

# **TIRUNELVELI KAVALKARS: THEIR WARFARE ACTIVITIES AND PARTICIPATION IN POLIGAR REBELLION**

**Dr. C. Chellappandian**

*Assistant Professor, Department of History  
Devanga Arts College, Aruppukottai*

**Dr. M. Thirumalaichamy**

*Assistant Professor, Department of History  
Devanga Arts College, Aruppukottai*

## **Introduction**

The Kaval machine prevailed within the southern Tamil us of a on the eve of the British rule. This machine becomes an historical and hereditary one. The Kaval system existed from the time of the formation of village community itself within the Tirunleveli Province. This gadget was then known as Padai Kaval or Ur Kaval. At some point of the Vijayanagar rule, a number of Kaval rights had been bought because of the incapability to pay tribute to Nayak Governors. This Kaval device persevered till the center of the sixteenth Century. The advent of the Poligar, gadget dealt a extreme blow to the organization of Padai Kaval from which it never finally recovered. Below the Kaval gadget, Watch and Ward capabilities were discharged through the village Kavalkars who had been drawn generally from predatory tribes. The Kavalkars supplied safety to the citizens, their lifestyles and property and cattle and safeguarded the fields surrounding the village, especially in the cultivation season, besides the temple premises and its possessions. However, the Kavalars levied taxes on all assets to which this device became practical. The existence of the system changed into be a counted very a good deal worried with geographical accident and mutual compromise. The establishment of the British strength, coupled with their advanced hands and ammunitions, threatened the very existence of the Kaval system. The Madras government followed strict measures to relieve the Kavalkars from their military responsibilities because of the latter's involvement inside the Poligar rebellions.

## **Kaval System**

The two structures, poligari and Kaval, complemented every other and the Kaval duties have been common both to the Poligars and Kavalkars. The Poligars supplied nearby security even as the villages have been given protection with the aid of the Kavalkars. The Poligars independently accumulated the taxes for his or her protection obligations. on the other hand, the Kavalkars had been responsible both to the sircar Governors or to the Poligars, by means of whom they have been appointed to Kaval and series duties. at some stage in the times of the Nayaks and the Nawabs, plenty significance was given to the Kaval duties. The Kavalkars attained a special region within the sircar territory or revenue devices. In sircar territory of the Southern Tamil us of a, the Maravas have been a source of internal resistance to the sircar authority. To prevent any illegal activities following the predatory

nature of the Maravars, the sircar retailers like Amuldar and Amils changed the Maravas as Kavalkars.<sup>1</sup>

In Tirunelveli Province, there were twelve sales devices for the protection of a sircar territory, the Nayaks and the Nawabs favoured the Kavalkars. The Amils stored the Kavalkars to safeguard the people and to sustain the sales series. Kaval was no longer considered the fundamental duty of Poligars within the Poligar location and they assumed the Kaval obligation because the regulation and order worsened.<sup>2</sup> The rulers and village communities failed in their obligation due to internal commotions or outside issues. The Poligar received the help of Kavalkars who were the traditional guardians of regulation and order within the sircar village. Protection to life and belongings became their watch phrase. They were categorized below four heads, particularly, Arasu Kavalkars, Nadu Kavalkars, Desa Kavalkars and Sthala Kavalkars which literally intended, government watch and ward, district watch and ward, region watch and ward, the village watch and ward respectively.<sup>3</sup>

### Functions of the Kavalkar

The extensive functions of Kavalkars had been to look at and shield the homes in a village at night, to protect the travelers and merchants, to acquire information of suspicious characters and to ship reports to the authorities; but, in the fifth document of the English East India employer.<sup>4</sup> Affairs, it's miles observed: "where the impact of the Poligars predominated, the maximum skillful and skilled offenders have been become Kavalkars". The services of the Kavalkars had been rewarded with the aid of a rate referred to as Sthala Kaval which consisted of a part of the plants which they protected, or a vast monetary fee.<sup>5</sup>

It is recorded that positive tribes observed the profession of robbery from technology to generation. The members of those tribes have been favored for appointment as Kavalkars. If a robbery occurred in a locality, Kavalkars needed to hint the foot prints to understand the culprits. It became mounted that if the thief went out of the boundaries of the village, then it was the obligation of the Kavalkars of the subsequent village to comply with it up. The final village, to which the thief becomes surely traced, became made answerable for the stolen assets. The Kavalkars have been required to repair the stolen belongings to the owner. if they failed to do it, the Poligar pressured them to make precise for the loss to the extent of his approach and levied the rest upon the whole village.<sup>6</sup> it's far clear that the protection of assets and existence of the individual turned into the main obligation of Kavalkars and the collective duty of the village network.

