

GOPAL NAICKER – A FREEDOM FIGHTER IN DINDUGUL

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Gopal Naicker was born on 14th January 1728. His original name was Thirumalai Kupala Chinnapa Naicker. His Father name was Tirumalai Dhasari Chinnapa Naicker. His wife is Pappammal. He had two sons namely Muthuvel Naicker and Ponappanaicker. Thirumalai Kupala Chinnapa Naicker was hailed as Kupalabatch Prime warrior of freedom struggle from Tamil Nadu by Tippu Sultan and as Gopal Naicker by people. He reined Virupaatchi for 40 years. He was the principal architect of the coalition of the Poligars. In 1795 they deposed the Setupati of Ramanathapuram, but failed to win the allegiance of the inhabitants. The proceedings of the Madras Government, Military Consultations during the period 1789 and 1799-1801 also indicate the earlier relations of the company with Palayakkarars¹. The Poligar Rebellion which culminated during the period 1799-1801 was a great event in the history of Tamil Nadu². They made deep inroads into the liberties of the poligars and nattamakars³ too and offended their sentiments⁴. Further the changes introduced by the company threw a large section of the people out of employment and created insecurity in the villages⁵. The company not only waged a series of wars and stringent measures against these traditional chieftains for default of payments or defiance to its authority, but overthrew and at times executed them.

Thus the Madras Council deposed Cambia Nayak, Poligar of Sapatore for his failure to pay tribute. The chief turned rebel was caught and executed poojari Nayak of Deodanapetty met with the same fate. In 1799 Kattabomman and other poligars were suppressed⁶. This was followed by the abolition of the Poligar system further, the replacement of one branch of the ruling house of a pollam by another was reduced to an accepted practice. This policy excited mutual jealousies and created an animosity towards the English and raised the banner of revolt⁷. The axe of coercion fell heavily upon the poligars of Dindigul⁸.

In 1784, after an agreement between the Mysore province and British army, Dindigul was restored by Mysore province. In 1788, Tipu Sultan, the Son of Haider Ali, was crowned as King of Dindigul. In 1790, James Stewart of the British army gained control over Dindigul by invading it in the second war of Mysore. In a pact made in 1792, Tipu ceded Dindigul along with the fort to the English. Dindigul is the first region to come under English rule in the Madurai District. In 1798, the British army strengthened the hill fort with cannons and built sentinel rooms in every corner.

The South India Rebellion of 1800-1801 represented a violent reaction against the growing influence of the English. The Rebellion of 1800-1801 was organised with a pre-determined motive of destroying British imperialism⁹. It spread over an extensive region and assumed the proportions of a mass movement. The horrors that attended the growth of imperialism spread a wave of revulsion and led the inhabitants to united action. The common people of South India to liberate the 'peninsula of Jamba Dwipa' from British yoke. This was more because of the support extended by the local princes to the alien ruler¹⁰.

In the beginning the rebellion broke out in Tirunveli and Dindigul, but the other parts of Tamilnadu remained quiet. It was only when these rebellions were suppressed that fresh rising broke out in the Marava country, Madurai and Thanjavur. Hence the company found it no impossible a task to crush the insurrection still certain trends in the rebellion tend to establish that it assumed the proportions of a popular rebellion. The proclamations of the rebels indicate that they believed in a mass movement against the British.

The English accords of the period refer to the inhabitants of different territories flocking to the rebel ranks quite voluntarily. In addition to these, the kuravai which was the war cry of the rebels and the killah-a leaf pierced with the nail-when sent to the villages served the purpose of summons to bring the inhabitants to the battle fields¹¹. In response men sent from Plani, Ayacudi, Kannivadi, Veeramalai and soon jointed them in strength¹². Hence it might not be improper to consider that the insurrection assumed the proportions of a popular outbreak particularly in 1801. Still defeat was inevitable because of the military strength of the Company, the support of its allies and command of vast resources. The British people formulated divide and Rule strategy and gamed over the Palayakaras.

Palayakarars rebelled against the huge amount of tax levied by the British. The people reached a stage where they have to sell all their properties and crop yields to pay the tax. The Palayakarars decided to fight against the British to protect the cause of the people much more vigor and vehemence. Among the polygars Gopala Nayak of Dindigul who spearheaded the movement and organised a formidable confederacy for overthrow of the British rule. They held a conspiracy in Dindigul and rose in arms with an attack on Coimbatore on the June 3rd, 1800¹³. The insurrection spread over an extensive region, to Sholapur in the north and Nanguneri in the far South. In this great struggle the Tamils played the most remarkable role. The proclamation and letters of the rebel's clues to the causes of the insurrection¹⁴. Their grievances were that the English reduced the hereditary rulers to the humiliating states of "a window", treated the sons of soil like 'dogs', showed no honour to the customs of the land, denied the peasants due share of the crops, and made the rice 'vellum' or water.

