From Camp to Port: Mughal Warfare and the economy of Coromandel, 1682-1707

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Chapter 2: Pulicat's political and economic landscape

We now shift our focus from Masulipatnam and northern Coromandel to central Coromandel. This chapter concentrates on Pulicat and its hinterland in central Coromandel, following a similar structure in its discussion of the political and economic landscape of Pulicat in four sections entitled 'Ecology', 'The economy', 'The political economy beyond Vijayanagara' and 'Political instability and wars'. The first section examines the ecological conditions around the port, including agriculture and its differences from Masulipatnam. The second section takes the form of an analysis of the economic profile of Pulicat, political patronage to the port after the fall of Vijayanagara is covered in the third section and finally, the last section looks at the impact of warfare and political instability in and around Pulicat.

2.1 Ecology

As noted earlier the Coromandel Coast was inhospitable for shipping in the sense that natural harbours were rare and its natural characteristics ensured some degree of parity between the many ports along this seaboard; since natural harbours were rare on the Coromandel Coast, the physical site of a port did not give it any special advantage over any other.[1] A port city depended on several factors, but physical factors, mainly the site, played an important role shaping a port's location and communication. A port situated in a natural harbour had the advantage that it could offer improved anchorage. Silting at the mouth of the port could create severe problems for its site, as could changes to the courses of rivers. The latter could lead to increasing difficulties in loading and offloading cargo. Most Coromandel ports of the seventeenth century were located upstream and could only be reached by small vessels – Pulicat was not an exception to this rule, however, and its fluctuating career saw it develop from a little village to a premier port, relegate to a hamlet and again develop into a considerable port. In addition to physical factors, the extension or withdrawal of political patronage could make or break ports.

Named for the lake (actually a lagoon) to its north, Pulicat (Palaverkadu/Pazhaverkadu) sits squarely in at the centre of the Coromandel Coast.[2] Central Coromandel had several ports that were close neighbours. San Thomé, for example, lay just south of Pulicat. A seventeenth–century VOC sailing manual had the following instructions for their captains trying to navigate the waters near central Coromandel:

> If a vessel sails along the Coromandel Coast from the south to the north, it should sail north–north–east from San Thomé and then turn north–north–west towards Pulicat, where the riffs stretch from the north–east and north to the south–west and had a

[1] Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*: 7–8.
[2] Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*: 93–94.

length of about one and a half miles to the south along the shore. From the mouth of the river, the port city of Pulicat lay about three miles upstream.[3]

Familiarity with the water depths and riffs around the port was essential for the pilots. During the monsoon season the city of Pulicat resembled an island since the lands around would be flooded.[4] Jean Deloche argues that Pulicat had an advantage over other central Coromandel ports in terms of navigation because the lagoon served as a secure mooring for ships during the north–east monsoon (October to December).[5] As was the case at many other Coromandel ports, goods would be ferried from ocean-going vessels to the port city on small coastal crafts.

The Coromandel Coast is dotted with far wider coastal plains than the western coast of India. They were formed at least in part by the great deltas of the rivers Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri. As noted in the previous chapter, Spate and Learmonth point out that a belt of anomalous rainfall greets the Coromandel Coast to the south of the bend of the Krishna where most rain showers are concentrated during the months from October to December, when the monsoon is in retreat. They add that since the orientation of the coast is sub–parallel to the track of rain–bearing depressions, rainfall figures are low here. Such an uneven distribution of rainfall affects agriculture. Rice cultivation, supported by irrigation, dominates the agrarian landscape of most parts of modern–day Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, but millets are important in Srikakulam while Nellore, at the southern border of Andhra Pradesh, is a zone of transition where the principal crop is jowar, followed by rice. A portion of the Eastern Ghats run in parallel in a crescent–like shape along the littoral from the bend of the Krishna to Nellore, up to Cuddapah where the river Penner cuts across the hills and flows on to meet the sea to the east of Nellore. To the south of Cuddapah the forest cover extends to Tirupati and Renigunta, near the Swarnamukhi River. The generally arid landscape is broken by groves of mangoes around the tanks. The Penner and its tributaries including Chitravati and Papati originate not in the Western Ghats but in the Mysore plateau. As a result, in the heat of August they are no more than beds of quartzite boulders, shingle or even sand.[6]

Upstream along the Penner, westwards from Cuddapah, we find the diamond mines of Gandikota, Bellary and then the former capital of the Vijayanagara Empire, present–day Hampi. Southwards from this riverine tract we reach first Tirupati and then Chandragiri, which became the seat of the shrunken Vijayanagara Empire in the late sixteenth century. Travelling east from Tirupati we would reach eventually the port city of Pulicat, located in a lagoon off the Coromandel Coast where the Araniyar meets the sea. To the west of Pulicat along this

[3] NA VOC 5029, Description of the coastline from Trincomalee in Ceylon along the Coromandel Coast till Bengal, along with sailing instructions: f. 6r.
[4] Breet and Barend–van Haeften, *De Oost–Indische voyagie van Wouter Schouten*: 272.
[5] Deloche, *Transport and Communication in India*, *Water Transport*: 101.
[6] Spate and Learmonth, *India and Pakistan*: 723–725, 728, 738.

river are the Palem Range and the Peria Puliyur forest. The landscape between Pulicat and Ponneri, a textile weaving village on the Araniyar, is dominated by reddish soil.[7]

As in northern Coromandel, tank irrigation was one of the primary features of the agricultural landscape around Pulicat. This was due to the rhythm of the monsoon: two–thirds of the annual rainfall along this coastal strip from north of Madras to Cuddalore is concentrated in three or four months and the rivers contain hardly any water for nine months of the year, and Spate and Learmonth argue that tank irrigation is crucial to extending the growing season. From March to May the parched conditions bring agrarian work to a standstill while the villages prepare themselves for action after the little rainfall of June, when a secondary paddy crop is sown along with dry crops such as ragi, seasamum, groundnuts and pulses. These are harvested in September and October when the rains increase, and then the main paddy crop is planted for harvesting in mid–January. Whether another crop can be grown after January depends mainly on tank irrigation.[8] Despite these complex conditions, there was reportedly an abundance of rice grown in the region.

Drawing upon the evidence provided by a sixteenth–century travelogue by the Italian traveller Ludovico Varthema, S. Jeyaseela Stephen argues the eastern parts of Pulicat produced plenty of paddy and adds that multiple varieties of it were cultivated in the Coromandel region.[9] Tank irrigation was used to expand agriculture in Kanchipuram where a lot of rice was produced.[10] Varthema was struck by Pulicat's flourishing trade, and writes, 'This country is most abundant in everything which is produced in India, but no grain grows there. They have rice here in great abundance.'[11] Varthema's observation reflects the early sixteenth–century opulence of Pulicat during the heyday of the Vijayanagara Empire, but also hints at the features of agricultural production in the region: the profusion of rice contrasts with the scarceness of grain. What Varthema precisely means by grains is hardly clear. But as we saw earlier in this section the jowar and millet zone ends around Nellore which, as noted in the previous chapter, was a somewhat arid zone that produced good quality oxen. In the Tamil country, rice was the staple crop. The scarceness of grains can perhaps be explained in terms of the natural conditions around Pulicat. After all, the port was located by a lake just inland from the Coromandel Coast, a low–lying region prone to inundation. Such conditions could not support cultivation of any grains which do not require as much water as paddy does.

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[7] This observation stems from the author's trip to the region in 2015.
[8] Spate and Learmonth, *India and Pakistan*: 743–744.
[9] S. Jeyaseela Stephen, *The Coromandel Coast and its Hinterland: Economy, Society and Political System (A.D. 1500–1600)* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997): 51–52.
[10] James Heitzman, 'Secondary Cities and Spatial templates in South India, 1300–1800' in: *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking in the Indian Ocean Realm, c. 1400–1800,* ed. Kenneth R. Hall (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008): 310.
[11] John Winter Jones transl., *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema in Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix, in Persia, India, and Ethiopia* (London: Hakluyt society, 1863): 195.

A delicate balance existed between supply of and demand for rice in the central Coromandel region, where Pulicat was located. Chingleput, Kanchipuram and Madurantakam were major producers of rice while a vast demand for the staple was created by the large population of manufacturing villages and towns, administrative and pilgrimage centres in the interior. When rainfall was good, harvests were good and the rice–producing regions could export their crop. When rainfall failed they had to import rice. The dependable monsoon regime along this long coastline ensured that there was never a total crop failure along the coast and normal harvests in one part always compensated for poor ones in others. Despite their increasing consumption of rice in the second half of the seventeenth century, ports such as Pulicat, Madras and Pondicherry were mostly supplied from the hinterland. Arasaratnam adds that the central Coromandel region embracing the hinterland of Pulicat, Madras, San Thomé, Sadraspatnam and Devanampatnam entered into rice deficit in the eighteenth century in the aftermath of the Mughal wars and were unable to supply ports and towns. Eventually the central Coromandel coastal areas and even inland districts came to be supplied with rice imports by sea from the north and the south.[12] Around the late seventeenth century the Dutch in Pulicat possessed some fields where the *nely* rice variety was grown.[13]

There were few obstacles to communications on the plateau towards the Bay of Bengal or on the coastal plain. Between the river Krishna and Tamil country land communication found its way on the coastal track and inland roads.[14] On a journey in 1663 from Pulicat to their factories in Tegenapatnam and Sadraspatnam, two VOC officials named Pieter de Lange and Francois Thivert followed trails along the coast since the plains had been flooded and inland ways were unsuitable for travelling.[15] The capital of the Vijayanagara Empire was linked not only to ports on the Arabian Sea but also to those on the Bay of Bengal, including Pulicat. Routes ran from Pulicat to Kanyakumari and intersected at points such as Srirangam, Tiruchchirapalli and Madurai. Jean Deloche points out that compared to northern India transit ways in the southern peninsula were of a more uncertain nature. To substantiate this, he points out how the itineraries of travellers who visited South India vary, reflecting above all an urban instability caused by wars. Porters carried goods either by placing them on their heads or by carrying them in two baskets suspended on either extremity of a pole borne on the shoulders, known as *kavadi* in the south. During wars *banjaras* supplied staples such as grains, salt and sugar to armies and were highly capable of conveying goods from zones of production to those of consumption, e.g. salt from the coast to the interior from where they returned with grains. Palanquin–bearers and pack animals were used by humans for travelling

[12] Sinnappah Arasaratnam, 'The Rice Trade in Eastern India 1650–1740' *Modern Asian Studies* 22, 3 (1988): 533, 539, 540, 542.
[13] Havart, *Op–en ondergangh van Cormandel*, *Eerste deel*: 105.
[14] Jean Deloche, *Transport and Communications in India*, *Land Transport*: 74.
[15] NA Inventory number 1.01.50 Stadhouderlijke Secretarie 1607, Report made by Pieter de Lange and Francois Thivert to Laurens Pit, the governor of Coromandel, regarding their return from a visit to Tegenapatnam and Sadraspatnam in 1663: f. 1r.

