

M.A. History: Fourth Semester.
Title of the Paper: **The Eighteenth Century of Indian History**
HS-504

Dr. Safoora Razeq

**THE SOUTH INDIAN STATE AND THE CREATION OF MUSLIM
COMMUNITY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

India was never fully 'Islamised', it was the rise of the first Muslim rule state in the region, that is the nawabi of Arcot (also known as the Carnatic), which formally defined the community of Muslims in the region. The earliest member of the nawabi of Arcot belonged to an elite population of Dakhini trading and service people popularly known as the Navaiyats. A section of the most powerful members of this group were those who had held high posts under the Sultans of Bijapur and the other Deccani Muslim states. It was when these domains came under the Mughal rule in the seventeenth century that many of the Dakhani nobles became part of the imperial service.

The Navaiyats was one such family, who took to the service of the Mughal state, when the whole of the Tamil country (the Payanghst Lower Carnatic that is the region below the Ghats' from Nellore to Kanniyakumari) was declared a subah or province of the Mughal empire. As Susan Bayly would argue, in theory the new subah was subject to the adjacent Mughal province of Hyderabad which had been annexed after the conquest of Golkonda in the 1680s. It was in 1704 that Saadatullah Khan's brother had been named qiladar (fortress commander) of Vellore and his nephew Baqir Ali Khan succeeded him to the post in 1716. Saadatullah was no new to the region when he was made the Subahdar in 1710. It is important to note that Saadatullah Khan and his successors, like the other Mughal Subahdars made the best of the opportunities which came their way in the early decades of the eighteenth century; declaring themselves to be independent dynastic rulers within the Mughal territories. It was this process of hard-fought state formation which gave rise to the new regional powers of the eighteenth century, construction of the Mughal 'successor' states.

When Saadatullah Khan took the reign in his hands he and his kinsmen intermarried with the region's other powerful Navaiyats settler clans and this strongly knitted family ties became the cornerstone of the Navaiyat rule for the next 40 years. It was from 1720 that Saadatullah set on his goal by extending the existing citadels of Vellore and Gingi by building strong economic base around them. New groups of artisans, traders and military men made their ways to the fort-town. He also recruited large number of Pathan mercenaries from north India and the Deccan. New business centres or gunjs came up in Saadatnagar (1714), Fattahnagar(1715) and Saadatpattam(1718). As the Navaiyat were vested with the prestigious Mughal title 'nawab', they formed the seat of their power at Arcot.

As it was the tradition of the Indo-Islamic world, the Navaiyats were expected to set up a true dynastic rule through the process of its own Islamic court culture. It was initially tough for the Navaiyats but slowly and gradually they were successful in attracting poets, scholars and Sufis to their new capital, it was largely because the other centres were failing to provide patronage to them. Most of Saadatullah Khan's learned and holy men came from north Delhi as it was under the shadow of factional conflicts, which broke after the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707. As there was an influx of learned men from Deccan and north India to the Navaiyat's new nawabi, most of them settled in the citadel town of Vellore. It was in 1725, that the Bijapuri Qadiri Sufi Sayid Shah Abdul Lateef(1656-1736) came to settle in Vellore and built his Khanaqah (hospice) there. In course of time it became the most celebrated of the south Indian Sufi institutions, known as Hazat Makan of Vellore.

Arcot in the early eighteenth century, became the centre of learning too, in 1722, Saadatullah Khan invited a Punjabi Hindu named Jaswant Rai to compose a Persian chronicle on the rise of Navaiyat power in the Carnatic., Muhammad Ali Walahjah asked his court literati to compose Anwar-nama. In 1769, the Sayeed-nama was written on the style of Firdausi's Shahnama and Mughal master piece *Akbarnama*, in praise of the reigns of the Navaiyat rulers. Both Vellore and Arcot saw the rise of many princely residences, mosques, dargahs, family tombs and huge artefacts. It was in this period that the capital acquired the nickname '*Shahjahanabad the small*', it also reflected how the successor states worked within the greater Mughal sentiments and memories to build the legitimacy for themselves.

In Carnatic the successor of Saadatullah Khan Dost Ali Khan was killed in 1740 in a battle against the Maratha invasion. On his death his son was forced to abandon his 'open and defenceless' seat at 'Shahjahanabad the small', when he was forced to take refuge in Vellore he was murdered there in 1742 by another Navaiyat notable- his cousin and brother –in-law, the Qiladar of Vellore. In 1743, Nizam-ul Mulk Asaf Jung marched into Arcot with a force of 280,000 men; this made the Marathas evacuate all their positions in Carnatic. It was he who appointed the new Subahdar-nawab of Arcot. In 1744, Anwaruddin Khan was made the nawab of Arcot.