In a certain village, the Kaval become divided into '*munni*' and '*nyal*'. The *munni* Kaval changed into a certain allowance given from the sircar revenue each from land and customs, now not much less than 5 percent and not extra than ten percent of the produce and it changed into enjoyed by the Poligars. The share, which fell at the lands, changed into gathered in a single *kist* on the harvest season. The Poligar sent his peons to each village with an order to the Patel and Karnam to pay the amount due to the chief. if they endeavoured to advantage time through excuses, the Poligar sent a number of his fans to devote thefts in the village and if that did no longer have the favored impact, he regularly carried off the Patel and Karnam, punished them and stored them in confinement, till they

paid up what turned into due and additionally fines as he chose to impose. The *nyal* Kaval changed into held only by using the inferior Poligars. It becomes an allowance in grain which was collected in November and December or at the time of harvest. In reality, The Kaval duties of the Kavalkars maintained by using the Poligars, improved the tax burden on the citizens of the *circar* villages.<sup>7</sup>

The services of Kavalkars had been terrific. Lord Nellaiappar Temple of Tirunelveli was cherished and honored with the aid of believers and worshippers all through the period and breadth of the Tirunelveli Province. Inside the path of their most hazardous and laborious journey, they have been exposed to the threats of bandits. The political vicissitudes underneath the Vijayanagar Rulers, the Nayaks, the Mughals, the Marathas and the Nawab of Carnatic further aggravated the situations. For the duration of the ones distressed instances, the Kavalkars rendered yeomen provider mainly inside the protect of sacred locations. With a spirit of willpower, the Kavalkars of without delay took care of the safety and comforts of the pilgrims. The Kavalkars retained manager of the precincts of the temple as well as the hills.<sup>8</sup>

Within the Tirunelveli Province, the Kaval machine changed into a fundamental protective company. The Nawabs of the Carnatic sought the Poligars to look after the regulation and order situation of their respective villages. The Poligars, in flip, depended upon the Kavalkars. The political turmoil inside the Carnatic vicinity provided extra momentum to the Kaval system. The sluggish decline of the authority of the Nawab rendered the Kaval machine very sturdy. The Kaval device is seemed as the south Indian counterpart of the "hue and cry" within the Anglo Saxon England.<sup>9</sup>

The developing electricity of the British, with their superior fingers and ammunitions, affected the prospects of the Kaval machine with passage of time. The dual administration of the British and the Nawab eroded the Kaval machine within the Southern Poligars and sircar areas in Tirunelveli. The Poligars of the southern location misplaced their right over tax collection because of the gradual ascendancy of the British. The British felt that intimidation changed into resorted to through the Poligars over the collection of Kaval responsibilities. The British were determined to take drastic measures in opposition to the Kaval system. The British felt that Kaval duties were a type of obnoxious taxes amassed by the Poligars with the help of Kavalkars.<sup>10</sup>

### **Sthala Kaval and Desha Kaval**

kinds of Kaval prices had been collected within the Tirunelveli Province viz., Sthala Kaval or Village Kaval and Desha Kaval or District Kaval. Sthala Kaval turned into a village police gadget. It was extensively everyday inside the Tirunelveli Province. This become prevailed with the status quo of villages themselves. In each village, the Kavalkars maintained peace and order under their control. Most of those Kavalkars belonged to the Marava network. The regions of Kavalkars were modified in step with the whims and fancies in their masters. If the village had any temple that was under the direct Kaval of the chiefs, their primary feature became to defend the grains, cattle and other home locations like roads and markets. The Kavalkars have been responsible if any theft befell in his vicinity

of operation. They were additionally held chargeable for the recuperation of the stolen belongings. In the event that they did no longer discover the robbery, the Kavalkars had to pay the damage amount. Kavalkars obtained a price known as 'Sthala Kaval.' Kavalkars were vested with judicial powers additionally. The petty disputes in his location had been settled via the Kavalkar.<sup>11</sup>