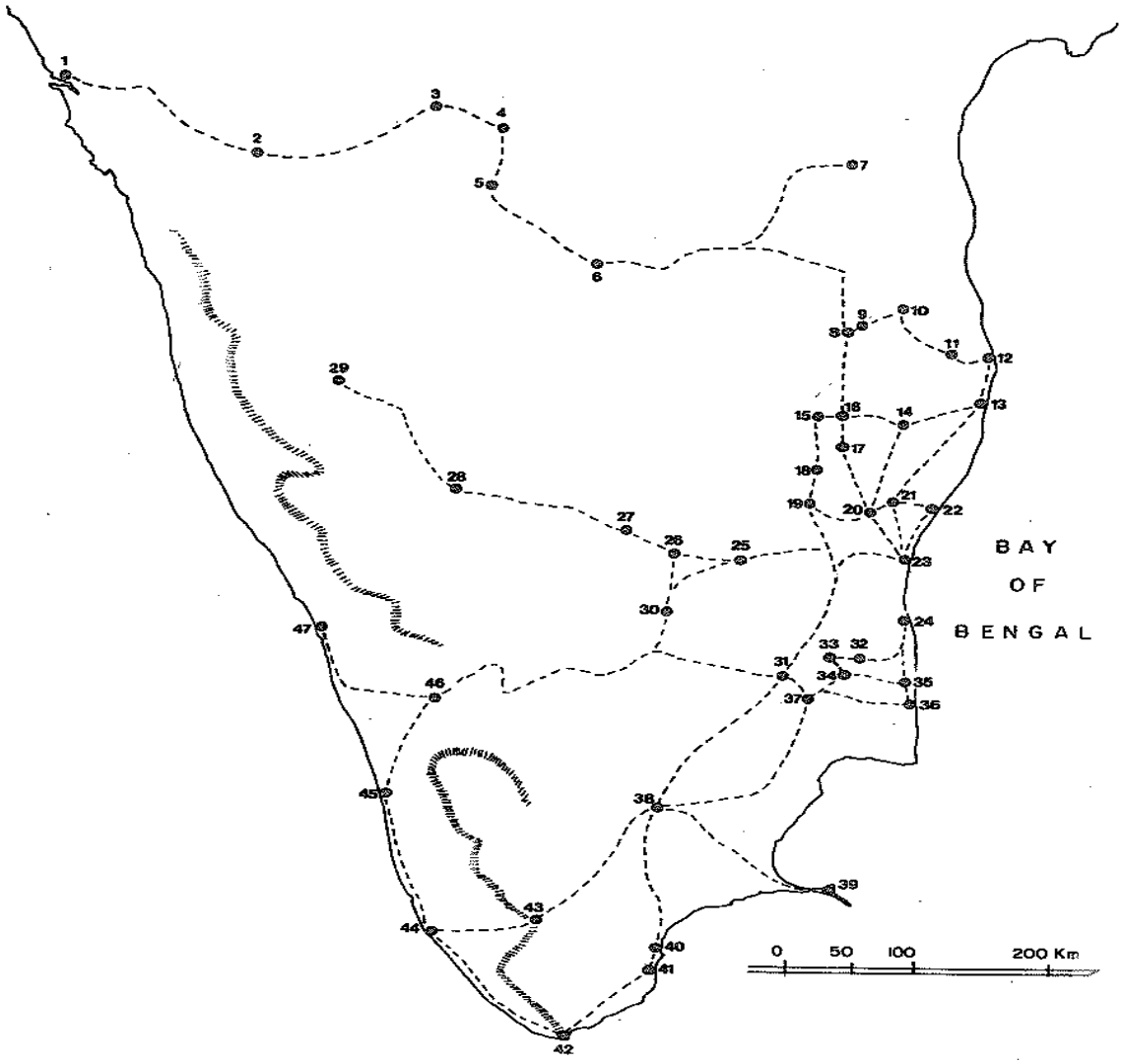
in the south and they do not seem to have used carts. Though carts existed in the plains of South India, they played a very minor role in long-distance transport.[16]

While discussing the port–hinterland complexes of Pulicat and Nagapatnam we must remember, in general, the rivers of South India which flowed across the Coromandel Coast into the Bay of Bengal did not support navigation upstream except for a few kilometres from the sea ports of Coromandel. As a result, inland transport on the Coromandel Coast had to depend almost entirely on pack animals and human porters.[17]

Culling evidence from sources such as inscriptions, literary works, Portuguese records and travellers' accounts Jeyaseela Stephen provides us with a map and description of the overland routes of sixteenth–century Coromandel which connected the major ports and towns.

[16] Deloche, *Transport and Communications in India*, *Land Transport*: 62–63, 75, 80, 204, 205–207, 249, 261.
[17] Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*: 12.

Map 2.1: Overland routes of South India 1500–1600[18]



Key

1. Goa
2. Bankapur
3. Vijayanagara
4. Bellary
5. Rayadurga

[18] Stephen, *The Coromandel Coast and its Hinterland*: map of overland routes of South India reproduced from page 96, 97–98 for description, 230 for keys.

6. Penugonda
7. Udayagiri
8. Chandragiri
9. Tirupati
10. Sri Kalakhasti
11. Tiruvallur
12. Pulicat
13. San Thomé
14. Kanchipuram
15. Vellore
16. Arcot
17. Arani
18. Polur
19. Tiruvannamalai
20. Gingee
21. Tindivanam
22. Marakkanam
23. Kunimedu
24. Villiyanoor
25. Attur
26. Salem
27. Kaveripuram
28. Mysore
29. Beluru
30. Namakkal
31. Srirangam
32. Chidambaram
33. Bhuvanagiri
34. Kumbakonam
35. Tiruvidaimarudur
36. Nagapattinam
37. Tanjore
38. Madurai
39. Rameswaram
40. Tuticorin
41. Punnaikayal
42. Cape Comorin
43. Aryankavu
44. Quilon
45. Cochin
46. Palghat
47. Calicut

One route ran from Pulicat via Tirupati and Chandragiri to Vijayanagara where it met the highway to Goa on the western coast. Another connected Pulicat to San Thomé (and Madras once the English established Fort St. George in the seventeenth century) and then turned west to Kanchipuram, Vellore, Arcot, Tiruvannamalai, Gingee and Kunimedu. The route to Tiruvannamalai extended further south to Srirangam where an eastern road took travellers to Nagapatnam. From Srirangam the road continued further south to Tuticorin via Madurai. The road running east from Mysore met this highway south of Tiruvannamalai. As noted in the previous chapter, religious establishments acted as stabilizing nodes in the networks of routes. Despite the shifting nature of transit ways in the south, as suggested by Deloche, the temple towns of Tirupati, Kanchipuram, Tiruvannamalai and Madurai were rather durable. Most of the highways running from west to east or north to south, cut across temple towns: Pulicat to Chandragiri and Vijayanagara via Tirupati; Pulicat to Gingee via Kanchipuram; and Mysore to Pulicat via Tiruvannamalai and Kanchipuram. This last region of Kanchipuram was also a major producer of rice and the port city of Pulicat possibly drew some of its supplies from here. These temple towns gave the local economy a shot in the arm by drawing large number of people as inhabitants, labourers, pilgrims and acting as currency exchange centres. It is unsurprising, then, that transit routes passed with these towns.

2.2 The economy

Pulicat: Origins and development

Although the earliest history of Pulicat, or Pazhaverkadu as it is known locally, is sketchy, we do know that it emerged during the reign of Devaraya II (1422–1446) and that the governor of this region Anandaraya developed it into a major port and gave it its name Anandarayapattinam. Prone, as the port was, to being submerged under seawater Pulicat also came to be known as *Pralaya Kaveri* because when inundated the area resembled the flooded river Kaveri. Such a dual nomenclature was typical of port cities of fifteenth and sixteenth–century Coromandel. Other examples include Sadraspattanam or Rajanarayanapattinam, Marakkanam or Eyirpattinam, Cuddalore or Nissarikammalapattinam, Porto Novo or Krishnapattinam and Tranquebar or Kulasekarapattinam. The suffix *–pattinam* was usually added to the name of a coastal village once it had been transformed into a centre for maritime trade,[19] and their names also tend to reflect a close association with those political figures who played a crucial role in the development of such ports. In fact, this trend of political patronage to port cities continued well into the seventeenth century when the patronage of the *nayaka* rulers combined with the investments of the European trading companies. The Dutch, the English and the French sought consent from the nayakas to keep trading from central and southern Coromandel.

European forts and munitions also offered a certain degree of security and protection that will have been attractive to the merchants of Coromandel, Stephen demonstrates. The

[19] Stephen, *The Coromandel Coast and its Hinterland*: 107, 109.

suffix –*kottai* was usually added to the name of a fortified town such as Adhmankottai. The fact that a Kamaiyappa nayaka revived an old market at Adhmankottai and levied taxes on merchants who traded there demonstrates that marketing functions were being combined with military functions. Merchants did also trade in open, unfortified town, however.[20] All the major European port cities of central and southern Coromandel in the seventeenth century were fortified. They include Pulicat (Dutch), Madras (English) and Pondicherry (French). Daniel Havart argues that the VOC headquarters in Pulicat, in the middle of the Coromandel Coast, was established to supervise and regulate the affairs of the company's managers in the northern and southern parts. He stresses the regulatory and political character of Pulicat rather than its export trade,[21] but there was more to Pulicat than this alone, as we will see later.

At its height (fifteenth century and first half of the sixteenth century), the Vijayanagara Empire in South India connected the arid zone of the Mysore plateau with the fertile strips of the Konkan and Coromandel coasts, and Dabhol in western India was a crucial node for Vijayanagara rulers wanting to import horses. By the sixteenth century Pulicat on the eastern seaboard had also become another important port for them. Its rise was closely linked with the fortunes of the Vijayanagara Empire, and its meteoric rise was a spectacular phenomenon commented upon by contemporary observers. Ravi Palat points out that Ma Huan's 1433 survey of the Indian Ocean did not mention Pulicat. At this juncture, it was probably a mere fishing village (Pulicat's early phase coinciding with the rule of Devaraya II, as we have noted). Yet by the early sixteenth century Pulicat had become an important export port: Duarte Barbosa visited Pulicat around 1508 and refers to the export of printed cotton cloth from there to Malacca, Pegu, Sumatra, Gujarat and Malabar.[22]

Behind this efflorescence was a multi–layered process of expansion that had merged the agrarian and pastoral worlds to create new infrastructures for appropriating the agrarian surplus; it encouraged the growth of the textile industry and promoted the maritime trade of Coromandel. Beginning from the late fifteenth century, the Vijayanagara rulers appointed *nayakas* (military leaders) who established control over the agrarian resources in their respective localities, settled the forest lands and encouraged the formation of new settlements of weavers.[23] The role played by the *nayakas* has resemblances with that of the *havaldars*, the portfolio–capitalists of Masulipatnam who traded salt produced near the port with northern and central India and imported commodities from there such as wheat, barley, opium, dates and tamarind. They used their politico-economic clout to combine the economic

[20] Stephen, *The Coromandel coast and its Hinterland*: 104–105.
[21] Havart, *Op–en ondergangh van Cormandel*, *Eerste deel*: 105–106.
[22] Ravi Palat, *The Making of an Indian Ocean World–Economy, 1250–1650: Princes, Paddy fields, and Bazaars* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 164, 166.
[23] Stephen, *The Coromandel Coast and its Hinterland*: 51, 73.

production of ecologically distinct regions. Political patronage was also manifest in the dual nomenclature of ports.

