



Capitulation of Madras from 1740 to 1752 – A Historical study

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Introduction :

This article is a humble attempt to know about the Capitulation of Madras from 1740 to 1752 A.D. the modern history of Madras August 22, 1639. On that day, Francis Day, a factor of the English East India Company, received a grant from Venkatadri Nayak of Wandiwash, who ruled the region under the Vijayanagara empire, to build a fort on a tongue of land on the seafront between the Cooum river in the south and the “Elampore river” in the north. When the first stone of the Fort was laid on March 1, 1640, the seeds of Madras, the first city of modern India, were sown. Madras appeared on the stage of world history when the French attacked Fort St. George in 1746, captured it from the English and held it until 1749.

Capitulation of Madras :

In 1740 the English entertained Europeans and topasses and strengthened the military gunroom.¹ More than two hundred guns were mounted on the wall and bastions. The board examined a list of the guns mounted upon several points and increased the number of gunmen. As only trained men could operate the guns, experienced persons were entertained into the service. The English garrison consisted of 540 men, including officers.² The supernumerary men formed a third company. During war time as trained men would not be available ex-servicemen were reemployed.³ By this time the garrison of Madras had strength of about 500. In 1743 the Europeans were 250 at Fort St. George and 160 at Fort St. David.⁴ The Directors ordered that the Madras military should be divided into four companies. They were sending as many recruits as were procurable to strengthen the Madras garrison. The president had given orders to double the guards and that no Mughal's horse should enter Madras or pass the Mettah without permission.⁵ The president acquainted the Board on 14th May, 1745, that he had received intelligence that the French at Pondicherry were making great preparations for war.⁶

As Fort St. David appeared as the immediate target of attack the Governor Nicholas Morse sent Smith, the Head Engineer, with orders to survey the Fort and put it in a state of defence. As the outer guards were at a great distance from the Fort, much liable to desertion and of no use against an European enemy, they were withdrawn. The guns and ammunitions were brought to Fort St. David.⁷ The

president acquainted the Board that he had received information from Arcot that the French had written a letter to the Nawab stating that the English were making preparations at Fort St. David to attack Pondicherry by land and by sea.⁸ It appeared that the French had some design in this and that was informed to the Nawab.

In 1745 the Marathas again marched to the southern province. Anwar-ud-din, the Nawab of Arcot set out to oppose them. He was willing to give them a sum of money but the Marathas insisted upon the delivery of Tiruchirapalli which the Nawab refused to comply with. If hostilities broke out, the supply of provisions would suffer greatly from their incursions as well as from the poligars, who would on such occasions immediately fall to plunder. The English wanted to find out some means to settle matters with them and prevent a war, as the country would not support another invasion after having suffered so greatly recently.⁹ Added to the Maratha trouble there was friction with the French over trade rights and political influence. As it appeared that the French would take advantage of the troubles, Nicholas Morse, the Governor of Madras, (1744-1746) put the fort in a state of defence.¹⁰

In January 1746 the Madras government represented to the company to send large recruits, as the French mobilized their forces. The preparations which the French had made at Pondicherry served to alarm the inhabitants at Cuddalore. Therefore, a body of sepoys was raised in 1746 by the Governor and the Council of Fort St. David to defend Cuddalore against the French.¹¹ In 1746 war had broken out between England and France and it extended to the Tamil country. The French raised forces with a view to driving the English out of the country. But the French had no ships of war in the Indian waters when the war broke out. Hence Dupleix, Governor of Pondicherry, appealed to Morse, the Governor of Madras, that they should remain neutral. Though Morse agreed to the proposal, when a strong British squadron under commodore Barnett appeared off Madras, the English captured the French vessels.¹² Dupleix appealed to Anwar-ud-din, the Nawab of the Carnatic, to ask the English to desist from hostilities. The Nawab wrote to the British with the result that Barnett took no further step against the French.

However, the situation changed. Dupleix appealed to La Bourdonnais at Mauritius to go to his aid. As he reached the Indian waters with eight warships, Barnett had only four ships of war and the best one, Medway, developed a leak. Indian climates were not suitable for his men, and Barnett himself died in April 1746.

