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Urban development in Pondicherry under French administration

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Abstract--The urban development in Pondicherry began with the outburst of war in 1676 A.D between Sher Khan Lodi and Nazir Muhammed. In the meanwhile Martin applied to his friend Sher Khan Lodi to give permission to entertain some native soldiers for the purposes of defence. Sher Khan not only assented to, but also made over to him three hundred of his own men. Martin entertained these men as soldiers, and made the settle down within his domain. Under the protection of Francois Martin, new villages like the Fishermen's village, Weavers' village, Textile painters' village, Coral polishers' village sprang up. Houses in the native area were built wall to wall with open space only at the rear. The pattern of houses were such as to afford a remarkable solution to the problem posed by the hot humid climate. The houses were built side by side in a row which protected the western and eastern sides of the house from direct sun leaving the two other sides (on the south and north) with small openings exposed to a large street that served as a wind funnel. A more orderly appearance was sought to be added to the town through building regulations viz., the front line of the building was required to follow the street alignment without encroaching upon the road, the height of buildings were not allowed to exceed beyond two storeys. Francois Martin, the founder of modern Pondicherry, has left an interesting account of the road journey he undertook in 1681 A.D. from Pondicherry to Surat.

Keywords-- urban, transformation, occupation, construction, administration, hospitals, manufacture and transportation.

Introduction

Historically, Pondicherry linked with the ancient “*Poduke*” stands immortalised by the ‘*Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*’ as a treaty port attracting to its shore traders from distant lands. Jouveau Dubreuil believes that Ozhukarai was the real town and Puthuvai was only its ‘fauxbourg’ or suburb. At the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, Ozhukarai limit seems to have extended up to the settlement of fishermen along the sea-shore. The ruins of the Danish loge within an enclosure, an age-old temple dedicated to Lord Shiva (the original Vedapureeswarar temple), a trade oriented agglomeration in the neighbourhood, the seventeenth century temple of Pillayar (the Manakula Vinayagar temple) another temple and two mosques constituted the chief landmarks of Pondicherry.

Urban Development

The first phase of transformation of Pondicherry by way of urban development began with the outburst of war in 1676 A.D between Sher Khan Lodi and Nazir Muhammed. As a measure of protection against the ill-effects of war, a sort of bastion was added to the loge on the north in 1676 A.D. In the meanwhile Martin applied to his friend Sher Khan Lodi to give permission to entertain some native soldiers for the purposes of defence. Sher Khan not only assented to, but also made over to him three hundred of his own men. Martin entertained these men as soldiers, and made the settle down within his domain.¹ He gave each a piece of land and encouraged them to build houses and employ themselves profitably in the manufacture of tissue and other articles for export. Under the protection of Francois Martin, new villages like the Fishermen’s village, Weavers’ village, Textile painters’ village, Coral polishers’ villages etc. sprang up.

After prolonged negotiations Francois Martin secured the permission to fortify Pondicherry on payment of 5,000 *chakras* to the court of Gingee. A fort was built about 122 metres offshore in a form of an irregular rectangle, one side broader than the other with four circular towers. It was called ‘Fort Barlong.’² Around it came up some nice single storied houses all along the shore. According to an old map, there were fourteen houses in a row. The houses of natives made of mud walls supported by wood stood scattered without orderliness and proper alignment from East to West forming a sort of street leading to the market. On the road side petty shops and way farmers sold tobacco, pipes, sugar, onion and other trifles. A market was held on Tuesdays when more than ten thousand people gathered and brought various collections. The town had grown so much by 1683 A.D that of all places in India where the French had settled. Pondicherry was the most advanced and the most prominent. During the Dutch occupation from 1693 A.D to 1699 A.D, the church of the Jesuits was demolished. They repaired the breaches in the fort and raised a kind of a platform around it, to improve its impregnability so as to cope up with possible attacks by enemies. A fence was put up around the natives town. It was reinforced with six redoubts, each with a canon. After the restitution of Pondicherry to the French in October 1699 A.D greater attention was paid to the defence works.³