The Vijayanagara Empire successfully connected what Susan Bayly describes as the two contrasting natural environments of South India: the 'wet south' with its fertile river valleys and deltas in the Tamil country and the lush maritime strip of the Malabar Coast which practiced intensive rice cultivation; and its counterpart the 'dry south', the unsettled world to which the settled agrarian world of townspeople and farmers was linked. But there was always great tension between the two. From the middle of the fourteenth century the people from the forest 'fringes' pushed more and more into the wet 'core'. The Tamil country witnessed a great influx of warriors and peasant colonists. Known as *vadugas* (northerners), these mostly Telugu speakers from the southern reaches of the Deccan transformed the political organization of South India and enhanced the prestige of the dry–zone warrior groups. By the early seventeenth century, these *nayaka* newcomers had consolidated dynamic states around Madurai, Trichy (Trichinopoly/Tiruchchirapalli), Tanjore (Tanjavur) and other places. They established more contact between the settled people of the rice belt and the martial predators of the dry plains. Cash revenue was required to finance their armies and this could only be achieved through a process of rapid commercialization. The *nayakas* and their agents recruited merchants, money–lenders and literate record–keepers to their domains and built up the region's ancient textile trade by bringing in weavers and other artisans. The *nayakas* expanded production sites and founded new specialist centres populated by *kaikkolars* (groups of weavers), other local specialists and migrants, including the Kannada and Telugu–speaking *devangas* and *seniyans* and the Gujarati–speaking Patnulkaran silk weavers from Saurashtra.[24] Other incentives to weavers and artisans included social privileges and exemptions from taxes on commodities sold in local markets (*pettais*) and fairs (*sandais*), and on articles sold in temples.[25]

All these politico–economic and ecological processes, taken together, helped in shaping the transformation of Pulicat from a fishing village to a premier Indian Ocean port in the sixteenth century. Before we continue our story of Pulicat's vicissitudes in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, let us prelude it with a discussion of the industry that provided the bulk of its exports: textiles.

Textile production in the Tamil country

Many regions in the south had been important textile manufacturing and trading centres since the first millennium AD and several major ones were to be found in Tamil country, argues Vijaya Ramaswamy. Three factors governed the location of these textile manufacturing centres: soil quality, generally rich in black soil or ferruginous loam soil;

[24] Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society*, 1700–1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 19, 21, 22–23.

[25] Kanaklatha Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel* (Chennai: Orient Longman, 1999): 43–44.

availability of dyes, mainly vegetable dyes and mordants (dye fixers); and proximity to the ports because land transport was slow and expensive. Among the cotton textiles mainly *vichitra* (variegated cloth) and *sella* were woven here. *Vichitra* and *sella* are the indigenous names for respectively, the chintz or pintadoes and *muslins* or *salempores* of the European records. Muslin was a major of export item in the seventeenth century. Professional tailors and weavers were attached to temples, and the weavers were settled in the *tirumadaivilagam* (temple square or 'temple town'), and they had their own streets in every town. Usually the tax levied on weavers who resided within the precincts of a temple went to the state unless it had been specifically endowed to the temple. The weavers were assigned a share of the temple paddy. Centres catering for the inland market were linked to the *peruvali* (highways), while those that provided for the export trade were connected to the nearest port.[26] In this context, we may remember the VOC survey of textile villages in the Godavari delta mentioned in Chapter 1. It distinguished between textile production for export and for domestic consumption. Here 'domestic' may be taken to denote either the producing zone itself or inland trade.

In her discussions of broad trends of textile production, Ramaswamy contends that export trade was far larger in volume and importance than inland trade. While it cannot be refuted that the export sector was more attractive, it is important to remember that all the primary sources produced in European languages, whether company or non–company in origin, focused more on the export sector of the textile industry, so references to inland trade are less frequent in these records. Ramaswamy points out the popularity of textiles from Pulicat in Gujarat and Malabar in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Textiles from Pulicat fetched good returns through South–East Asian markets in Malacca (printed cotton clothes and chintz), Pegu and Sumatra (chintz). Gujarat clothing and Mecca velvets were imported into Pulicat and then re–exported. Textiles were shipped from San Thomé to Aceh, Priamam in Sumatra, Bantam in Java and Malacca. Though the painted clothing of Masulipatnam were artistically superior, the patterned clothes of San Thomé and Pulicat were in greater demand in the lands of the Malay Archipelago. Known as *Tape* or *Tape-sarssas*, Pulicat chintz sold in these lands required little or almost no stitching since the fabric was worn as a sarong–like (skirt) item. Weavers who produced for the export market mainly resided in the temples till the seventeenth century when they moved to company settlements on the coast.[27]

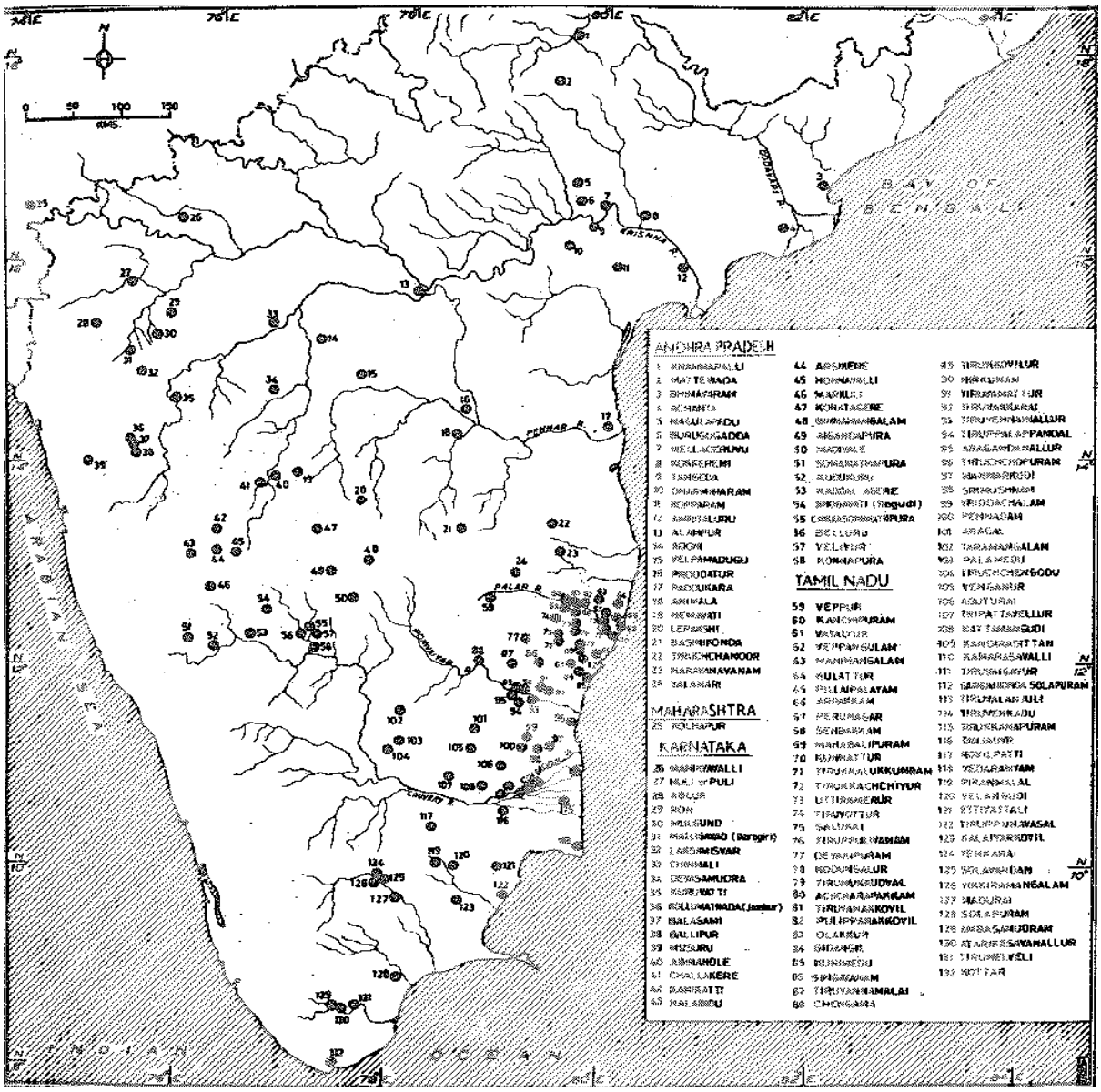
In the early sixteenth century, Pulicat thronged with great traders, Hindus and Muslims alike, writes Duarte Barbosa. He also demonstrates that the connection with the imperial capital in Vijayanagara played a substantial part in the fortunes of the port city, providing as evidence the merchants who travelled overland from different parts of

[26] Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985): 6, 16–17, 25, 32–33, 64–65.
[27] Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers*: 6–13 (maps and charts on 7,8,9,10,11 and 12) 28, 69–71, 121.

Vijayanagara to transact business in Pulicat, where goods from Pegu such as rubies, spinels and musk had a good market. Moreover, he mentions that printed cotton cloth which had a great demand overseas was produced in the city. They earned good profits in Malacca, Pegu, Sumatra, Gujarat and Malabar.[28] This is striking because Ramaswamy presents to us a map of weaving centres of medieval south India (1000–1500), prepared with the help of epigraphic evidence, which does not locate the textile industry in Pulicat itself. The valleys of Godavari and Krishna show fewer centres of production. Of course, Qutb Shahi Masulipatnam was yet to become prominent. We find the industry to be densely concentrated along the river valleys of Palar, Ponnaiyar and Kaveri. The river valley of Pennar has a rather light concentration, to whose south lay the port city of Pulicat. Its period of dominance as the premier port of Coromandel started, as we have noted, only in the late–fifteenth century, and that is probably why the map does not show a concentration of textile industry around Pulicat.

[28] Mansel Longworth Dames transl., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa: An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and of Their Inhabitants, Written by Duarte Barbosa and Completed About the Year 1518 A.D.,* vol. II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1921): 130–132.

