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Recipient of the French Chevalier: Dubassi Pedro Kanakaraya Mudaliar of French India, 1716 - 1746

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Introduction

Puducherry, a small fishing village unknown to the world, was created as a window into French Culture by the advent of the French. The very word Pondicherry is the corrupted nomenclature of the usage *Pudicherry*, which means a new hamlet.² The hamlet began its occupation primarily as the export and import of raw products available in and around. The French installed a *loge* left by the Dutch, and the first factory in Pondicherry was established by the French East India Company.³ As the company developed, the administration also grew, and the French ruler appointed a Governor to administer the hamlet, which was transformed by the sweat of the brow through the Governor Francois Martin's prudent administration. The administrator communicated in his own tongue, which the locals did not understand, so the French administrator appointed a translator or interpreter called a Dubash. From Thanappa Mudaliar to Anandaranga Pillai, the growing town of Pondicherry was feasible to administer by these Dubashies, as mentioned by Rev. J. Fredrick Price. The long-term recipient of the Chevalier was Kanakaraya Mudaliar. This article highlights Kanakaraya's contributions to the socio-economic development of Pondicherry and his achievement of the highest award from the French.

Kanakaraya Mudaliar's birth

He was born in the year 1696. Nothing much is known about his birth, as the annals of Pondicherry don't mention his childhood. His grandfather Thanappa Mudaliar (Lazar de Motto)

was the first chief dubash of the French East India Company. The French retained Thanappa as their consultant on trade and commerce. He was the one to fix the prices of all commodities available to the French in Pondicherry. After his demise, Kanakaraya's father and the son of Thanappa Mudaliary, Andre Muthappa Mudaliar, discharged the duties from 1699, and the post was taken up by Nainiappa Mudaliar in 1708. After Nainiappa, Kanakaraya Mudaliar, who was baptised as a Christian, took the name Pedro. His service began in 1716 and ended in 1743, which proves that he was the long-standing Dubash during the French period.⁵

The Duties of the Dubash

The Dubash had a variety of duties to perform for the Governor and for the people of Pondicherry, such as:

1. Translation into French of letters in the Indian language.
2. Translation of French letters into Indian Languages and respond to the letter thereon.
- 3 Interpretation at the conversation between the French Officials and the Indians.
4. Assistance to the Company in the purchase of goods such as piece goods, pepper, cardamom, and in the sale of imported foreign goods. In this work, he was entitled to receive a commission.
5. Benefit of a commission of half a rupee per thousand on the rupees prepared by the Thangasali or Mint of Pudhucheri.
6. Collection of land lease revenue from the cultivators of all the lands in French possessions (Fermier general in French). Remittance of the same into the Company's Treasury.
7. Head of the Tamil Community.
8. Assistance to the Judges of the Choultry Tribunal on questions touching the manners and customs of the Tamil people.
9. Reporting to the Governor all the news about the town regarding trade and security.

The word *Dubassi* is derived from Sanskrit, which means "a person who knows two languages." They were taken into service as they know the languages of French and Tamil. They were given

the name Dubassi, but in Tamil, they were called Mudaliar, which means first in all, and were treated as Head of the Community. This was not a caste title and was called the Mudaliar profession.⁷

Kanakaraya Mudaliar's appointment as Chief Dubash

The post of Dubash was essential to the French officials, as the administration of the French depended on the person who held the post, who was regarded as the developer and assistant of commerce in Pondicherry. The most challenging task of the dubash was fixing commodity prices to the satisfaction of both the company and the merchants. Andre Muthappa Mudaliar, the successor and son of Thanappa Mudaliar, was appointed Dubash, and he was succeeded by Nainiappa Pillai in 1715. But Nainiappa Pillai had to face allegations and was imprisoned on 19th February 1716. Kanakaraya Mudaliar was appointed to the post as the Jesuits influenced him to appoint a Christian as Dubash, and Kanakaraya was baptised with the name Pedro. The French officials encouraged him to discharge his duties in a trustworthy manner. But the Superior Council of Pondicherry desired to remove Kanakarayar from the post as the case of Nainiappa Pillai in France peaks at high velocity. The new Governor was expected to land in Pondicherry shortly, and he would decide on the continuity of the Kanakaraya post. The new Governor was Mons. Provestiere. Meanwhile, it was essential that the task of collecting the commodities of four ships shortly to set sail from Pondicherry to France required a dubash. So Kanakaraya was allowed to continue in the post.