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Peyton who succeeded Barnett proceeded to intercept the French off Nagapatnam. The two squadrons fought on the afternoon of the 6th and morning of the 7th July, 1746. As Peyton failed to make any impression, he sailed away for safety to the Hugli to await the arrival of reinforcements. The French squadron anchored off Pondicherry on 8th July. On September 3, 1746 the French fleet appeared off Madras and the next day La Bourdonnais, the French Admiral, attacked Madras and on the 7th bombarded the White Town.¹³ A besieging force of 1100 European soldiers and Indian and African recruits, summoned Morse, the Governor of Madras, to surrender. At this critical hour Morse appealed to Anwar-ud-din for help, but the Nawab did not respond till the French actually appeared before Madras, as no presents accompanied the appeal. He sent a warning to Dupleix but the latter ignored it. Dupleix replied that he was trying to capture Madras so as to deliver it into the hands of the Nawab.

The operations against Madras continued and the English found their situation desperate. On 10th September, the English agreed to surrender, having lost five men. The Governor and merchants were sent as prisoners to Pondicherry. John Hinde assumed charge of the English settlement at Fort St. David. The charter, among other papers, fell into the hands of the French and the gold plate, being the treaty between Frasin Day and the Raja of Chandiaragiri disappeared.¹⁴ The fall of Madras into the hands of the French was mainly because the defences of Madras had never been built to face a siege. Also Payton gave no support to the settlement. As Fort St. George, described as “the handsomest and strongest fortress in His Majesty’s dominions”,¹⁵ surrendered to the French, the government of the coast of Coromandel devolved on the Governor and council of Fort St. David.

The capture of Madras brought about a clash between Dupleix and La Bourdonnais, as they could not decide the matter between themselves. The general court of the company on receiving reports of the capitulation and ransom of Madras forbade Fort St. David to enter into any treaty with the local powers or any other power relating to the payment of any sum of money for the recovery of Fort St. George. Fort St. David was constituted as the head settlement.¹⁶ The council of war was held on the 29th April 1747 at Fort St. David and it appointed a committee of officers to represent whatever might occur to them for the preservation of the garrison.¹⁷ The opportunity for conquering all the English settlements was lost by their differences. On October 2, storm broke out and it dispersed the French fleet. Several ships were driven ashore. La Bourdonnais sailed for France leaving 1200 men to garrison Madras. Dupleix refused to return Madras to the English.

Nawab Anwar-ud-din demanded that the city should be handed over to him as promised. As Dupleix did not comply with, the Nawab sent a force of 10,000 men under the command of his eldest son Mahfuz khan to enforce compliance. The Nawab's forces blockaded Fort St. George, but the French administered a severe blow on the forces of the Nawab. As the army of Mahfuz khan attempted to bar the progress of the French under Paradis on the bank of river Adyar, there followed a deadly combat in which many of the Nawab's troops were killed. The battle of Adyar was of great significance in the history of the growth of European political power in India. The terror of the Indian princes vanished. The European military system proved its superiority over that of the Indian princes.

The capture of Madras encouraged Dupleix to consider schemes aimed at destroying the British power on the coromandel Coast. Eighteen months after the capture of Madras, he tried to capture Fort St. David but it failed. The Nawab received presents of the value of 40,000 rupees and withdrew his proposed aid to the English. The English recovered from the shock of defeat with the arrival of British commander, Griffin with more troops.¹⁸

The English deputed one Hodjee Adee to the Nawab at Arcot to advocate the matters relating to their cause. The English were no doubt obliged to the Nawab's predecessors for the esteem in which they were held by the Mughals in preference to all other Europeans on the coromandel Coast. They also contacted Nasirjung, the Nizam, in September, 1747 through a vakeel to secure military aid. Even though it was expensive, there was no other means left for the security of Fort St. David.¹⁹ The Nizam sent fireman's to several poligars and killedars to assist the English with provisions and everything required of. He also wrote to the Nawab of Arcot to assist the English. Yet nothing materialized.

After the fall of Madras, the kanakkapillai reached Fort St. David and stood before the board on the 30th June, 1747 to examine the accounts of Fort St. George. He acquainted the Board that the books and cadjans were all lost, when the French were at Madras and he could not give any accounts.²⁰ Hence Fort St. David requested the Directors to send a copy of the last set of general books so that they might settle and adjust accounts relating to the merchants of Madras.²¹ Accordingly the Directors sent copies of the general books to Fort St. George. A large British expedition under the command of Rear Admiral Boscawen appeared on the Indian waters early in August 1747. In retaliation Boscawen and Major stringer Lawrence besieged Pondicherry by sea and land respectively: but failed. Boscawen raised the siege and retired to Fort St. David. He made preparation for one more attempt to take Pondicherry, but the news arrived that England and France concluded peace in Europe by signing the treaty of Aix-la-chapelle.