The Dindigul fort played a major role during the Polygar wars, between the Palayakarars and the British. The Polygar of Virupachi, Gopal Nayak formed a revolutionary Alliance organizing the Palayakarars of Dindigul and commanded the Dindigul division of Polygar, and during the wars aided the Sivaganga queen Queen Velu Nachiyar and her commanders Maruthu Pandiyar Brothers to stay the fort after permission from Hyder Ali. The king of Sivaganga Muthuvaduga Nathar¹⁵ was shot to death in Kalaiyakavil war. Queen Velu Nachiyar, who escaped from the deadly attack of the British, came to the palace of Gopal Naicker along with her daughter Vellacci, Minister Thandavarayanpillai and Maruthu Brothers. Velu Nachiyar swore on to redeem the country from the British and Gopal Naicker assured to support her. Gopal Naicker's Guidance was the major reason behind the success of Velu Nachiyar.

After hanging Veerapandiya Kattabomman to death in Kayastha, the British imprisoned his brother Oomaithurai in Palayankottai prison. Gopal Naicker and Maruthu devised a plan to redeem Oomaithurai. They entered the prison tactically by preparing an army dressed like people carrying 'Karadi' to Tiruchendur after the battle redeemed Oomadurai. Oomadurai, who was out from the prison, executed the heads of the British who came to attack him sword urging swirl. Gopal Naicker made him king of Panchalankurichi again. Granting and award and 6,000 soldiers. The Collector of Dindigul

B. Hardis who came to know through his spy's that Gopal Naicker was the reason for Gorilla attack all over the country, Summoned him with charges against him but Gopal Naicker did not respond. The second summon threatened him to surrender in November 1799. Gopal Naicker, even at the age of 72, did not fear about the threatening and started to chalk out a plan for the final attack.

A large Army under the leadership of Gopal Naicker and Keralavarma drove out the British army in Dindigul Rockfort and captured the explosives guns in the weapon warehouse. The British were not able to withstand the Gorilla war strategy. The army of GopalNaicker destroyed the Military equipment's in the Dindigul fort after strenuous efforts. The army of Tippu sultan under the leadership of GopalNaicker fought with the British army in Dindigul fort. The British who came to knew about the final phase of war counter attracted with canons around Coimbatore in 03.06.1800. Lieufinent cornel Ennas seiged Virupatchi with a large army in 12.10.1800. The rebellion broke out in Virupakshi and spread over most of Dindigul. Hence the rebellion remained centred to the Dindigul area. He attacked the surroundings, Chatrapatti and Nangoanchi till 14th. They sieged the British palace. The people of periyakottai actively involved in the war demanding their lives for the sake of Gopal Naicker. The fort of Periakotai the residence of GopalNayak was reconstructed¹⁶. Trees were field with across the roads for obstructing communications of THE British. After completing these preperations the rebels announced to the villages of their decision to send an expedition to Virupakshi, Chatrapatty and Palani¹⁷ and attacked the revenue establishments of the company.

The people belonging to Vellore fought along with the people of Periyakottai against the British in Chatrapatti. The people gathered in front of the Jamin Palace of Chatrapati and fought against the British and lost their lives. The people of Periyakottai, Chatrapati and Vellore fought against the British Army but were not able to withstand the modern war weapons of the British and lost their lives¹⁸. They fought valiantly till their last breath. The struggle was attended with bitter ferocity and immense slaughter. The rebels paid more dearly than the English as they were neither disciplined nor adequately armed, the rebels had a well concerted plan of action but it did not work up to expectations. Gopal Naicker escaped without being caught by the enemies. The palace of Virupatchi was crushed to ground by the furious enemies. Who were not able to trap Gopal

Naicker? The British could not find out Gopal Naicker after Virupatchi war, even after a rigorous search for a span of 2 months.

So they fired an amount of Rs.20, 000 for his head. GopalNaicker was betrayed of for the sake of money. The British imprisoned him on 04.05.1801 and he was tortured in the prison.In the year 1801, Gopal Naicker was hanged to death in Virupatchi Fort by the British. Gopal Naicker swore during his death that Millions of people would gather and will bring an end to the British Rule.A Manimandam for Gopal Naicker was constructed in Dindigul district at a cost of Rs.69 lakhs and inaugurated by The Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamilnadu Selvi J Jayalalithaa on 20th February 2013. Thenpandi Singam is a Tamil historical novel written by kalaignar M.Karunanidhi. The British army, under statten stayed at Dindigul fort from 1798 to 1859. Dindigul was under the rule of the British Until India got our Independence on 15 August 1947.

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