Map 2.2: Weaving centres in South India 1000–1500 based on epigraphic evidence[29]



The concentration of weaving centres along the coast allowed for easy access to transport to exporting ports. Ramaswamy does not speak of production within the city and it is possible that Barbosa mistook the availability of textiles in Pulicat for production in the port city itself.

[29] Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers*: I draw these inferences from the map on page 7 and the discussion of it in the book.

Apart from the production in these villages close to the coast, the temple towns of Tirupati and Kanchipuram also produced textiles.

Merchants acquired control over production by supplying raw materials and cash advances. They also ensured that the clothing produced met the desired requirements.[30] The growth of the textile industry was accompanied by occupational specialization in corollary activities. Vijayanagara Empire inscriptions provide the names of trade groups who had to pay taxes to the local and imperial authorities: dyers, fabric bleachers, tailors and cotton carders (carders combed wool for use as textiles).[31]

To an extent Pulicat's story mirrors that of Masulipatnam. Both these cities developed from coastal villages into thriving international ports dependent upon connection with and patronage from an inland territorial centre that offered a favourable environment for maritime commerce and put into place the infrastructure necessary for that. But there are differences, too, because while Masulipatnam turned into a regional entrepot, after the fall of Vijayanagara Pulicat became just a local centre. Pulicat's fluctuating fortunes hint at what fate awaited maritime outlets when their inland patrons grew weak and offers clues on the developments discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. In 1565, the Vijayanagara emperor was defeated in a battle at Talikota by an alliance of the sultanates from northern Deccan, including Bijapur and Golconda. Historians generally agree that this event was a watershed in the fortunes of Pulicat, and conclude that this port went into a downward spiral after the war as the Vijayanagara Empire began to decline. They differ, however, on the exact causes that led to this decline. The causes centred on the shifting of trade with Malacca and the decline of Vijayanagara. The third section of this chapter discusses these causes and then puts forward evidence that shows the survival of the port in the seventeenth century, when a new patron arrived on the scene – the VOC.

2.3 Decline and survival: The political economy of Pulicat beyond Vijayanagara

Causes of decline

As we have noted, Pulicat's rise in the fifteenth century was closely linked to the consolidation of Vijayanagara rule in central Coromandel. Sanjay Subrahmanyam distinguishes three major textile–producing areas in Coromandel in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the central Coromandel strip, where Pulicat was located and which produced textiles for the Burmese markets and the Indonesian archipelago; the region extending from Kunjimedu to the southern extremity of the Kaveri delta; and the Krishna–Godavari delta, which was of relatively minor importance in the early sixteenth century. Textiles from all these regions were brought to Pulicat and shipped overseas. By the early sixteenth century, Pulicat's main

[30] Stephen, *The Coromandel Coast and its Hinterland*: 77.

[31] Carla M. Sinopoli, *The Political Economy of Craft Production: Crafting Empire in South India*, c. 1350–1650 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 82.

trading partners were Mergui and other ports of the Irrawady delta in southern Burma, Pegu and lower Burma, especially the ports of Martaban and Cosmin, and most importantly, Malacca in South–East Asia.[32]

In the early sixteenth century, Portuguese settlers in Coromandel agglomerated around Pulicat. However, from the 1530s two nuclei of Portuguese settlements developed: Pulicat–San Thomé in central Coromandel and Nagapatnam in southern Coromandel. Pulicat–San Thomé was effectively one complex as Portuguese merchants based in San Thomé traded from Pulicat, thanks to the port's good anchorage. Until 1550, Portuguese – whether the *Estado da India* (State of India) or private Portuguese – fitted themselves without much difficulty into the pre–existing commercial system of the Indian Ocean. The issuance of cartazes was nothing more than a minor tax, rather than being restrictive for commerce. Up to the middle of the sixteenth century, Coromandel's Hindu and Muslim merchants had an undisturbed commerce with Malacca. The Portuguese factors in Malacca declared in the 1550s that annually about five or six ships arrived there from Coromandel, i.e., Pulicat. At the close of the 1540s and the beginning of the 1550s, the Estado da India decided to monopolise the Coromandel–Malacca line of shipping by preventing independent Asian merchants from operating on it. The system of concessions that was developed as a part of this policy allowed a concessionary the exclusive right to trade over a particular commercial route, specified with respect both to port of departure and that of destination. In the case of Coromandel–Malacca line, this system became highly restrictive and by the late 1560s it had replaced the four or five ships which annually used to ply between Coromandel and Malacca. Now merchants who wanted to trade on this route were compelled to freight space on board the vessel of the concessionary. This development, Sanjay Subrahmanyam argues, along with the dismantling of Vijayanagara as a consumption centre (after 1565) led to a substantial decline in the internal trade to Pulicat (and external trade from it) and the port experienced a downturn from the 1560s. Drawing on evidence from Linschoten's travelogue, Subrahmanyam assigns to Pulicat a very rapid decline: by the end of the sixteenth century it was serving as a subsidiary supplier of textiles to more important ports, such as Masulipatnam.[33] Pulicat had now effectively become what Masulipatnam, in its early days, had been.

Ravi Palat argues that the political disintegration accompanying the decline of the Vijayanagara Empire acted as the more immediate cause behind the decline of Pulicat. The process, Palat states, can be traced back to the political crises that followed Achyutadevaraya's usurpation of the Vijayanagara throne in 1529. As decades of internecine warfare weakened the defences of the empire, the country was left open to predatory raids by Adil Shahi and Qutb Shahi troops. The crisis of empire intensified during the thirty years that followed after Rama Raya had incarcerated Achyutadevaraya in 1535. Circuits of exchange were fragmented and there was a dramatic fall in religious endowments, especially

[32] Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*: 94–96.
[33] Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*: 105–106, 108, 110, 112–113.

after 1547 when the inscriptional record at Tirupati temple does not speak of a single grant by members of mercantile communities. This process was only exacerbated by the destruction of the capital after the Battle of Talikota (1565). Vijayanagara's decline meant that the hinterland Pulicat catered to had considerably shrunk, with the disappearance of courtly elites the demand for luxury goods too fell and inland routes were no longer safe. These turned Pulicat again into a fishing village. However, the decline of Pulicat did not mean that the connections of Coromandel's ports with South–East Asia disappeared. The decrease in flow of trade on the Pulicat–Malacca route coincided with the growth of the Masulipatnam–Aceh network.[34] In other words, trade to South–East Asia had found a new route.

Jeyaseela Stephen argues that the fall of Vijayanagara was only a secondary factor in the decline of Pulicat in the sixteenth century, and that the primary factor was the shift of Coromandel–Malacca trade from Pulicat to San Thomé in the 1540s. The Portuguese started to trade with Malacca directly from San Thomé and Pulicat was relegated to the status of mid-point on the Malacca–Goa route. This suited the Portuguese but not the indigenous merchants. It was common practice for merchants on the Coromandel–Malacca trade route to pay for the freight in advance and make their return voyage in the same ship. Facilities that served this practice were more readily available at San Thomé and merchants preferred to settle there to trade with Malacca, abandoning Pulicat.[35]

As we had noted in the introduction, the success of port cities in Coromandel primarily depended on two factors: one, their linkages with patron capital cities in the hinterland and two, their ability to export goods to markets across the Indian Ocean. The support of Vijayanagara rulers and governors, and presence of merchants trading with Mergui, Pegu and Malacca were major features of Pulicat's economy. With this in mind and the evidence provided in secondary literature, let us try to understand what had caused the decline of Pulicat. Firstly, while the political disturbances that increasingly gripped Vijayanagara from the 1530s might have indeed resulted in a loss of public order, they did not reflect on the sailings from Pulicat to Malacca. Evidence from Portuguese records, provided by Subrahmanyam, points out that four or five ships still used to arrive annually in Malacca from Coromandel in the 1550s. In the light of this it is difficult to see how a diminution in religious endowments made by mercantile communities tells us of their decline, at least until 1550. Secondly, though both Subrahmanyam and Stephen stress the role of the Portuguese policy in explaining Pulicat's decline, they differ in the conclusions drawn: for Subrahmanyam it restricted the trade from Pulicat to Malacca and contributed to ruination of the port, and for Stephen the merchants moved to neighbouring San Thomé for better facitlites of freighting space on board vessels. But this does not explain how merchants who had been stifled by Portuguese restrictions to trade with Malacca from Pulicat found it convenient to operate

[34] Palat, *The Making of an Indian Ocean World–Economy*: 181–182.
[35] Stephen, *The Coromandel Coast and its Hinterland*: 144.

under similar conditions from the neighbouring port of San Thomé. Thirdly, as we will see in this chapter, in the early seventeenth century VOC sources spoke of San Thomé as mainly a Portuguese port with little presence of indigenous merchants who traded with South–East Asia. Thus, the real shift of indigenous shipping may have taken place, not to San Thomé, but to the Masulipatnam–Aceh line.

So, it seems the first real blow to Pulicat's position as an oceanic port came in the 1550s after the introduction of the concessionary system that restricted the operation of indigenous merchants trading with Malacca, a fact reflected in the decreasing number of ships that plied from Pulicat to Malacca in the 1560s. This would have meant a loss of eminence in terms of export markets of the Indian Ocean, but Pulicat still had an internal market and a consumption centre to cater to. The port was, as we have noted, a centre for jewel trade. In this respect the link with Pegu (dependent on export of textiles and import of gold and rubies) was more important and so was the second blow that struck Pulicat once the capital of Vijayanagara had been destroyed in and after 1565. While the first blow had resulted in a loss of Pulicat's major oceanic market, the second blow deprived the port of what could have been another line of survival in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, it was a succession of these phenomena – introduction of the concessionary system and the disintegration of Vijayanagara – that contributed to the decline of Pulicat by the late 1560s. The decline was so rapid that Jan Huyghen van Linshcoten did not consider Pulicat to be a port of renown in the Indian Ocean around 1583–1584, and he omitted the port from a list of important centres of maritime trade on the Coromandel Coast.[36]

Clearly trade from Pulicat went into sharp decline by the end of the sixteenth century. So, a question that naturally crops up is this: What happened to the textile industry which catered to overseas markets from Pulicat. As described in Chapter 1, while internal migration between villages and cities was a symptom of unstable political life in South Asia, it also facilitated the survival of industry and marketing of economic produce by creating new nodes, ensuring the resilience of the political economy. Pulicat will certainly have decreased in population as it reverted to a minor port, but was there a synchronous migration of weavers away from the surrounding villages, leading to the dismantling of the textile industry? Early Dutch surveys of the Coromandel Coast point to the contrary: if any migration of weavers did take place following the decline of Pulicat, it was not on a massive scale.

