded into obscurity upon the invasion of the Kalabhras. The dynasty revived under Kadungon in the early 6th century, pushed the Kalabhras out of the Tamil country and ruled from Madurai. They again went into decline with the rise of the Cholas in the 9th century and were in constant conflict with them. The Pandyas allied themselves with the Sinhalese and the Cheras in harassing the Chola empire until they found an opportunity for reviving their fortunes during the late 13th century. The Later Pandyas (1216–1345) entered their golden age under Maravman Sundara Pandyan and Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan (c. 1251), who expanded the empire into Telugu country, conquered Kalinga (Orissa) and invaded and conquered Sri Lanka. They also had extensive trade links with the Southeast Asian maritime empires

of Srivijaya and their successors. During their history, the Pandyas were repeatedly in conflict with the Pallavas, Cholas, Hoysalas and finally the Muslim invaders from the Delhi Sultanate. The Pandyan Kingdom finally became extinct after the establishment of the Madurai Sultanate in the 16th century.

The Pandyas excelled in both trade and literature. They controlled the pearl fisheries along the South Indian coast, between Sri Lanka and India, which produced some of the finest pearls in the known ancient world. Traditionally, the legendary Sangams were held in Madurai under their patronage, and some of the Pandya Kings were poets themselves.

After the close of the Sangam age, the first Pandyan empire was established by Kadungon in the 6th century by defeating the Kalabhras. The following chronological list of the Pandya emperors is based on an inscription found on the Vaigai riverbeds. Succeeding kings assumed the titles of "Sadayavaramban" and "Maaravaramban" alternately, denoting themselves as followers of Lord Sadaiyan and Lord Thiru Maal respectively.

After the defeat of the Kalabhras, the Pandya kingdom grew steadily in power and territory. With the Cholas in obscurity, the Tamil country was divided between the Pallavas and the Pandyas, the river Kaveri being the frontier between them.

After Vijayalaya Chola conquered Thanjavur by defeating the Muttarayar chieftains who were part of Pandya family tree around 850, the Pandyas went into a period of decline. They were constantly harassing their Chola overlords by occupying their territories. Parantaka I invaded the Pandya territories and defeated Rajasimha III. However, the Pandyas did not wholly submit to the Cholas despite loss of power, territory and prestige. They tried to forge various alliances with the Cheras and the Kings of Lanka and tried to engage the Cholas in war to free themselves from Chola supremacy. But right from the times of Parantaka I to the early 12th century up to the times of Kulottunga Chola I the Pandyas could not overpower the Cholas who right from 880–1215 remained the most powerful empire spread over South India, Deccan and the Eastern and Western Coast of India during this period.

The 13th century is the greatest period in the history of the Pandyan Empire. This period saw the rise of seven prime Lord Emperors (*Ellarkku Nayanar – Lord of All*) of Pandyan, who ruled the kingdom alongside Pandyan princes. Their power reached its zenith under Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan in the middle of the 13th century. The foundation for such a great empire was laid by Maravarman Sundara Pandyan early in the 13th century.

The Pandyan kingdom was replaced by the Chola princes who assumed the title as Chola

Pandyas in the 11th century. After being overshadowed by the Pallavas and Cholas for centuries, Pandyan glory was briefly revived by Maravaramban Sundara Pandyan and by (probably his younger brother or son) the much celebrated Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan I in 1251. The Pandya power extended from the Telugu countries on banks of the Godavari river to the northern half of Sri Lanka, which was invaded by Sundara Pandyan I in 1258 and on his behalf by his younger brother Jatavarman Vira Pandyan I from 1262–1264. later Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan appointed his brother to rule Kongu country, Chola nadu and Hoysala country. Jatavarman Vira Pandyan's clan was later called as Kongu Pandiyar and he is the first Kongu Pandiya King.

The revival of the Pandyan dynasty was to coincide with the gradual but steady decline of the Chola empire. The last two or three Chola kings who followed Kulothunga III were either very weak or incompetent. The Cholas of course did not lack valour but had been unable to stop the revival of the Pandyan empire from the times of Maravaramban Sundara Pandyan, the revival of the Kadava Pallavas at Kanchi under Kopperinchunga I and indeed the growing power and status of the Telugu Cholas, the Renanti and the Irungola Cholas of the Telugu country; for the last three named had been very trusted allies of the Cholas up to Kulothunga III, having helped him in conquering Kalinga. The marital alliance of Kulothunga III and one of his successors, Raja Raja III, with the Hoysalas did not yield any advantage, though (initially, at least) Kulothunga III took the help of the Hoysalas in countering the Pandyan resurgence. Kulothunga III had even conquered Karur, the Cheras in addition to Madurai, Ilam and Kalinga. However, his strength rested on support from Hoysalas, whose king Veera Ballala II was his son-in-law. However, Veera Ballala II himself had lost quite a bit of his territories between 1208–1212 to his local adversaries in Kannada country, like the Kalachuris, Seunasetc.

The resurgent Pandiyans under Maravarman Sundara Pandyan went to war against Kulothunga and first at Kandai and then near Manaparai on the outskirts of modern Tiruchirappalli, the Pandiyans routed the Chola army and entered Tiruchy, Thiruvaramam and Thanjavur victorious in war. But it appears that in the Tiruchy and Thiruvaramam areas, there was renewed control of the Cholas, presumably with the help of the Hoysalas under Vira Someswara with the Hoysalas later shifting their allegiance to the Pandyans either during the last years of Maravarman Sundara Pandyan or the early years of his successor Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan.

Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan was a very brave, ambitious warrior king, who wanted to completely subjugate the Cholas. He initially tolerated the presence of the Hoysalas under Vira Someshwara with his son Visvanatha or Ramanatha ruling from Kuppam near Samayapuram on the outskirts of Thiruvaramam. This was because other feudatories of

the Hoysalas were also growing in power and threatening the Hoysala kingdom itself. Besides, the Delhi Sultanate invasion of the Deccan had started under Malik Kafur. The challenged Hoysalas did have a foothold in and around Tiruchy and Thiruvaramam for a few years and seemed to have indulged in some temple building activity at Thiruvaramam also. But Jatavarman Sundara Pandiyan, who subdued Rajendra Chola III in around 1258–1260 was an equal antagonist of the Hoysalas whose presence he absolutely disliked in the Tamil country. He first vanquished the Kadava Pallavas under Kopperinchungan-II, who had challenged the Hoysala army stationed in and around Kanchi and killed a few of their commanders.

Though Rajendra III suffered another defeat at the hands of Vira Someshwara, because of the growing power of Pandiyans being felt by both Cholas and Hoysalas, there was a political affinity between the two which was cemented also by marital relations. At the time the Pandiyans and the Kadava Pallavas, with an earlier Chola, Raja Raja III, having been held in captivity by Kopperinchunga II and his release being secured by the Hoysalas. Ultimately, the Kadava Pallavas, Hoysalas and also the Telugu Choda Timma who invaded Kanchi were all one by one vanquished by Jatavarman Sundara Pandiyan with the Cholas finally becoming extinct after defeat of Hoysala Ramanatha as well as his ally Rajendra III around 1279 by Maravarman Kulasekhara Pandiyan.

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