Kanakaraya Mudaliar was removed from the post of dubash from 1618 to 1624, as this post was held by Guruvappa Pillai, who went to France and embraced Christianity. Firstly, there was some misunderstanding between the Governor and Kanakarayar, and so he was removed from the post. Secondly, the lack of knowledge of Tamil, as well as the lack of funds and their unfamiliarity with the well-established customs and practices of the natives, prompted the French officials to reappoint Kanakarayar to that post. The reappointment was followed by a new policy that Dubash was forbidden from directly involving himself in the supply of

merchandise to the French company in the Seventeenth century, but this was relaxed in the later days of Kanakaraya, as he had entered into textile production and trade in the Eighteenth century.

Kanakaraya Mudaliar and his involvement in producing Textiles

The French people were very prone to purchasing Guinea cloth, the main variety manufactured in the 17th century. This cloth had the names blue guinee, demi guinee, and indigo-dyed *cloth*. The French demand for the fabric between 1720 and 1730, under patronage, extended to many individuals who wanted to produce it. Pedro Kanakaraya was one such who produced cloth. He signed contracts with the French. The local weavers supported the demand and delivered the required goods within six or eight weeks. From the records, it appears that the French purchased eleven varieties of textiles produced in Pondicherry. Many bales of cloth were exported, and the Superior Council of Pondicherry, dated 8th August 1725, made deliberations for producing the same.¹⁰ The French Company requested to supply *white cloth* and *handkerchiefs* of various sizes, as there was a great demand. Kanakaraya Mudaliar lent money to the French company, and in 1743, the French official records mentioned by Cornet stated that 3200 fanams were due. He had also advanced money to the bleachers in Pondicherry, and in some cases, he made raw materials such as rice available, which were required to make *conjee* for starching the cloth. Kanakaraya Mudaliar, together with the assistance of Sunku Rama Chetti, who was involved in exports, invested nearly 401 pagodas, four fanams, and 32 kasus in their goods.¹¹ This was the principal amount that the Dubash gave to the French company. The Superior Council ordered the early settlement of their accounts and thereby the principal along with the interest amount of 200 *pagodas*, 14 *fanams* and 43 *kasus* were given by which Kanakarayar achieved 50% of profit from the French company, a considerable amount by a local in Pondicherry.¹²

A table may be generated as proof that the supply of textiles by Pedro Kanakaraya Mudaliar and the amount that was received from 1736 C.E to 1737 C.E

TEXTILES SUPPLIED BY DUBASH PEDRO KANAKARAYA MUDALIAR (1736 C.E -- 1737 C.E)¹³					
Year	Textile Variety	Bales	No.of Conjons	Price Rate	Total Amount
				(Amount in Pagodas fanams and Kasus)	
1736	Guinees	739	18	1-13-0	1140-1-32
	Guinees	498	24	1-20-0	913-0-00
1737	Guinees	1641	18	1-13-0	2529-21-0
	Guinees	1449	24	1-20-0	2656-12-0

Kanakaraya Mudaliar as Revenue Collector and other special taxes

The French found the services rendered by the Dubash trustworthy, so they entrusted the collection of land revenue and taxes to the Dubash. Villages received from Dost Ali Khan, the Nawab of Carnatic, such as Abishekapakkam, Odiampet, Thirukanchi, Kottakuppam, and Theduvanattan by the Governor for his great courageous deeds¹⁴. The jagir was given to the Dubash, and the annual revenue of 2100 *pagodas* was collected. The records prove that 1100, 1600, 1000, 400, and 500 varahans were collected, and that these villages were under him until the 2nd of November 1743.¹⁵ He collected the salt tax, particularly in the Vanjiyur coastal area, which had large saltpans.¹⁶ Cloth tax was collected, Professional tax from *Komatti Chettis* and *Gujaratis* who had settled in Pondicherry owing to the incursions of the Marathas was collected¹⁷. Those merchants who failed to pay their tax amounts were imprisoned and forced

to pay the same amount with a fixed fine. The financial transactions and contracts were taken seriously by the dubash, and all collections were handled under his purview. The Superior Council authorised Kanakarayar, who played a key role in the economic affairs of the French Company, to collect the tax according to the status and ability to pay, and the Dubash also rendered his grateful services in fortifying the town of Pondicherry.