As per the letters patent signed by Louis-XIV in February 1701 the Superior Council of the Indies, so far located in Surat, and was transferred to Pondicherry

which was made the seat of the Director or Governor General with supreme authority over all the other French factories in India. Almost immediately afterwards Martin was appointed as The President of the Superior Council and Director General of French Affairs in India.⁴ On arriving at his destination, Martin commenced the work of improvement, he laid out a plan for a large town, the erection of which he soon commenced. In little more than a year, a hundred new houses had been erected, and the place presented such an improved appearance. By the same course of gentleness and straight forward dealing which he had formerly followed, he attracted them (the natives) in great numbers to the settlement, so much on his death, in 1706 A.D, the native town was reckoned to contain nearly forty thousand inhabitants.⁵

The first successors of Martin, M.M. Dulivier and Hebert seem to have contributed little to the growth of the town. However, under Lenoir and Dumas, the town developed fast. Orders were received from France to maintain the alignments of streets and ensure the beauty of the town. All the streets were clearly demarcated, running straight and cutting each other at right angles. Streets were lined with trees. Great attention was paid to the marking of construction plots whenever permission was sought by the public. Especially under the initiative of Lenoir houses were constructed in the town with bricks and tiled roof. The rich settlers were asked to construct two storeyed houses. Pondicherry had at that time many lofty and beautiful houses the beauty of which could be seen no where else.

In 1728 A.D. when all works of an essential nature were over, construction of residential and office buildings were taken up.⁶ The erection of a choultry in 1729 A.D near the present Grand Bazaar provided a location for '*Tribunal de la Chaudrie (court)*'. The prison for the native was located close by. On the basis of a plan furnished by Father Louis, the construction of a hospital was started in 1734 A.D. south-west of the town. It was completed in June 1740 A.D. On the western side of the Governor's house a beautiful garden with five avenues was laid out. In the midst of this garden was a large and well furnished building used as a guest house for visiting dignitaries. Near this was the College of the Jesuits to whom was committed the task of educating the children of the colony. There was also a house for the priests of Missions Etrangeres and another near it for the Capuchins. A new church of the Capuchins was constructed in South-east of the town. Under Dupleix, the programme of work drawn up earlier viz., the Garden and the Hospital at Ozhukarai, the choultry and the bleaching yard near Madras Gate was completed. The erection of a wall on the east with an opening in the middle viz., Marine Gate was taken up and completed around 1747 A.D.⁷

House Structure

The houses in the eastern sector were designed with gardens enclosed by a solid wall with few openings to the outside, to which was added a small tower sometimes giving the impression of a peasant fortress. The main opening was framed by a depressed arch, sometimes served by a roof of its own. To meet the rigours of the tropical climate and in order to provide for good circulation of air, roofs were kept high over pillars so as to reduce the impact of heat to the minimum in summer; taking into account the angle of the sun, the verandas were kept usually on the rear side of the house thereby keeping that side cool by

shades and gardens.⁸ Servants' quarters were located in front contrary to the British system, probably to serve as a watch post. Kitchens formed part of the main building.

Houses in the native area were built wall to wall with open space only at the rear. The pattern of houses were such as to afford a remarkable solution to the problem posed by the hot humid climate. The houses were built side by side in a row which protected the western and eastern sides of the house from direct sun leaving the two other sides (on the south and north) with small openings exposed to a large street that served as a wind funnel. A more orderly appearance was sought to be added to the town through building regulations viz., the front line of the building was required to follow the street alignment without encroaching upon the road, the height of buildings were not allowed to exceed beyond two storeys.⁹ As a measure of public hygiene, water resources at the rear had to be at least 3.05ms. (10 feet) away from water closets. The commercial activities of the town developed at the cutting of the two main streets (viz., rue Madras and rue Grand Bazaar) and slowly expanded along the street as in the case of Indian market centres. It is said to depict truly the character of French introvert markets.¹⁰ Accessible from all sides through punctures from the main streets, with a central clock tower, it is divided into various sections according to the type of article sold. The stalls in the area are however typically Indian.