In the 1580s Linschoten identified three major places of textile trade in Coromandel: Nagapatnam, San Thomé and Masulipatnam.[37] Following their voyages to the Coromandel Coast in the early seventeenth–century, the VOC found Pulicat to be a very suitable place for

[36] H. Kern and H. Terpstra ed., Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *Itinerario, voyage ofte schipvaert naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien 1579–1592*. Eerste Stuk (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955): 63–69; Pulicat is missing from Linschoten's description of the Coromandel Coast.
[37] Kern and Terpstra ed., *Itinerario*: 68.

buying cotton textiles. But they also anticipated the Portuguese, stationed in the neighbouring port of San Thomé, would create problems for Dutch trade. The VOC expected Pulicat would be an advantageous place because of the cheap prices at which textiles were available.[38] It might have been a small port at the point when the VOC sent their early voyages to the Coromandel Coast, but the textile industry around it had survived and found new outlets (San Thomé). During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth–centuries Pulicat had nothing close to the kind of security Masulipatnam possessed due to consolidation of authority by the sultans Golconda. So, apparently its politico–economic condition was different from northern Coromandel and this leads us on to a problem which we should try to tackle at different stages in this thesis – to look at the heterogeneity of and differences within the Coromandel Coast while analysing its economy and trade.

The VOC and Pulicat

The early years

When the Dutch arrived in Coromandel, the Aravidu king of Vijayanagara was based in Vellore. In 1610, Arent Maertszoon, acting on behalf of the VOC, entered into an agreement with the Aravidu king regarding Pulicat. The VOC was permitted to erect a fort at Pulicat to store munitions and other goods. In return, tolls of two per cent on goods that the Dutch offloaded and shipped from Pulicat were to be paid to the king. The contract also gives us a sense of how jurisdiction in the port and its environs was shared by the Dutch and the Aravidu ruler. For example, all weavers and painters who had been contracted to dye cloth for or supply textiles to the Dutch were obliged to do so. If they failed to do so, the Dutch factor in Pulicat had the power to arrest and imprison them. If a worker were to escape from Pulicat to the king or some other part of the region, the king was required by the terms of the agreement to hand this person over to the Dutch. The king also agreed not to prohibit anyone from trading with the VOC. Last but by no means least, the king agreed not to let any other European nation trade from Pulicat.[39]

But the Dutch were not yet so strong in Pulicat that they could resist a Portuguese attack that took place in 1612. In its aftermath, in 1612 another contract was signed with the Aravidu king, Venkatapati Raja of Vellore. This time the Dutch envoy was the director of Pulicat, Wemmer van Berchem. The agreement stipulated that the Dutch would complete the building of the fort in Pulicat, and that Venkatapati Raja promised to ensure that the Dutch men and merchandise captured by the Portuguese were returned. The Dutch were also permitted to wage war against the Portuguese in Pulicat, San Thomé and all other ports and

[38] H. Terpstra, *De Vestiging van de Nederlanders aan de cust van Coromandel* (Groningen: M. De Waard, 1911): 29, 121.

[39] J.E. Heeres ed., *Corpus–Diplomaticum Neerlando–Indicum Verzameling van Politieke contracten en verdere Verdragen door de Nederlanders in het oosten gelsoten, van Privilegiebrieven, aan het verleend, enz., Eerste Deel (1596–1650)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1907): agreement made by Arent Maertszoon with Venakatapati Raja, Aravidu king, dated 24.04.1610, 84–85.

places along the coast. The contract reveals another layer in the relationship between trade and politics in early seventeenth–century Coromandel: the king promised to have a *caul* or order lent to the Dutch from Jagga Raja, his subordinate official in the region, who would protect the Dutch against enemies, since Vellore was far away from Pulicat.[40] This attests to the weakness of central control over the region from Vellore. Support not only from the king, but also his subordinate officials based closer to Pulicat was important for the Dutch trade to thrive. Eventually, in 1616, Pulicat became the VOC headquarters of Coromandel, with authority over the other company factories in the region.

In the early seventeenth century the Aravidu king based in Vellore acted as an overlord or suzerain to the three nayaka kingdoms of Tamil Nadu: Gingee, Tanjore and Madurai. Proffering evidence from an account written by a VOC official in 1615, Velcheru Narayan Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam write that these nayaka states together paid an annual tribute of 1,200,000 pagodas to the Aravidu ruler in Vellore: the nayaka of Madurai paid 600,000 pagodas, the nayaka of Tanjore paid 400,000 pagodas and the nayaka of Gingee paid 200,000 pagodas. Contemporaneous accounts written by Jesuit priests also referred to this fiscal relationship between the three nayaka states of Tamil Nadu and the Aravidu ruler based in Vellore.[41]

Dutch expectations of finding textiles cheaply and easily in Pulicat adds weight to a point alluded to earlier: though Pulicat had been relegated to the status of a subsidiary supplier of textiles to Masulipatnam, the textile industry around it had not been ruined and could offer good returns on investment. One of the terms of the first treaty signed with the Aravidu king – his promise to see that weavers and painters meet their obligations to the Dutch – hints at instability in the regions surrounding Pulicat and at the innate buoyancy of the industry in the form of the weavers possibly willing to respond to other buyers if offered better terms.

Vijaya Ramaswamy argues in favour of unsettled conditions because of the mobility of the weavers in the seventeenth century, a phenomenon unheard of in the earlier centuries because weavers moved only during extreme distress (such as famines) or to protest against increased taxation. This argument is based on two types of evidence: inscriptions on temples across Tamil Nadu and correspondence of the European companies, especially the EIC. Majority of weavers probably no longer lived within the premises of temples because very few inscriptions on temples from the seventeenth century speak of weavers. Ramaswamy cites only two seventeenth–century inscriptions from the central Coromandel region, the hinterland Pulicat depended on, which point to weavers residing in temples. An inscription on the temple walls at Pallikondai in Vellore from 1632 tells us of grant of land and ritual

[40] Heeres ed., *Corpus Diplomaticum, Eerste Deel*: agreement made by Wember van Bergen with Venkatapati Raja dated 12.12.1612, 101–103.
[41] Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*: 105–107.

honours to *kaikkolar* weavers. Similarly, another inscription dated 1679 from Tiruppulisvara temple at Ponneri, Chingleput (Ponneri was a major supplier of cloth to the VOC in Pulicat, as we will find out) shows that *kaikkolar* weavers made a gift to the deity of the temple, Tiruppulisvara. Besides, unlike the earlier period, a few inscriptions from the early seventeenth century dedicated to weavers have been located in the middle of villages, rather than in temples: an inscription at a village in Chingleput speaks of *kaikkolar* weavers and another inscribed on a slab in the middle of a village tells of a charter given to the weavers of Kaliyapettai in Kanchipuram. In the seventeenth century the dwelling places of weavers who produced for the export market, Ramaswamy says, had begun to shift from temples to European settlements on the Coromandel Coast. For the region of central Coromandel, Ramaswamy provides evidence from EIC records in this regard. As early as 1622 the English factors near Pulicat wrote to their superiors that many weavers and painters (dyers) had offered to follow the English wherever they go. In another correspondence from Fort St. George (Madras), dated 1676, the EIC factors say that the Dutch have their own weavers and painters (dyers) on the coast and wonder why the EIC too should not do so. The reasons for Dutch success in attracting weavers were inducements like paddy at cheap rates, low customs and taxes, and higer wages.[42]

The point about the relatively recent increase in mobility of weavers in the seventeenth century indeed has credence because the early Dutch factors in Pulicat induced weavers and dyers from elsewhere to settle in the vicinity. This phenomenon should, however, be seen within the longue dureé of historical developments in this part of Coromandel: political patrons had always induced weavers to settle in their lands, and the VOC was nothing more than a new player on the scene, albeit one that threatened weavers with punitive measures if they violated contracts (and of course mobility of weavers through migration also ensured survival of the textile industry). So, whether more weavers took to cultivation in the slump years of the late sixteenth century or not is difficult to substantiate. However, we may safely assume not many weavers took to cultivation because, as we have noted, within two decades of the destruction of the Vijayanagara capital (1565) Jan Huyghen van Linschoten listed San Thomé as a major textile exporting centre of Coromandel. It is likely the Portuguese port acted as a magnet to keep weavers and dyers occupied in central Coromandel. Subrahmanyam points out that Pulicat had fallen to the status of a secondary port by the late sixteenth century, but the textiles woven around Pulicat had not lost their market in the Indian Ocean. South Asian merchants who traded around the Indian Ocean world were well–acquainted with the intricacies of markets. They knew what could be sold and where it could be sold. The intra–Asian trade, which supported the VOC in Asia, was based on precedents established by Portuguese and Asian merchants. The VOC learned from their example and came to the Coromandel Coast in search of its textiles.

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[42] Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers*: 120–121.

An early seventeenth-century reference from the VOC archive substantiates the idea that while there was indeed relative instability, the textile industry was also thriving. Writing in 1615, Hans de Haze describes Pulicat and its Dutch lodge and mentions the various kinds of textiles and the process whereby they were procured. Pulicat, Hans de Haze pointed out, provided painted and woven cloth at lower prices than the VOC had encountered in Tierepopelier (Tirupapuliyur) for the Moluccas, Banda, Amboina and Java. The Dutch ordered cloth from merchants who would, in turn, make advance payments to weavers and dyers. Hans de Haze also added that Pulicat was the best place to procure goods for Java because the best dyers lived there. The textiles of the region were still in demand in South–East Asia and the same letter written by Hans de Haze also referred to plundering of the villages where clothes were produced. These included Ponneri, Camonamagalom (Karungali), Narambacca and Paliam, all of which lay within the jurisdiction of the Aravidus in Vellore and were close to San Thomé.[43] The establishment of the VOC in central Coromandel boosted the textile industry around the littoral. Terpstra refers to how Hans Marcelis had induced dyers and weavers skilled in the production of textiles for Java and Malaya to settle at Tirupapuliyur.[44] The populations of villages leased to the European companies (in this context the VOC) included both weavers and dyers.

Until the fifteenth century, it seems that the textile industry remained a part–time occupation for agriculturists. Ramaswamy cites evidence of a fifteenth–century poet's verses that say while men were ploughing the fields, women were busy spinning. Just like the shift in dwellings of weavers from temples to company settlements along the coast, the picture of weavers being part–time agriculturists too changed in the seventeenth century when weaving became a full–time occupation. This dissertation's survey of the weaving villages in the Godavari delta, presented in the Chapter 1, substantiates this: weaving as a full–time occupation was ubiquitous in seventeenth–century Coromandel (including Nagapatnam, as we will see in Chapter 3). The terms of the treaties signed between the VOC and the Aravidu king, presented earlier in this chapter, also allude to the fact that weavers and dyers were contracted to work full–time for the VOC (and other European companies). It remains to be seen to what extent this development can be linked to growing specialisation within the profession, as argued by Ramaswamy for the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Evidence for this can be found in taxes. Earlier references were made to dyers and tailors, but during the Vijayanagara period there are references to taxes on carders who formed a separate professional group.[45]

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[43] NA VOC 1059, Considerations about the Coromandel Coast which concern the interests of the factories of the company: f. 63v.–f. 64v.
[44] Terpstra, *De Vestiging van de Nederlanders*: 141.
[45] Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers*: 67, 69.