First mint for rupees in Pondicherry by the Dubash

Pondicherry had a shortage of currency for manufacturers and trade; its absence caused constant trouble in transactions. To put an end to Kanakaraya Mudaliar, who had known a close friend of Imam Sahib, the Nawab of Arcot, by the influence secured for the French, the remission of half the charge that was levied on the minting of rupees by the French at the Nawab's mint at Alambarai during December 1732. Arcot rupees were not readily available to the French because their trade rivals, the British, for some reason, wantonly denied them a trade monopoly. But the Dubash intervened and made agreements between the Superior Council of Pondicherry and the Nawab of Arcot for a farman authorising the coinage of rupees in Pondicherry. A head dress of honour was sent by Nawab Dost Ali Khan from Alambarai on 10th September 1736, and it was brought by Kanakaraya Mudaliar.¹⁸

The Dubash's suggestion to conduct minting at Alambarai was taken into consideration, and the French Governor of Pondicherry entrusted the affairs to three individuals, with three shares each: Sunku Seshachala Chetti, Balu Chetti, and Venkanna Chetti, and one-third of the share was given to Kanakaraya Mudaliar¹⁹. He also received the allowance amount due to him. The records prove that an allowance of rupees sixteen for every one hundred coins apportioned to him as chief dubash, besides half a rupee for every one hundred coins towards his share invested in the mint. The financial advantage of Kanakaraya Mudaliar took him as high as all the locals felt that he was next to the Governor of Pondicherry. The minting of coins in Pondicherry greatly facilitated trade, and the memorable role played by the dubash was

recognised, and a shower of honour came from the King of France as he was conferred the highest civilian award called *Chevalier*.²⁰

Recipient of Chevalier

Kanakaraya Mudaliar, the Chief Dubash, played a dominant role in the French-developed Pondicherry—Tamil Hindu society, which was deeply divided into two large divisions, *Idangai* and *Valangai*. There was a continuous clash between these divisions, which had to be settled by the Chief Dubash, as the case of right- and left-hand castes that prevailed. In 1717 C.E., on January 12th, on the eve of the Pongal festival, a conflict broke out between the castes as the headmen of the castes were ready to murder each other. Kanakaraya Mudaliar settled the case at the age of twenty as the Superior Council ordered that the headmen of the castes had to pay a fine of 3000 pagodas to the French company secretary, which proved their inability. The intervention of the dubash with the Superior Council agreed that 1000 pagodas can be paid immediately, and the balance of 2000 pagodas to be paid within thirty days²¹.

Famine was prevalent in Pondicherry during 1738-39. The washermen, appointed to wash the export cloth, found it difficult because there was no water, and no work could be accomplished. The loan received from the French company cannot be repaid. The dubash Kanagaraya Mudaliar played an essential role in waiving the loan, as he was the spokesperson who proved that locals suffered from the famine and that the French company should consider waiving the loan.²²

There arose a dispute among the Christians of Pondicherry, which the dubash resolved. The problem was between the low-caste Christians and the high-caste. The priest was to serve the Mass and prayers, and the Communion was to be given separately, as a wall stood between them. The priest was not supportive of this kind of disunity among the Christians and decided that the wall should be removed immediately. Equality in religion was necessary, as he insisted. The high caste did not accept this change, and they were violent and vehemently opposed to

the priest act, together with the wife of Asrappa Mudaliar, the sister's son of Kanakarayar, and the brother-in-law, Jagnivasa Mudaliar, of Kanakarayar. The dubash intervened and consoled the Christians, went to meet the priest and made him agree that the status quo be maintained, thereby settling the problem without further trifles²³.

