

Pudugai in its golden jubilee year



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The demand to declare Pudukkottai a separate district reverberated at the national level way back in 1962. Back in the day, Pudukkottai remained a division of Tiruchirapalli district and a parliamentary constituency as well. The then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, set up an exclusive committee to identify the backward regions across the country and implement development schemes for the regions. The committee, in its report, declared the eastern region of Uttarpradesh as backward. The report triggered hot discussions in Parliament then.

Participating in the discussion, Pudukkottai MP Umanath demanded that Pudukkottai be declared as a backward region. Nehru, however, remained silent on this demand, provoking Umanath to ask why Nehru remained silent on the Pudukkottai issue. “Is it because Pudukkottai is not located in his home state? What sins have the people of Pudukkottai committed?” Umanath asked.

Replying to these questions, Nehru said, “Pudukkottai is a division of Tiruchi, a well-developed district. So a region, part of a better-off district, cannot be declared as backward.”

Thereafter, the demand for making Pudukkottai district headquarters had been gaining traction as an important issue.

New district born

Paying heed to this demand, the Tamil Nadu government, way back in 1973, directed the Revenue Department to examine the favorable features for making Pudukkottai a separate district. After studying all favorable features, Pudukkottai was declared in the Assembly as the 15th district. The new district started functioning officially on January 19, 1974. The then Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, inaugurated the new district administration at Pudukkottai on the day. The function was presided over by Saddiq Pasha, a minister in the DMK cabinet. The first Collector of the new district was Ramadoss, IAS. Education Minister Nedunchezian released the souvenir on the occasion. Certain regions of Tiruchi district were handed over to the new Pudukkottai district by Anbil Dharmalingam and those of Thanjavur district by Mannai Narayanasamy. Aranthangi, Gandarvakottai and a part of Peravurani taluk from Thanjavur district were annexed to Pudukkottai. Moreover, Aembal and Irumbanadu from Ramanathapuram district, which had been annexed to Aranthangi, were also annexed to Pudukkottai district.

Natural fortress on the borders

Pudukkottai is one of the eight coastal districts in Tamil Nadu, endowed with the natural fortresses - Bay of Bengal in east and Piranmalai, a fortified hill, in southwest. It is bounded on the east by Kattathi and Kalirayanviduthi, on the west by Pallakurichi and on the north by Thethuvasalpatti. Pudukkottai is a textbook example of the five traditional Tamil classifications of landscape: The Kudumiyanmalai and Kumaranmalai regions belong to the Kurunji landscape; Kulathur and Tirumayam to Mullai; Pudukkottai and

Alangudi to Marutham and Aranthangi to Neithal. Though the later-day Tamil landscapes are not pigeonholed as Palai, Pudukkottai has the features of the Palai landscape too.

According to the 1971 census, when Pudukkottai district was carved out, its population was 9,47,351. It had the third least population density next to Dharmapuri and The Nilgiris. As per the 2011 census, the district had a population of 16,18,345; this figure is predicted to touch 18 lakh around 2024.

Puduvai, Pudugai and Pudukkottai

People used to call the region located between Vellaru and Tirumayam 'Puduvai'. Navalar Ma.Vu. Ma Seidhu Muhammed Aliyar, who had written a congratulatory poem to the minor literary text 'Kaatubhaava Sahib Kaaranakummi' composed by Arulvaaki Abdul Kathiru, had written the following line: "Tiruputhu Vaipathi Vaaranangkottu Dhivakaranae" meaning "O Sun, who sets right the splendid Puduvai town."

Kaviyogi Suddhananta Bharati was living incognito in Tirumayam during the Freedom Struggle. In his book 'Thamizhar Unarchi' (Tamilians' Emotion), he had called the princely state of Pudukkottai 'Thani Tamizharasu' (Separate Tamil government) and termed Pudukkottai as 'Puduvai' in several contexts in the book. The Madras University lexicon records three towns – Puducherry, Villiputtur and Pudukkottai – which are called 'Puduvai.' But there are several people who call Pudukkottai 'Pudugai', making all think that Pudugai is derived from Pudukkottai. But contrary to the belief, Pudugai is the old name of this region. Pudukkottai is just a later-day nomenclature.

Over 10 scholars have written the history of Pudukkottai. In the book written by K. R. Venkatarama Iyer, Pudugai is explained as meaning the silted sand ('vandal' in Tamil). The Pudukkottai region has seven types of soil, namely, pudugai, karambai, karisal, seval, manal (sand), saralai and kalar. The Pudugai landscape later was called 'Sethuseemai', 'Pallavarayan Seemai' and Thondaiman Seemai and

over the years, turned into Pudukkottai. It is better to speculate that as the fortress was built on the soil of pudugai, the region was called 'Pudugaikkottai' which had over the years evolved into 'Pudukkottai' rather than to think that since a new fort was built, the region was called 'Pudukkottai' (New Fort).

In the olden days Pudukkottai was called Pudugai and Pudevai. Similarly, Ramanathapuram on the southern border was nicknamed Mugavai, Madurai was called Marudhai, Thanjavur on the northern border was shortened to Thanjai and Aranthangi on the eastern border to Aranthai.

Pudugai people's expectations

Today's Pudukkottai's eastern region is prosperous; the southwestern region is teeming with historical information and the northwestern part is backward in terms of livelihood resources. The people of the district have long been demanding the implementation of the scheme on linking the Cauvery and the Kuntaaru. Their general demand is to restore the lost parliamentary constituency status to Pudukkottai. At a time when the district is passing through its golden jubilee year, will its people's dreams and demands be fulfilled?

Translated by V Mariappan.