Desha Kaval was popularly referred to as District Kaval and it was popular from 1720 A.D. The Poligars, with the assistance of the Kavalkars, have been concerned inside the series of Desha Kaval. This Kaval device changed into a later development; but it yielded outstanding profit to the Kavalkars. It exceeded the peshcush paid by means of the local military chieftains to the authorities. In the call of protection, Kavalkars accrued considerable Kaval charges. Because of worry of the army chieftains, the villagers furnished all their demands. The chieftains obtained contributions like money, grain, ploughs, livestock etc. If the villagers failed to make well timed charge of Kaval price, they were put in confinement. The sircar regions were every now and then plundered by the Poligars, and the Kavalkars accepted this plunder because of their near connection with the Poligars. therefore the British suspected the Kavalkars. The Poligars stored inam lands without paying any obligation. Their atrocities multiplied due to the intermixture of sircar lands underneath their respective Pollams.<sup>12</sup>

In 1799, there had been 2000 villages in the Southern Poligar place. Among them, villages have been under unbiased Kavalkars and the relaxation of the villages came under the manipulate of the Poligars. The Kavalkars had the proper to acquire the Sthala Kaval and enormous amount changed into accordingly accumulated. Interfering in the sircar villages, the Poligars, received loads of take advantage of the Desha Kaval. Through receiving the costs via the Kavalkars, the Poligars led a life of pomp and delight. If the villagers not on time fee, they had been critically punished. The near contact among the Poligars and the Kavalkars affected the sircar revenue.<sup>13</sup>

### **Warfare Activities of Kavalkars**

Like Poligars, the Kavalkars of Southern Poligar location additionally indulged in abnormal struggle. They usually used bow and arrow, swords and lances. Amongst different weapons have been pikes or bamboo spears, iron spears eighteen to twenty feet long and dagger. Clay-pellets, organized by using blending the white of the egg with clay, served the motive of bullets. They used a unusual weapon a hundred and forty known as 'valaithadi' or boomerang. It appeared like a crescent fashioned weapon. It's one cease become heavy even as the other edge became sharp. It becomes made from a few tough grained timbers or of iron. It measured about twenty four inches alongside the outer curve and eighteen alongside the arc. A Kavalkar held it with the aid of the lighter quit and hurled it with extremely good force in opposition to the enemy. A whirling movement, imparted to the weapon, delivered it back to the spot from where it became thrown unless it were given stuck on its victim.<sup>14</sup>

In some occasions, the Kavalkars have been despatched via the sircar government to a hostile united states. The Kavalkars led the army, recommended the soldiers by using

announcing that because they all had to die some day, they should court a heroic demise dauntlessly within the leading edge of the warfare. The Kavalkars were experts in guerilla conflict also and that they were given well timed facts approximately the important forts and antagonistic motion of the enemies. The Poligars enlisted the assist of Kavalkars in their constant conflict in opposition to the sircar authority or sircar sales retailers and governors.

### **Participation of Kavalkars in Poligar Rebellion**

Inside the starting, the British had been reluctant to take stern measures against any of the Poligars who had cherished rebellious behavior. While the British bolstered their function, there regarded no other opportunity to punishing the Poligars, destroying their declare, and securing their lands and Pollams. The Madras government for this reason declared to the Poligars and Kavalkars of Tirunelveli and Kalakad area specifically that they'll be granted locations as reward for their obedient and passive conduct and they and their heirs and successors will be included by using the British inside the leisure in their rights and privileges.

Inside the course of Poligar insurrection of Tirunelveli, many Kavalkars of Kalakad and inhabitants of Tirunelveli participated via suppressive activities, the British overwhelmed many Kavalkars. As a matter of reality, the Kavalkars of Kalakad place took to the desperate reason of the rebels of Panjalamkurichi and the vagabond Dalavoy Pillai. At final, the British were equipped to provide pardon to all those who have been engaged within the Poligar revolt. The Collector of Tirunelveli, S.R. Lushington, demanded Kavalkars and other population of Kalakad at hand over the rebels and their supporters. He warned that individuals who gave asylum to the rebels might be punished severely. He also introduced that the government would reward 1000 puli chuckrams to people who passed over Dalavoy Pillai either useless or alive or gave facts approximately his hidden region.<sup>15</sup>

The Collector of Tirunelveli despatched a caution letter to the Kavalkars of Kalakad area. among them have been Erulappa Thevar of Nanguneri, Madasamy Thevar of Marugalkurichi, Periya Pitchai Thevar of Marugalkurichi, Chinna Pitchai Thevar, Cautakooty Thevar of Marugalkurichi, Veraperumal Thevar of Thennimalai, Veraperumal Thevar of Puttapalaypudur, Nambi Thalaivan, Seenirama Thalaivan and Chocka Thalaivan of Tirukkurangudi.