Kanakaraya Mudaliar, the dubash known for his unique symbol of unity in the caste ridden society, can be witnessed that when a church was constructed by him in Reddiarpalyam in the name of his son Andre as St. Andrew's Church, he had invited all the friends of various religions on 30th November 1745 to participate in the celebrations. He arranged meals for the *Vellalars* in the houses of *Agambadiyars*, and other castes also joined the festivity without any problem.²⁴

The residents or quarters of houses for rent were not given to the Muslims by the Hindus, nor were they given to the Christians by the Muslims. This was eradicated by the Dubash, who constructed separate quarters of the town and houses in Pondicherry. A rent of 150 pagodas was offered, and every house between the Hindus and the Christians was given to the Muslims. Husain Tahir, the head of the Muslim community, was pleased by the activities of the dubash, who offered him a palanquin for his means of transport in the local area.²⁵

The Kanakaraya Mudaliar administration and the trustworthy made the French officials, especially the Governor of Pondicherry, together with the French Company, grant the highest French civilian award, Chevalier. This was arranged on 30th October 1737 to present a medal bearing the king's image and a gold chain as a reward for his assistance in procuring the charter to mint coins in Pondicherry. He was honoured in the open council, and that was witnessed by his successor, the diarist, Anandaranga Pillai.²⁶

Conclusion

Kanakaraya Mudaliar, the Chief Dubash, the recipient of the French Chevalier, together with the French administrators involved in the Political, Social, Economic and Religious development of

Pondicherry. He was not simply a merchant or trader like others. He was active and connected with weavers, artisans, and officials. He was a diabetic patient, and Europeans thought that he would not survive after a severe fall in 1737 and even asked the diarist, Anandaranga Pillai, to be his successor. But nature brought him back to the post. For the next full decade, he became involved in the fortification of the town, the economic and financial transactions, the settlement of societal disputes, and the unification among the religions. This proves that Pedro Kanakaraya Mudaliar should not be forgotten. A special mention to conclude is that Kanakaraya Mudaliar was the instrument to negotiate the purchase of Kariakal and the surrounding area from the King of Tanjore. The King of Tanjore sent three delegates to Pondicherry to open negotiations with Governor Dumas in May 1738. The King of Tanjore was ready to sell the place of Karaikal and its five villages, together with the fortress of Kirchangery, for a sum of 40000 chakrams or 25000 pagodas. The mediator was Kanakarayar, who meticulously handled the matter with a letter on Palmyra leaf on 3rd August 1738, by which the French obtained Karaikal and the foremost of Karukalacheri, together with five villages, one of which was *Thirumalairayan pattinam*²⁷. Thus, his body buried in the cemetery symbolises that the seed of unity and tranquillity was sown, and his soul continues to serve as the guiding spirit towards the development of Pondicherry.

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7. A.Martineau, Correspondance da Conseil Supérieur de Pondichéry avec ie., Conseil de Chandernagor Vols -3 Pondicherry 1915-27, pp.63-67.

8. Anandaranga Pillai Diary, Vol.IV, pp.247-253. See also H.Closet d'Errey, L'Histoire de l'Inde Française, Pondicherry,1918, pp. 62-65. Jesuits are the priests who belong to the Congregation of the Society of Jesus, Compagnie de Jesus. The famous religious order founded at Paris in 1534 by Saint Ignatius Loyola and approved in 1540 by the Bull of Pope Paul III. Steel frame order, highly hierarchial compelling in France. Under King Louis XIV, it exercised considerable influence. Expelled from Portugal in 1759 and from France in 1762. They were very active in Puduchery from the days of Francois Martin and have constructed the St.Paul's Church, which the locals call Samba Koil.
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12. Anandaranga Pillai Diary, Vol.VII, pp.48-50 & p.188. One pagoda was equivalent to 3.5 rupees.Its Tamil name is Varahan. The gold pagoda was worth about 9 shillings sterling. 480 kasu is equal to 1 rupee, 60 kasu is equal to 1 fanam (silver coin), eight fanam is equal to 1 rupee, and 24 fanam is equal to 1 pagoda. There was one chakram, which was equal to a gold coin in circulation in South India, worth more than half a pagoda. 500 Parangipettai chakrams were worth 1000 rupees in March 1748.
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- 15 Ibid. pp.13-16.
- 16.Ibid., see also Alalasundaram. R., Op.cit., pp.308-329.
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18. Anandaranga Pillai Diary, Vol.I, pp.67-68 also Revue Historique de Pondichery, Vol-XVIII 1995, Societe de l'Histoire de Pondicherry. See also Proces Verbaux, pp.22-23 & 191. According to sources, 20,000 rupees were spent on the farman, as mentioned in the diary of Anandaranga Pillai.
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