Pulicat: A coastal centre in the Bay of Bengal

By the second half of the seventeenth century, VOC political patronage and investments in textile production in the region had begun to restore some commercial viability to the port of Pulicat, with the cloth merchants adapting their networks of production and marketing to Dutch demand in central Coromandel.

In the records of the day, when the Dutch discuss contracts, negotiations or troubles concerning the industry and commerce in Pulicat, the focus is on their own trade; theirs is the richest documentation for this region available to us from the early seventeenth century. Daily registers maintained at the Dutch lodge of Pulicat help us reconstruct some of the trade flowing through the port, and they point to its status as a centre for mainly coastal trade in the Bay of Bengal's oceanic network. The vessels sailing into and out of the port were now predominantly coastal rather than ocean–going crafts trading with Bengal and Orissa.

Regular coastal trade during the 1620s brought in provisions from Orissa. In keeping with the rhythms of the agricultural cycle these goods would arrive in Pulicat in January:[46] ships left from Bengal and Orissa after the winter harvest to reach the various central Coromandel ports in January and February. The trade in food grains was necessary to keep not only the Coromandel ports stocked with rice, but also the pepper growing regions of Malabar in South–western India.[47] Some ships plying trade within the Dutch sphere of operations would stop off at other places on the Coromandel Coast on their way from Pulicat to elsewhere; others sailed from Pulicat to Masulipatnam and then on to Batavia. In February 1624, for example, a Dutch ship offloaded in Pulicat a cargo of fine textiles, saltpetre and slaves (generally ultimately destined for Batavia) before sailing on to Tegenapatnam with a view to procuring more textiles and slaves before sailing to Ejara. This was a clear case of these local centres supplying textiles to markets abroad. The same trend continued in the next year, when a Dutch ship sailed to Tegenapatnam from Pulicat and returned with textiles and slaves.[48] It is possible that the slaves in the latter case was part of preparations for a voyage to Batavia. Another example of sailings between Pulicat and other places on the Coromandel Coast comes from the daily register kept at Pulicat from 1623 to 1625. It tells us how a ship sailed from Pulicat to Masulipatnam to load cargo for the Moluccas and then depart for Batavia.[49]

In the 1620s, ships en route to Masulipatnam from Siam, Tenasserim and Arakan would stop off at Pulicat.[50] During the 1630s, too, we find that Arakan figures as a destination

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[46] NA VOC 1087, Daily register kept at Pulicat from 20.11.1623 to 28.11.1625: f. 181v., f. 198v.
[47] Palat, *The Making of an Indian Ocean World–Economy*: 165–166.
[48] NA VOC 1087 Daily register kept at Pulicat from 20.11.1623 to 28.11.1625: f. 186r., f. 198v., f. 196r.–f.196v. The rhythm of Dutch shipping in Coromandel has been discussed in the previous chapter.
[49] NA VOC 1087, Daily register kept at Pulicat from 20.11.1623 to 28.11.1625: f. 204v.
[50] NA VOC 1087, Daily register kept at Pulicat from 20.11.1623 to 28.11.1625: f. 187r.–f.187v.

in the trade across the Bay of Bengal. Exports to Arakan, where indigenous merchants also traded, included cloth and other merchandise. That Pulicat continued to supply textiles to Batavia is clear from the varied cargo of a Dutch ship that set sail there from Pulicat in October 1632.[51] In October 1645 another Dutch ship followed the same route with a cargo of 339 packs of various sorts of textiles.[52] While the entries in the daily registers tell us that Pulicat was by now only a relatively minor maritime centre in the Bay of Bengal, the Dutch investment in the economy of the region and their demand for mainly textiles and saltpetre would have acted as a fillip for the economy of central Coromandel. On the whole, Pulicat had primarily turned into a coastal port for the VOC in the Bay of Bengal in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Pulicat restores connections with its textile-producing hinterland

Daniel Havart, whose book on seventeenth–century Coromandel was cited in Chapter 1, saw Pulicat as a coastal administrative centre for the VOC rather than as a major port, and he argues that this was what the VOC intended it to be. Though both fine and raw textiles were collected here, oceanic commerce was not a priority for the VOC lodge, the author contends.[53] In this, Havart is only partially correct, because although Pulicat was not as big a port as Masulipatnam, served as the headquarters of the VOC in Coromandel for most of the seventeenth century and indeed mainly functioned as a Dutch relay station in the Indian Ocean, the patronage and protection provided by the VOC restored its connections with the textile–producing hinterland in central Coromandel and around Nellore along the borders of the southern Telugu country, as the following paragraphs will demonstrate.

From their early days on the Coromandel Coast, all European companies depended on local merchants for access to rulers, commodities and inland markets. The middlemen or agents serving the European companies combined many and varied functions. The European presence provided the local merchants with opportunities to enlarge both their economic and non–economic spheres of action and power. Merchant–capitalists (merchants who used their economic clout to influence politics by, for example, farming out revenues of a region or port, thereby strengthening their economic position and social status) generally shared a triad of common characteristics. Firstly, they were large–scale export merchants who operated from many ports in Coromandel through an extended network of kinsfolk by birth or marriage and traded extensively with South–East Asian ports. Secondly, their commercial pre–eminence was reinforced by their contacts with rulers to the point that they emerged as recognized leaders of society in urban centres. Thirdly, they were the all–important links between the Europeans and the local economy through their purchasing of textiles and other commodities

[51] NA VOC 1109, Daily register kept at Fort Geldria (Pulicat) from 24.06.1632 to 25.12.1632: f. 277r., f. 278r., f. 280r.
[52] NA VOC 1161, Daily register kept at Fort Geldria from 23.09.1645 to 19.09.1646: f. 891r.
[53] Havart, *Op–en ondergangh van Cormandel*, *Eerste deel*: 105–106.

for export and their selling of imports. Since the focal point of their contact with the Europeans was textiles, trade conducted by merchant–capitalists after the first quarter of the seventeenth century became synonymous with the textile trade.[54] These figures were major partners in the joint–stock *gezelschappen* or companies formed by the Dutch in the 1660s to facilitate a smoother supply of textiles from inland. As we will also see in Chapter 3, from the 1660s, organizing textile production and supply via these *gezelschappen* became the norm in Pulicat and Nagapatanam.

In a memoir for his successor written in 1663, Laurens Pit, the departing Dutch governor of the Coromandel Coast, details the types of textile that were procured from different parts of the coast and the places around the Indian Ocean to which they were exported. The focus here will be on what the memoir had to say about Pulicat.

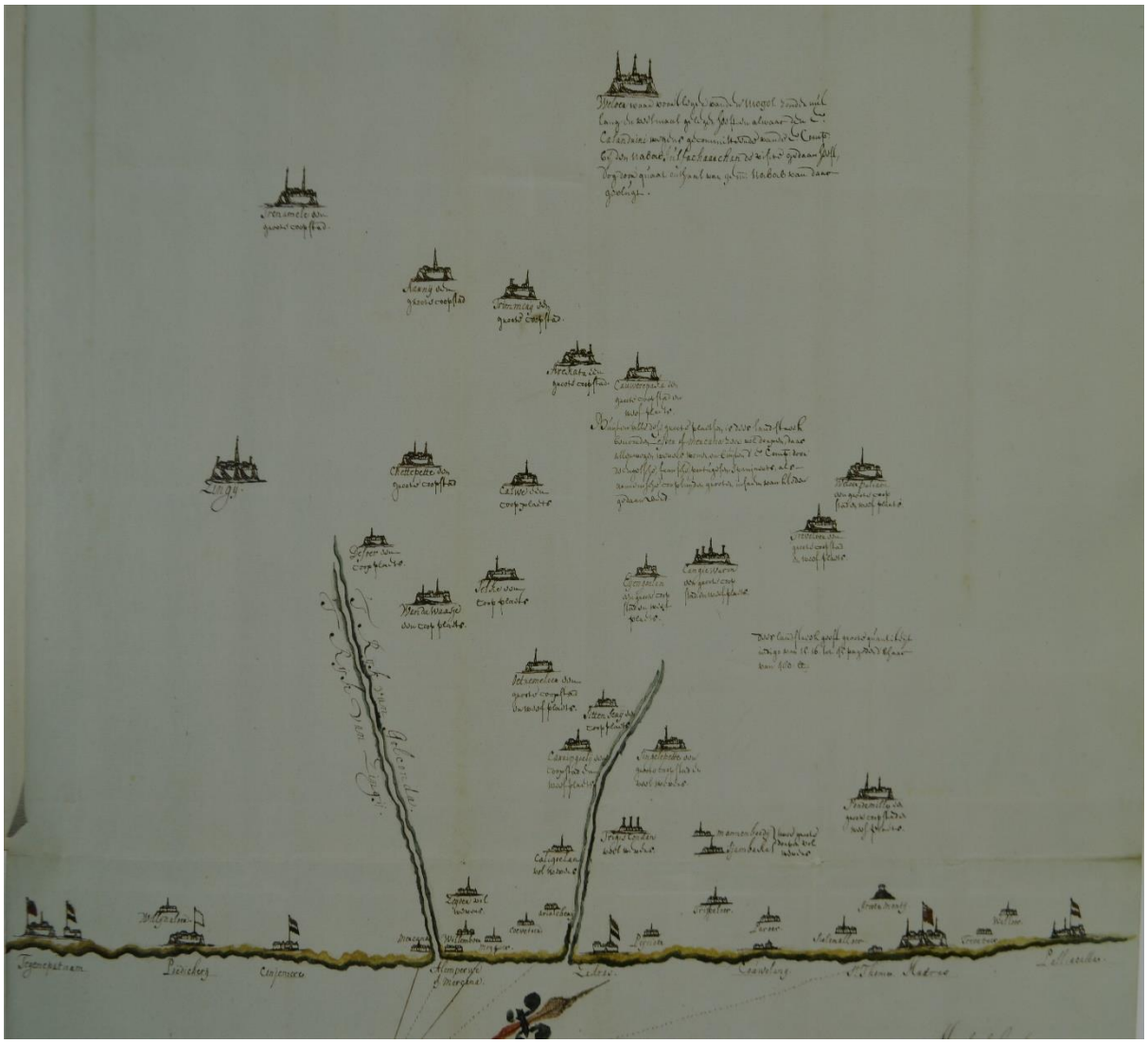
The VOC sealed contracts with merchants who supplied Pulicat with *moeris* (cotton cloth) of all qualities, varying from fine to raw. Fine *bethilles* (literally 'veiling' in Portuguese) and *chiavonis* (a very light white cotton cloth) were mostly produced at a village called Madrepakke located to the north–west of Pulicat. Arrij and nearby villages also produced these varieties. Though a reasonable quantity of *tapesarasses* (multi–coloured skirts), *gobers* (curtains) and *commtijters* were manufactured in Pulicat itself, most came from the village of Ponneri. When demand were high, these textiles were also procured from Kalleturu and Armagaon. Most of the textiles destined for Siam, Cambodia and Pegu were manufactured in the city, but some were brought in from the outskirts of San Thomé. These included *cattawanis* (painted and striped cotton cloth) and *kalamkaris* (painted or block printed textiles). The varieties for exports to Siam and Cambodia were even more in number. These, along with those for trade to Java, were produced mainly in Pulicat, Mylapore around San Thomé, Armagaon and Kalleturu. The same was true of varieties exported to Ceylon, Batavia, Amboina and Japan. Textiles intended for export to the Netherlands, which included *salempores* (plain white and dyed cotton cloth), *parcalles* (plain cotton cloth) and *ginghams* (striped and check cloth), were also collected in Pulicat through contracts with merchants.