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Madras remained in possession of the French from September 10, 1746 to August 13, 1749, when it was restored by virtue of the treaty of peace signed at Aix-la-chapelle.²² The red flag of Fort St. George floated again over the Fort on 21st August, 1749, when admiral Boscawen made his entry. It was then made a subordinate settlement under a deputy Governor but was made the chief seat of government in May, 1752.²³ To encourage the inhabitants and the merchants of Madras to return to Madras, customs was not collected for the first six months for the goods other than imported from Europe and so also the rents of the villages.²⁴ As there was stagnation of inland trade ever since the loss of Madras, it was ordered for the term of one year for debts contracted by them.²⁵ From the year 1745 to the conclusion of peace in 1748, the English had been continuously engaged in war. It appeared that preservation of their commerce depended much on the conduct and success of the wars in the Tamil country.²⁶ Therefore it was judged highly proper to put the military and artillery upon a new footing at Fort St. David.²⁷ On January 28, 1748 Major Stringer Lawrence arrived at Fort St. David. Known as “the father of the Indian Army”. he brought out that the English officers neither did not know to defend themselves, nor they could not command the obedience of their men. The Angel- French war proved that the Nawab of the carnatic was not the overlord of the English or of the French. The oriental military power was shattered and the inherent weakness of the Nawab was exposed. It inspired the foreigners to enter into more of adventures to gain political influence. This radical shift in policy turned clerks into conquerors, factories into forts and commercial settlements into political headquarters.

During the year 1749, hostilities between the French and English were suspended in consequence of the treaty of peace. However, the peace was not a lasting one, Chanda sahib, who had been released by the Marathas in 1748, defeated and killed Anwar-ud-din, the Nawab of Arcot early in 1749. He prepared to advance against Muhammad Ali khan, son of Anwaer-ud-din, who remained in possession of Tiruchirapalli. The French countenanced the endeavours of Chanda sahib while English sent aid to Muhammed Ali khan. This policy led to the renewal of conflict between the English and French early in 1750. As Fort St. George was much better situated than fort St. David, it was made the principal settlement on 2nd February, 1751.²⁸

End Notes :

1. Diary and consultations of Fort St. George, 1740, Madras, 1931, p. 83.

2. Ibid, pp. 92-176.
3. Despatches from England, 1743-1744, Madras, 1932, p. 13.
4. Despatches to England, 1743-1746, Madras, 1931, p.2.
5. Ibid, p.25.
6. Ibid, pp. 31-37.
7. Diary and consultations of Fort St. David, 1745, Madras, 1934, p.30.
8. Diary and consultations of Fort St. George, 1746, Madras, 1931, p.62.
9. Despatches to England, 1743-1746, Madras, 1931, p.43.
10. Frank Penny, Mrs., Fort St. George, Madras, London, 1900, p.152.
11. Ibid., p.36.
12. Malleson, G.B., Rulers of India, Duplix, Oxford, 1899, p. 23.
13. Despatches to England, 1746-1751, Madras, 1932, p. 17.
14. Frank Penny, Mrs., Op.cit., p. 246.
15. David Leighton, Vicissitudes of Fort St. George, Addison Press, Madras, 1902, p. 246.
16. Despatches from England, 1747-1748, Madras, 1933, Letter dated 24 July, 1747 to Fort St. David, p.11.
17. Despatches to England, 1746-1751, Madras, 1932, p. 23.
18. Ibid, pp.22-45.
19. Ibid, p. 30.
20. Ibid, p. 38.
21. Ibid, letter dated 25th April, 1748 to Fort St. David, p. 56.
22. Dodwell.H., Calendar of the Madras despatches 1744-1755, Madras, 1920, pp. 32-37.
23. Wilson, w.J., colonel, History of the Madras Army, Vols .I-III, Madras, 1888.p.24.
24. Despatches to England, 1746-1751, Madras, 1932, p. 137.
25. Ibid, p. 143.
26. Orme, Roobert, A History of the military transactions of the British Nation in Industan, London, 1861. p. 33.
27. Despatches from England, 1748-1749, Madras, 1932, p. 8.
28. Despatches to England, 1746-1751, letter dated 2nd November, 1749, from Fort St. David, p. 142.