Notable Features

Pondicherry town in its earlier stages of development is said to have followed the pattern of bastide towns¹¹ in France with a wall around the town and the main gates (Madras Gate, Valudavur Gate) leading to the market. The rest of the area was divided into rectangular blocks on the same pattern of Montpazier in Southern France. Another notable feature of Pondicherry is the '*Quai*' which is found in many French towns. Most of the French '*Quais*' are built along the rivers flowing through the town. In Pondicherry, this has been achieved through the formation of two promenades called '*Quai de Gingy*' and '*Quai d'Ambour*' on either side of the Grand Canal both of which were once lined with shady trees.¹¹ Squares in medieval French bastide towns were all market centres near the main streets. But later, they developed away from the main traffic arteries. These came to be known as Royal squares, as they were meant to serve as a setting for the statues of kings. It is a brilliant example of French planning of squares. Although it cannot be compared to any of the squares in France in its scale, it still epitomises the basic principles of the classical French squares.¹² Another important characteristic is that all the main public buildings are lined along this square.

Hospitals

In Pondicherry the first hospital was constructed near the sea-shore by Francois Martin between May 1701 and August 1704 (probably at the cutting of rue Lai Bahadur Shastri and rue Dumas). Another hospital was constructed in a garden owned by the Company on the southern fringe of Pondicherry. Started in the year 1734 A.D, the construction work was completed in 1738 A.D. The need for the construction of this hospital was felt because there were always about 30 to 40

inmates, apart from 60 very old persons. This hospital also served as an asylum for the European orphans who had to be fed, sheltered and educated until they could earn their livelihood. The medicines for the hospital were obtained from France. The management of the hospital was entrusted to a priest called Father Louis.”¹³

The problem of public health received the attention of Governor Lenoir who wanted the hospital to be well maintained and provided with sufficient means to afford protection to invalids, soldiers and mariners. In Mahe, Lambert is known to have constructed a hospital in 1731 A.D. at a cost of 180 pagodas.”¹⁴ Governor Dumas Wanted to construct a home for the convalescents (*maison de convalescence*) at Ozhukarai. The matter was under prolonged correspondence between the company and the authorities in France. However the Convalescent Home was completed in 1744 during the governorship of Dupleix who carried out some of the projects initiated by his predecessor Dumas. This *maison* was meant also for the sick.” In 1841 A.D. the former Governor Desbassyns de Richemont had endowed a Sum of 15.386 *francs* in favour of the *Comite de Bienfaisance* for the construction of a Leprosarium in Pondicherry. In 1847 A.D, the administration donated to the ‘*Comite de Bienfaisance*’ a site measuring 82.46 sq. metres in Olandai village for the construction of the lepers’ asylum.¹⁵ In 1853 A.D, a military hospital with 40 beds was constructed in Pondicherry for the treatment of officers, sailors, private persons, etc. The present General Hospital then known as ‘Hospital Colonial.’ was also established the same year with a capacity of 100 beds. This was built on a site which belonged to the *Comite de Bienfaisance*. It consisted of a maternity ward, a ward each for orphans, convicts and mental patients. The sisters of the Congregation of ‘*St. Joseph de Cluny*’ helped to run the hospital.

Ports and Lighthouses

Ports

The archaeological findings of Arikamedu have established beyond doubt the existence of a Roman emporium, very much like a treaty port, on the Coromandel Coast very near modern Pondicherry. Barros in his book “*Da Asia*’ which he wrote in the year 1553 A.D. presents the geography of India as it was known in the days of St. Francis Xavier. Pondicherry is among the ports on the Coromandel Coast mentioned by him where the Portuguese had their factory. Besides Pondicherry, the ports of Kalapet and Kunnimedu are also mentioned by him. Interestingly, Tirumalarajanpattinam in Karaikal region also finds mention. Having lost the patronage of Muthu Krishnappa Nayaka in 1614 A.D. the Portuguese abandoned the port which came to be occupied by the Dutch in 1618 A.D.¹⁶ The Danes came in 1624 A.D. and stayed upto 1657A.D. Francois Martin who made a study of the sites between ‘*Porto Novo*’ and Madras found that Pondicherry would be the best place for establishing the loge. With the advent of the French in 1673 A.D, Pondicherry again became an important trading port and trade by sea grew steadily with many French as well as other foreign ships calling at the port.¹⁷