Anwaruddin Khan and his successors took the reign of Arcot and ruled as the Walajahs. It was under them that another influx of servicemen came to the Tamil country. This new influx of Urdu-speaking elite included Muslim jurists, mystics and literary men as well as soldiers and government officials or bureaucrats. Among them many of them were north Indian qasbah gentry like the Walajahs themselves. As Susan Bayly would like to argue that the nawabs commander in chief, Muhammad Najib was a part of the new influx of migrant from north India. This key military figure is remembered as an accomplished sufi poet and scholar as well as a soldier. It is important to note that Muhammad Najib came from the family of eminent thirteenth century Chishti saint Shaikh Hamidu'din who had his khanqah at Naguar in Rajasthan. It was Muhammad Najib Khan and his successors who established the leading sufi institutions. Elite Muslim literati like the sufis of Hazrat Makan also formed part of the military service of the new nawabi. Bayly further argues that at this time Muslim sufis also provided the military services to the new nawabis of the period.

During the reign of Anwaruddin Khan, the development of the Muslim political tradition in the Carnatic changed. It was the Anglo- French war of 1744-48 which brought a massive influx of European troops to the Carnatic. The British and the French were made to hold a balance of military power in the region, so it became evident for the new nawabi to establish their presence in Madras. This was also important as a sizeable Muslim population in the colonial port city consisted of Pathan military and trading people, Labbais and Maraikkayars from southern Tamilnad acting as agents for the East India Company, weavers and other artisans from the Deccan and the northern Tamil districts. It is because of this reason that much of Anwaruddin Khan's religious patronage was focused on Madas: the Masjid –e-Anwari which he

built in the mid-1740's served as the city's congregational mosque until 1847. His son also focused on pleasing the Muslim commercial class and the artisan population of Madras by building the graceful Mahfuz Khan Bag masjid in the trading quarter of 'Blacktown' (now Georgetown).

In 1749 Anwarduudin Khan died at the fort of Ambur fighting against the last of the of the Navaiyati military men, Shamsuddaula Hussain Dost popularly known as Chanda Sahib. He was a great warrior in the political history of Tamilnad. Robert Orme argued that he was 'the ablest soldier that had of late years appeared in the Carnatic, in 1736 he used his 15,000 strong army to take control of the great rock fortress at Trichy. Three years after his victory at Ambur he was defeated at Trichy by a joint force of Company sepoy and troops serving Muhammad Ali, the son of Anwaruddin Khan and his new found ally the Maratha raja of Tanjore. Though Muhammad Ali and his successors ruled for next forty –six years, his descendents became dependence on the British arms and finance soon began to rob the nawbs as independent sovereign lords. The domain was transformed into a semi-dependent client of the colonial power long before the state was formally absorbed into the Madras Presidency in 1855.

Like most of the Mughal 'successor' states, the Carnatic remained a Mughal province throughout the eighteenth century. It is true that imperial rule became little more than a fiction in this period but even so the attempt to create an independent dynastic state within these provincial domains could still be perceived as an act of sedition and the nawabs as usurpers in rebellion against their legitimate Mughal overlords. It was difficult for the nawabs of Carnatic to create a tradition of Islamic kingship since the south had so little direct experience of Muslim rule and hence Carnatic could claim only the most remote succession to the Mughals. Susan Bayly points out how the rival powers in south as in the north in the eighteenth century bore two important characteristics in common. First, as the preceding account of Fitna and political conflict suggests they were all highly militarized societies. The main prerequisite for the new eighteenth-century regimes was an expensively equipped European style army. Since no aspiring rulers could survive without efficient recruiting techniques and control of enough revenue to finance such a force. Secondly, the new state-builders were assiduous in carrying out acts of religious patronage. In both north and south India, displays of conspicuous piety were as important to the

process of political consolidation as the formation of armies and the creation of an effective state revenue apparatus.

Both the Navaiyats and the Walahjas sought to create a style of munificence which had much in common with the court culture of the other former Mughal domains. Here the rulers lavish spending is to be equated with the piety and moral worth. By the beginning of the eighteenth century the Rock fort sites were thought of as part of a single interconnecting cluster of holy places. Like other well known Tamil shrines and temples, each was a popular pilgrimage site in its own right and was known and venerated widely in south India. At the same time though almost all such south Indian sites-dargahs, great temples, shrines of lesser blood-taking power deities and their associated cult objects and symbolic tokens-were perceived as forming part of a localized sacred landscape with each of the individual sites taking on enhanced power and prestige from its bonds and legendary interactions with all the others.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the Trichy Rock had come to be identified as part of a network which had been built up around the cults of the town's two most famous sacred personages- the lord of the Srirangam temple(Lord Vishnu as Sri Ranganathaswami) and the Trichy pir Nathar Wali. During this time the Srirangam shrine and the Nathar Wali dargah were closely related, it was a symbolic of the pre-colonial society. Their devotional traditions were full of shared motifs and legends and their chronicles and shrines histories portrayed the two beings as counterparts or divine partners. There were dozens of smaller temples and pir cult shrines around Trichy which had been drawn into this same web of affiliation and interaction. Thus in the formation and in sustenance of the south Indian state and the creation of Muslim community in the eighteenth century, we see the birth of syncretism, as part of the emerging culture of the pre-colonial Carnatic society, where sites as those of the dargahs, great temples, shrines of lesser deities and their associated pir cult were fast becoming objects and symbolic tokens of a localized sacred landscape, which bonds the diversified legendary by its interactions with all the others.

