

MANIDHANA EYAM FREE IAS ACADEMY – TNPSC - PRELIMINARY EXAM
UNIT – IV – HISTORY & CULTURE OF INDIA
Maratha Rule in Tamil Nadu

Circumstances leading to its establishment

- Krishna Devaraya, during his reign (1509-1529), developed the Nayankara system.
- Accordingly, the Tamil country was divided into three large Nayankaras: Senji, Thanjavur and Madurai.
- Under the new system the subordinate chieftains were designated as Palayakkarars and their fiefdom as Palayams.
- Thanjavur which remained as a part of the Chola territories first and then of the Pandya kingdom became a vassal state of the Madurai Sultanate, from which it passed into the hands of Nayaks.
- The rivalry between the Nayaks of Madurai and Thanjavur finally led to the eclipse of Nayak rule of Thanjavur in 1673.
- Troops from Bijapur, led by the Maratha general Venkoji, defeated the Nayak of Madurai and captured Thanjavur.
- Venkoji crowned himself king, and Maratha rule began in Thanjavur in 1676.
- When Shivaji invaded the Carnatic in 1677, he removed Venkoji and placed his half- brother Santaji on the throne.
- But Venkoji recaptured Thanjavur and, after his death, his son Shahji became the ruler of Thanjavur kingdom.
- Shaji had no heir to succeed.
- So his brother Serfoji I became the next ruler and remained in power for sixteen years (1712-1728).
- After him one of his brothers Tukkoji succeeded him (1728), followed by Pratap Singh (1739-1763), whose son Thuljaji ruled up to 1787.
- Serfoji II aged 10, was then crowned, with Thuljoji's brother Amarsingh acting as Regent.
- Disputing this succession, the English thrust an agreement on Serfoji II, according to which the latter was forced to cede the administration of the kingdom to the British.
- Serfoji II was the last ruler of the Bhonsle dynasty of the Maratha principality of Thanjavur.

Serfoji II

- Serfoji II was a remarkable ruler.
- He was educated by the German Christian missionary Friedrich Schwartz, Serfoji.
- Similarly, Serfoji II turned out to be a well-known practitioner of Western science and medicine.
- Yet he was a devoted keeper of Indian traditions.
- He mastered several European languages and had an impressive library of books in every branch of learning.
- Serfoji's modernising projects included the establishment of a printing press (the first press for Marathi and Sanskrit) and enrichment of the Saraswati Mahal Library.
- His most innovative project, however, was the establishment of free modern public schools run by his court, for instruction in English and the vernacular languages.
- The Saraswati Mahal library, built by the Nayak rulers and enriched by Serfoji II contains a record of the day-to-day proceedings of the Maratha court - as Modi documents, French-Maratha correspondence of the 18th century.
- Modi was the script used to write the Marathi language.
- It is a treasure house of rare manuscripts and books in many languages Serfoji II found in his contemporary missionary scholar C.S. John in Tranquebar, an innovator in education.
- John carried out reforms and experiments in schooling ranging from residential arrangements for students and innovations in curriculum and pedagogy.
- But his most important proposal was a project submitted to the English colonial government in 1812, urging it to sponsor free schools for Indian children, for instruction in Tamil and English.
- This was at a time when English education was not available to non-Christian Indians.
- Thomas Munro, governor of Madras, proposed a scheme for elementary public schools in the 1820s, but the Company government did not establish a modern school for natives in Madras till 1841.

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- In contrast, from the start, the German missionaries had run several free vernacular and English schools in the southern provinces since 1707.
- Serfoji II was in advance of both the missionary and the colonial state, for as early as 1803 in Thanjavur he had established the first modern public school for non-Christian natives.
- While Indian rulers often endowed educational institutions of higher learning, they did not establish elementary schools, nor did they administer any schools or colleges.
- Serfoji's most striking initiative was the founding and management of free elementary and secondary schools for orphans and the poor in Thanjavur city and other adjacent places.
- Included were schools for all levels, charity schools, colleges and *padashalas* for Sanskrit higher learning.
- The schools catered to the court elites, Vedic scholars, orphans and the poor.
- In 1822, at the free school in *Muktambal Chattiram* the king's favourite almshouse established in 1803, 15 teachers taught a total of 464 students of diverse castes, in two classes, in the morning and in the evening.
- Serfoji also supported a free school for needy Christians, run by missionaries in the village of Kannandangudi.
- Serfoji II established *Dhanvantari Mahal*, a research institution that produced herbal medicine for humans and animals.
- Maintaining case-sheets of patients was introduced.
- Physicians of modern medicine, Ayurveda, Unani and Siddha schools undertook research on drugs and herbs for medical cure.
- They produced eighteen volumes of research material.
- Serfoji also catalogued the important herbs in the form of exquisite hand paintings.
- Serfoji's strategic initiatives in modern education enabled the Thanjavur court elite and subjects to enter and benefit from the emerging colonial social and economic order.
- The court officials, mostly Brahmins, trained in European knowledge, technologies and arts became leading agents of colonial modernity, equal to

the English-educated *dubashes*, writers and interpreters, both Hindu and Christian, who mediated between the Europeans and Indian courts.

- Two of Serfoji's pandits (one of them was Kottaiyur Sivakolundu Desigar) joined the Company's College of Fort St. George and became leaders in translation and print culture.
- The careers and projects of Serfoji and John illuminate the important roles that enterprising individuals, and small places, such as a Danish-Tamil fishing village and a Maratha-Tamil principality, played in the history of change in colonial Tamil Nadu.
- Serfoji II was a patron of traditional Indian arts like dance and music.
- He authored *Kumarasambhava Champu*, *Devendra Kuravanji*, and *Mudra rakshaschaya*.
- He introduced western musical instruments like clarinet, and violin in Carnatic music.
- He is also credited with popularising the unique Thanjavur style of painting. Serfoji was interested in painting, gardening, coin-collecting, martial arts and patronized chariot-racing, hunting and bull-fighting.
- He created the first zoological garden in Tamil Nadu in the Thanjavur palace premises.
- Serfoji II died on 7th March 1832 after almost forty years of his rule.
- His death was mourned throughout the kingdom and his funeral procession was attended by more than 90, 000 people.
- At his funeral, Rev. Bishop Heber observed: 'I have seen many crowned heads, but no one whose deportment was more princely'.
- **Raja Desinghu:** The Maratha king Rajaram, threatened by Mughal forces, had to flee from Raigarh and take asylum in Senji.
- Pursuing him, the Mughal forces led by General Zulfikar Khan, and then by Daud Khan, succeeded in taking over Senji.
- During the Mughal expedition against Senji, a Bundela Rajput chieftain, Swarup Singh was employed as Kiladar (fort commandant) of Senji in 1700.
- In due course Swarup Singh gained control over the entire Senji.
- After his death in 1714, his son Tej Singh (Desinghu) assumed the governorship of Senji.

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- Desinghu refused to pay tribute to the Mughal emperor and invited the wrath of Nawab Sadat-ul -lah Khan.
- In the ensuing battle Raja Desinghu, who was only twenty-two years old then, was killed.
- His young wife committed sati.
- The gallantry displayed by the daring Rajput youth against the Nawab is immortalized in many popular ballads in Tamil.