Between 1683 A.D. and 1720 A.D. French ships ranging from one to three called at the port of Pondicherry every year. After 1742 A.D, though the situation further improved under the governorship of Dupleix, trading activities were hampered by

war. Nevertheless, at least three to four vessels called at the port. This included sometimes warships. The Pondicherry port had trade relations with Devanampattinam, Parangipettai, Tarangambadi, Karaikal, Nagappattinam, Marakkanam, Madras, Chandemagore, Mahe, Surat, Bombay etc. and also with outside countries like China, France, Siam, Colombo, Manila etc.¹⁸

Roadways

Francois Martin, the founder of modern Pondicherry, has left an interesting account of the road journey he undertook in 1681 A.D. from Pondicherry to Surat. Anquetil Duperron, in his introduction to "Zend Avesta", gives a detailed account of his extraordinary journey from Bengal to Pondicherry in 1757 A.D, via Burdwan, Balasore, Cuttack, Ganjam and Maehilapatnam. He has left also the details of his journey from Mahe to Goa on the West Coast.¹⁹ Jean Law de Lauriston gives details of his journey from Kasim Bazaar to Delhi performed during the same period with minute details of places of halt from Kasim Bazaar to Patna, from Patna to Allahabad, from Allahabad to Lucknow, from Allahabad to Delhi, from Chatterpur to Patna and finally from Mirzapur to Pondicherry via Nagpur and Cuddappah. Interestingly the city of Pondicherry, built within the limits of a rampart surrounding three sides of the towri, was provided with four gateways called 'Porte de Goudelour' facing south, 'Porte de Villenour' and "Porte de Valdavour facing west and 'Porte de of Madras' facing north. The roads emanating from the gateways were appropriately named as Cuddalore road, Villianur road, Valudavur road and Madras road, establishing links with the entire subcontinent.²⁰

Railways

Pondicherry -Villupuram Line

The origin of the Pondicherry-Villupuram railway line may be traced back to 1869 A.D, when its construction was entrusted to the Pondicherry Railway Company, a limited concern constituted in 1869 A.D. by virtue of the British Parliament Acts of 1862 and 1867 on the formation of companies. The French Government in Paris reached an agreement with the Pondicherry Railway Company on 8th May 1878. Under this agreement the Pondicherry administration had to pay the Company a subsidy of 1,264,375 francs to meet the construction cost of the line and place the lands required for the purpose free of cost. The period of concession was for 99 years.²¹ The proposed railway line which was to start from Pondicherry had to be laid up to the eastern bank of river Gingee and join the British railway line at Belpur. The Company, for its part, agreed to remit to the French Government during the period of concession half of the net profit arrived at after deducting the expenditure on maintenance, taxes, etc. The French Administration enjoyed the right to transport its mail and was entitled to all such benefits enjoyed by the British Government. According to the same agreement, the railway would become the property of the States on the expiry of the period of concession (viz. June 18th, 1978). The first passenger train steamed at Pondicherry on 14th October 1879. The official inauguration ceremony was however performed by the British Governor, the Duke of Buckingham, on 15th December 1879. The line which passed through the communes of Mudaliyarpettai, Ozhukarai, Villianur and Tirubhuvanai (now Mannadipattu) covered a distance of 37.62 km. out of

which 12,633 km. ran within this Territory.²² Four trains ran between Pondicherry and Villupuram. Facilities were available for straight journey to Madras and Karaikal by through compartments.

The goods service was also introduced simultaneously along with passenger traffic. A wide variety of goods was exported from Pondicherry and brought into the town by rail. Coal, mazout, petrol, bones, cement, rice, pulses and ground-nut were among the chief items imported. Cotton, yam, hides and skin, areca and scrap-iron formed the chief items of export. The movement of goods and traffic which was hampered by the Second World War revived with the removal of customs barriers with effect from 15 February 1941. At present large number of trains operated from Pondicherry all parts of India. From the above analisation it is understood that the French administration laid the foundation of urbanization in Pondicherry.

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