To threaten the Kavalkars of Tirunelveli Province, Lushington mentioned the fate of rebellious Poligars who have been by and large sponsored by means of Kavalkars of their rebellious sports. Lushington in his listing in brief narrated to the Kavalkars approximately the tragic stop of Poligars. The Poligar of Panjalamkurichi met his unhappy give up. Perumal Naick, the Poligar of Kadalgudi, became captured and put to loss of life. Lingamma Naick, the supporter of Kattabomman, fled far from his principalities. Annaje Naick, the Poligar of Kulathur, rebelled towards the British and sooner or later his Pollam become confiscated. As a result, Lushington asked the Kavalkars to forestall their unlawful activities and their reference to the family members and retailers of the deceased Poligars. The Collector urged the Kavalkars at hand over Dalavoy Pillai and other rebellious leaders who were hid inside the Kalakad area. similarly, the British strongly warned the Kavalkars that

no Kavalkar could disguise any rise up from the British. The British appointed Captain Hazart because the Commanding Officer of the three troops at Kalakad. He became asked to adjust the sports of Kavalkars and watch their movements with the rebels. He turned into given a free hand to deal with the revolt activities of Kavalkars and their ring leaders. He turned into freely allowed to punish the defaulters and capture the fingers of the rebels and thereby bringing them to obedience.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

The Southern Poligar vicinity became the penultimate vicinity of the Tamil country within the Eighteenth Century. The gathering of kaval obligations by Poligars and Kavalkars affected the revenue of the British. Because of dual management of the British and the Nawab, the Poligars involved themselves in unruly activities. The Nawab feared the army supremacy of the British and the British, in turn feared the felony authority of the Nawab. Further, the enterprise activities of the moneylenders affected the sales of the both the circar and British Authority. The British Authority asked the creditors and the navy commanders to take extreme motion towards all offenders. The British firmly believed that twin machine was the foundation purpose of all the evils. Lord Edward Clive, the Governor of Madras made Azim-ud-Daulah, the grandson of Muhammed Ali because the nominal Nawab of the Carnatic to sign the Carnatic Treaty in 1801. It placed a give up to the twin device which prevailed in Tirunelveli. Thus the British realised their ascendancy in Tirunelveli. The Treaty of 1801 added a brand new territorial quantity to the British and thereafter the British had been capable of set up a uniform system of administration within the Tamil country on the decline of the native strength.

## End Notes

1. Mahalingam, T.V., *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar*, Madras, 1969, p.138.
2. Tirunelveli Letter Book of the Committee of Assigned Revenue, 6 June 1783, Vol.5, letter No.4, pp.92-93.
3. Revenue Consultations, 1799, Vol.97, pp. 2243-2248.
4. Select Committee's Fifth Report on the Affairs of the East India Company, Vol.II, London, 28 July 1812, pp. 357-370.
5. Mahalingam, T.V, *op.cit.*, pp.137-139.
6. Srinivasachari, C.S., *Village Organisation at the Time of British Rule in Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1932, p.55.
7. Extracts from Old Bellary Records, p.8.
8. Sundararaja Iyengar, *Land Tenures in the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1916, pp.109-113.
9. Military Country Correspondence, 20 August 1799, Vol.49, pp.309- 313.
10. David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras, 1859- 1947*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, pp.17-18.
11. Military Country Correspondence, 12 June 1767, Vol.15, pp.137-140.

12. Sobhanan, B., '*The Kaval System – A Case Study*' in Commemoration Volume of Twenty-Eight Annual Conference of the Institute of Historical Studies, Tuticorin, 1991, pp.19-21.
13. Jetley, J., *Madura*, Madras, 1913, pp.161-162.
14. Thurston, E., *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, Madras, 1907, pp.555-558.
15. Papers Relating to the Poligar War, Tinnevely, 1916, pp.10-14.
16. Minute of the Board of Revenue, 5 August 1810, p.1432.