Often supplies of cloth brought by different textile merchants varied greatly in terms of quality and length. To resolve this anomaly, the Dutch organized the main suppliers into *gezelschappen* (companies) that contracted to deliver cloth to the Dutch. The memoir speaks of three such companies for different varieties of textiles supplied to the VOC in Pulicat. Firstly, suppliers of cloth for Batavia, Pegu, Malacca and Siam were organized into a company. This enterprise provided the VOC with better qualities of the red–coloured *salempores*, *percalles*, *moeris*, *bethilles* and cotton yarn which were woven in Kalleturu (Kalutara) and Armagaon. Secondly, the region to the south of Kanchipuram and Ponnemilli specialized in the production of guinea cloth. To avoid high prices which could result from competition among different suppliers, the Dutch organized the suppliers of guinea cloth into a company

[54] Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*: 53, 60, 76.

which contracted to supply these textiles to Pulicat. Thirdly, for the same reasons (to avoid competition and high prices), the VOC organized the suppliers of fine *moeris* and *bethilles* into another company. The memoir also lists textiles that were manufactured around Palakollu and Draksharama and shipped from Masulipatnam to Batavia, Japan and other places. It also describes the varieties of textiles exported by the VOC from Tegenapatnam, Sadraspatnam and Nagapattinam – all of which lay to the south of Pulicat.[55] An early eighteenth–century Dutch map depicted this textile–producing hinterland.

Figure 2.1: Textile–producing centres in central Coromandel[56]



[55] NA VOC 1242, Memoir of succession dated 25.06.1663 from Laurens Pit, governor of Coromandel to Cornelis Speelman: f. 793v.–f. 795v., f. 795v.–f. 799r.; the definitions of the textile varieties come from Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*: 98–101.

[56] Jos Gommans, Jeroen Bos and Gijs Kruijtzer eds *Voor–Indie, Perzie, Arabisch Schiereiland. Grote atlas van de Verenigde Oost–Indische Compagnie VI* (Voorburg: Asia Maior, 2010): sheet 350.

Drawn by an anonymous artist around 1703, when the Mughal wars were still going on in the west of the Deccan, this map provided the VOC middlemen with information on the conditions of textile manufacture inland along the stretch of the Coromandel Coast from Pulicat to Tegenapatnam, which also had a Dutch factory. The English settlement of Madras and its French counterpart Pondicherry also feature. The map is particularly intriguing for its reference to contemporary developments. In the wake of Mughal wars the Dutch headquarters of Coromandel had been shifted from Pulicat to Nagapatnam in 1690, at the insistence of Hendrik Adriaan van Reede. At the top, the map describes Vellore as a place where the Mughal army camped for quite some time while a visit by Pieter Calandrini on behalf of the company to the Mughal general Zulfiqar Khan ended unsuccessfully. With its directions for middlemen wanting to find villages of weavers and painters, the map is a visual representation of the hinterland from which Pulicat drew throughout the seventeenth century. In addition, it arguably distinguishes between bigger and smaller centres. Trenamele, Karrij, Trimmerij, Arekata (Arcot), Kaveripaka, Chettepette (Chetpet), Vellorepaliam, Treveloer (Tiruvallur), Eijengoeloer (possibly Ayyangarkulam), Cangiewaron (Kanchipuram), Octremeloer, Singelepette (Chingleput or Chengalapattu) and Pondemillij (possibly Poonamallee) are each described as a *groote coopstad,* a sizeable market town where merchants could buy large quantities of textiles.

It is quite possible that villages which produced textiles were to be found inland from these large towns. Some would have also been religious sites with big temples – continuing the trend of combining economic and religious functions throughout the seventeenth century. The map also mentions several small towns and villages where weavers resided and produced textiles. They include Desoer (Desur), Wan de Waasje (Wandiwash, the site of a famous Anglo–French battle in the second half of the eighteenth century), Pelke and Pitten Serrij (possibly Pattancherry). The text on the map locates this entire area to the south–west of Pulicat beyond Kanchipuram as a zone inhabited by numerous weavers who supplied textiles to the English and French companies and private Portuguese merchants. The merchants and middlemen for the VOC would take their advance payments and venture out to the villages along the coast and inland, where the profusion of weaving villages was a huge pool of resources waiting to be tapped.

Although all of this does not dislodge Daniel Havart's contention that Pulicat had little export trade compared to Masulipatnam and confirms the idea of the port being mainly a Dutch relay station in the seventeenth century, it, nevertheless, points to the significance of the textile industry of central Coromandel around Pulicat within the VOC's sphere of operations– a point that is somewhat neglected in Havart's survey of Coromandel. In Pulicat we find the Dutch drawing from a variety of sources for diverse markets around the Indian Ocean. There is no reason to doubt the degree of specialization or Dutch penetration into the networks of production and assemblage. The choice of sites was governed by close access to the ports and transport on small craft. While some of the textiles were produced in Pulicat itself (during periods of exceptional pressure on the region, as the next section shows), most

came from around San Thomé and Mylapore. The farthest point inland reached by Dutch suppliers operating out of Pulicat was possibly somewhere south of Kanchipuram and Ponnemilli. We find the amazing resilience of Ponneri as a centre of production from the early seventeenth century. These centres of production lay either to the south or southwest of Pulicat. It can therefore be argued that in the second half of the seventeenth century the VOC successfully restored the connections between Pulicat and its old textile–supplying hinterland.

In Pulicat's sixteenth–century heyday it shipped out textiles from production centres in the region around Nellore, in the southern border of Telugu country,[57] and it is quite possible that VOC had ambitions to bring this zone under the port's sphere of influence. Whether or not they succeeded in doing so is difficult to say with any certainty due to the cryptic nature of the primary sources on this matter. A Dutch official named Pieter de Lange travelled from Pulicat to the diamond mines in the sultanate of Golconda and submitted a report of his journey to the governor. En route north from Pulicat to the mines in Kollur, De Lange came across two villages named Mirmalur and Nulupari where chialops and ginghams (see glossary) were woven, and later he also encountered a big weaving settlement at Mutusera which specialized in rolled cloth, *chelas*, *madaphons*, *rumals* (handkerchief) and *lungis* (cloth worn from the waist to almost the toes by tying it around) for export to Persia. Mutusera attracted many Muslim merchants from Golconda and Bijapur, and De Lange writes that even during the phase of strong Portuguese presence it exported clothes to Java, Malacca, Cambodia, Siam, Pegu and Tenasserim. Nulupari, where the English used to buy cloth possibly ignited De Lange's imagination because while there he bought several samples of cloth to present to the Dutch governor of Coromandel and writes in quite enthusiastic tones about the idea of trading it for substantial quantities of copper and tin from Pegu.[58] The villages through which De Lange passed were to the north of Pulicat and most probably in the region of Nellore, which, as Arasaratnam points out, was famous for its fine textiles for the South–East Asian market.[59]

It seems likely that the Dutch were looking to expand further into the hinterland to tap into supplies of textiles and they possibly considered bringing these villages into their range of operations. The products manufactured here could have gone to either Masulipatnam or Pulicat. Since Mutusera produced clothes for Persia, its products possibly found their way to ships departing from Masulipatnam, while those from Nulupari would probably have been shipped from either Pulicat or Masulipatnam. Though this is very much speculative and difficult to corroborate, it offers a plausible insight into the textile industry to the north of Pulicat. In short there was a substantial field to choose from and the outcome

[57] Palat, *The Making of an Indian Ocean World–Economy*: 166.
[58] NA VOC 1242, Report dated 25.03.1663 by Pieter de Lange to Laurens Pit, governor of Coromandel, about the diamond mines in Golconda: f. 859r.–f. 859v.
[59] Arasaratnam: *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*: 55.

depended largely on the ability of the Dutch factors to penetrate the hinterland via middlemen and politico–economic conditions in the region. The economic and demographic composition of the hinterland of Masulipatnam can be reproduced with the help of reports prepared by the VOC officials and other travellers, but similar accounts pertaining to Pulicat are hard to come by.

The overall picture is of a rich hinterland producing textiles for export around the Indian Ocean. Pulicat's survival under the VOC belies the idea of decline that we tend to associate with a Coromandel port when a major imperial patron vanishes. Lines could be, and in this case were, redrawn, with 'smaller' patrons, in the form of *nayaka* rulers, who tried to resuscitate the economy. Rather than simply arguing that after the fall of Vijayanagara a decline set in around Pulicat, we would be better advised to examine the kind of changes that political crises brought to this port–hinterland complex. As we have noted, it turned mainly into a Dutch port and exported textiles across the Indian Ocean as a part of the VOC's operations. The European trading companies of the Dutch, the English and the French successfully exploited the potential of the region with their investments. The stretch of coast from Tegenapatnam to Pulicat was one with which the Dutch were quite familiar, thanks not only to the European managers who would travel to various VOC factories, but also their indigenous middlemen who were well–versed with the conditions inland. The establishment of Fort Geldria and the Dutch investment into the economy and commerce of the region played an important in part in helping Pulicat survive as a reasonably strong port city of seventeenth–century Coromandel.

If such was the picture of the hinterland of Pulicat, how did wars and political unrest affect it in the seventeenth century? The following section tries to explore the impact of wars on Pulicat, in a bid to build a hypothesis on the relation between wars and the economy of the Coromandel Coast.

2.4 Regional response to political instability and wars

As explained in Chapter 1, a section with this subtitle appears in each chapter and serves as a building block towards a hypothesis on how ports and their hinterland in South India responded to wars and political instability. It should be noted, however, that not all these sections engage with the same theme. In the context of Masulipatnam, we looked at the impact of wars on the connecting nodes of its hinterland, particularly the link with Surat. Now, in the context of Pulicat, we will look at: how some of the effects of warfare in the surrounding region tell us what kind of developments could be expected during Aurangzeb's southern campaigns; the ways in which the port, supported by Dutch patronage, survived a temporary decline in the wake of the weakening of the Vijayanagara Empire; and the differences between the port–hinterland complexes in Pulicat and Masulipatnam.

Political conditions in central and southern Coromandel were mostly unstable for the first half of the seventeenth century. In and around Pulicat this instability was a part of the scenario from the very outset of the establishment of the VOC's factory. Their troubles started

with a siege of the factory in 1614 and were followed by a succession struggle after the death of Venkata II, Aravidu ruler of Vellore. The Dutch held a neutral course during such succession struggles. In the early stages of the succession struggle the security offered by Fort Geldria led to an increase in Pulicat's population and trading activity. Manufacturers of cloth moved there in numbers great enough to cause an excess in supply of patterned cloth; more than the VOC could purchase. And in 1618 and 1819 the Dutch even deployed a naval force to protect Pulicat's trade. Thirty Indian vessels visited Pulicat in this period, while none called at the neighbouring port of San Thomé. Though the wars hit production of cloth around Pulicat quite badly in 1619, enough was produced in the city itself to ensure adequate supply.[60]

This instance points to two features which repeated themselves during the Mughal wars in the late seventeenth–century. Firstly, the fort in Pulicat acted as a haven not only for the Dutch, but also for weavers. Merchants in South India tended to prefer the security of fortified towns, hence arguably the weavers saw the VOC not as an aberration in the political landscape of central Coromandel, but simply as a new patron whose political clout offered a safe environment for trade. As noted in Chapter 1, flight from disorder to order was a traditional feature of the rural economy in India and it ensured resilience of economic production, in this case the textile industry. Secondly, though the European settlements could offer protection, they could do little to mitigate the devastating consequences of warfare. Crucially, the Dutch could not have sustained their exports solely through production within the city. Production within Pulicat could continue as long as raw materials required for production were available, but whenever their stocks got low the Dutch would have been compelled to negotiate with merchants for fresh supplies. If wars disrupted the highways and caused a dip in supplies it would have affected the exports from Pulicat.

In the 1620s disturbances emanating from wars and a struggle of succession continued to afflict Pulicat, its surroundings and the region up to Gingee. As a result, in 1625 Dutch trade ceased almost completely in Pulicat due to poor demand for the company's merchandise and the necessity to transact in cash. Tapan Raychaudhuri argues that it was a shortage of capital rather than supplies that brought this about. The turmoil barely abated in the 1630s, and it continued to impact on Dutch trade: anyone transporting goods along the highways connecting Pulicat to the hinterland were vulnerable to attack, supplies of clothes were not reaching the VOC and middlemen refused to enter into contracts. The worst of all was possibly 1638 when in despair the Dutch abandoned the island of Erikan and the village of Wansiwake (Wansiwarom of the Dutch sources), both attached to Pulicat. These years also coincided with invasions of the coast by Bijapur and Golconda which simply added to the woes as merchants did not venture out on unsafe roads to the coast to buy the company's imports.[61]

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[60] Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*: 35.
[61] Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*: 36, 43–45.

Before quoting their prices to the middlemen, weavers and painters would consider the threat and insecurity posed by wars as well as availability of food, and textile prices would have been high during wars. This phenomenon would manifest itself again during Aurangzeb's southern campaigns. As we will see in Chapters 4 and 5, the VOC regularly bemoaned the high prices of textiles during the Mughal wars. Though economic production must have suffered from the unsafe transport network, it did not disappear altogether. During the 1620s and 1630s, the VOC expanded its operations into other regions around the Bay of Bengal. To achieve this, the Dutch would have had to invest more bullion in Coromandel, doubtless increasing incentives for production on the coast. By this we allude to the need to procure textiles that could be traded to mainland and maritime South-East Asia; expanding maritime networks meant the VOC had to explore more textile-producing villages in central Coromandel and thus increase their investments in production of cloth. Ironically, corroboration is provided by the flight of weavers from Ponneri near Pulicat who had contracted to supply patterned cloth to the company.[62] While their flight reflects the ongoing political instability, it also points to the probability that the Dutch continued investing in textile production in central Coromandel. When speaking of decline or destruction due to warfare, it is therefore important to temper our arguments through an examination of whether or not the decline was absolute, the connections between the coast and hinterland had been irrevocably broken, economic production had completely stopped, and incentives for economic production had dried up.

In the 1640s the configurations of political power around Pulicat changed once more, when the sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda repeatedly invaded the central and southern parts of the Coromandel Coast. In 1646, the prime minister of the Golconda sultanate Mir Muhammed Said (a.k.a. Mir Jumla) occupied Pulicat and adjacent regions. As noted in the introduction, he defected to the Mughals in 1655, at which point the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan conferred upon him the lands around Pulicat as his *jagir*. After the death of Mir Muhammed Said the territory was reabsorbed into the sultanate of Golconda,[63] and remained under its control until Golconda itself was annexed by Aurangzeb in 1687. This period of relative peace in the region following Golconda's annexation of adjoining lands, accompanied by increased VOC investment, would have boosted the textile industry that supplied Pulicat. In this context, we may recall Laurens Pit's (the VOC governor of Coromandel) memoir of succession providing details on the textile industry of central Coromandel cited earlier in the chapter – it was written in the 1660s.

Stability had also played a role in the growth of Pulicat as a port and it is evidenced by the proliferation of settlements in the town. Sanjay Subrahmanyam argues that in the early seventeenth century the population of Pulicat dwindled significantly, and that this was an

[62] This builds on the discussion in Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*: 44–45.
[63] Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*: 46–51.

aspect of the general decline suffered by the port in the wake of the disintegration of the Vijayanagara Empire.[64] Evidence offered by the Dutch, on the other hand, points to a growth of population in the seventeenth century. In this respect, a point that we must remember is the difference in the temporal points of evidence proffered by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and this dissertation: while Subrahmanyam's evidence comes from the early seventeenth century, the evidence cited in the dissertation to argue in favour of a revival in Pulicat's status dates from the second half of the seventeenth century. So, there is not a contradiction between the two of them. In his report on the various VOC settlements on the Coromandel Coast in the early seventeenth century, Hans de Haze notes that the population of Pulicat was sparse and that the king (of Vellore) had agreed to allow a part of the city to be populated by Dutch and another part by indigenous people.[65] It is this reference that Subrahmanyam cites to argue in favour of a decline in Pulicat. Though this letter does point that the population of Pulicat had become sparse, it also speaks of efforts to resettle the lands. Such efforts bore some fruits by the second half of the seventeenth century. In the 1660s, a Dutch traveller found the city to the south of Fort Geldria to be full of houses inhabited by indigenous people.[66] That this indigenous part of Pulicat was settled until the late seventeenth century is indirectly revealed to us in another Dutch source: in a letter written in 1688 to the directors of the VOC in Amsterdam, Hendrik Adriaan van Reede mentions that company officials had built houses and streets to the south of the fort opposite the indigenous part of the town.[67]

Of course, this interpretation of the situation is based on Dutch perspectives, but it does show that at least the port city itself had attracted some indigenous population due to its trade and the patronage of the VOC. There was no absolute decline in Pulicat and human agency had played an important a role in reviving its fortunes. The ruling authorities were willing to invite the Europeans to settle in their territories and the Dutch were keen to invest into a port–hinterland complex. The terms of the treaty between the VOC and the Aravidu ruler reflect their intentions to settle a port that had been unsettled. Changes in politico–economic conditions made and unmade ports in the Deccan and South India. The level of keenness of ruling authorities and merchants alike to invest in and trade from a port depends entirely on the surrounding politico–economic landscape. The conditions of the period are instrumental to the development or otherwise of any port and its corresponding hinterland, and it is clear that in the case of Pulicat investments brought significant improvements to the port's fortunes.

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[64] Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*: 24.
[65] NA VOC 1059, Considerations about the Coromandel Coast which concern the interests of the factories of the company: f. 63v.
[66] Breet and Barend–van Haeften, *De Oost-Indische voyagie van Wouter Schouten*: 272–273.
[67] NA VOC 1477, Letter dated 01.12.1688 from Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, Pulicat to the Gentlemen Seventeen: f. 152v.

Atiya Habeeb Kidwai writes that the growth environment for a port is never static because it is determined by human factors operating at global, national and local levels. As an economic concept rather than a geographical one, a port's 'hinterland' represents layers of commodity flows connected by transport, markets, shipping and port facilities. Moreover, a port is often unable to lay exclusive claim on any part of its geographical hinterland, since an inland area may function as the hinterland to any number of ports.[68] If we consider these to be the defining features of a hinterland, how should Pulicat and its hinterland be characterized?

Pulicat's hinterland overlapped with those of other ports with a European presence, such as Madras (English) and Pondicherry (French). The eighteenth–century Dutch map [Fig. 2.1] that appears earlier in this chapter clearly shows that the area to the south–west of Pulicat beyond Kanchipuram had a dense concentration of weaving villages that supplied the English East India Company and the French East India Company. This was a zone whose textile products were oriented for overseas exports and the Dutch middlemen and merchant–capitalists served as feeders of funds and goods between the port and the layers of commodity production inland. In other words, they linked the coast with the geographical hinterland. Pulicat's integration into the VOC's intra–Asian trading network brought it into the economic hinterland of ports in South–East Asia.

Although it very much remained a relay station for the VOC in their intra–Asian trade in the seventeenth century, Pulicat became connected to economic nodes throughout the Indian Ocean region. The production, procurement and marketing of textiles around Pulicat was marked by the company's economic connections in the Indian Ocean and throughout the globe. The products of central Coromandel, mainly textiles, were tapped by the Dutch for exporting to markets in South–East Asia to draw spices. The overseas markets had specific requirements, as we have seen in this chapter and that points to the sheer specialization of the industry. Textiles exported from Pulicat to Java and Amboina helped the VOC acquire spices, while some of those shipped to Pegu, Siam and Malacca might have gone on to China and Japan via other merchants.

Indigenous political authorities in central Coromandel strove to utilize the flow of commodities through Pulicat (and by extension other ports) to add to the wealth of their kingdoms. For the VOC, the Pulicat was not only a place to cheaply procure many varieties of textiles for their South–East Asian markets, but also a prestigious port. In Hendrik Adriaan van Reede's 1688 instructions for Johannes Bacherus, who had been selected as an envoy to the camp of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, he relates that the Dutch had enjoyed the possession of the fort since the early seventeenth century. In no uncertain terms he asserts

[68] Atiya Habeeb Kidwai, 'Conceptual and Methodological Issues: Ports, Port Cities and Port–Hinterlands' in: *Ports and Their Hinterlands in India (1700–1950)*, ed. Indu Banga (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992): 12, 18–19.

that Dutch had settled those lands long before their annexation by the Golconda sultanate and could therefore not fall under the jurisdiction of the Mughals who had conquered Golconda.[69]

Masulipatnam and Pulicat in the seventeenth century: A comparison

The port–hinterland complex which we encounter at Pulicat is quite different from that of its northern counterpart Masulipatnam, the premier oceanic port of seventeenth century Coromandel. Masulipatnam was not dominated by any specific merchant group. Indigenous, Arabic, Persian and Armenian merchants all operated there, and the Dutch, English and French trading companies all had lodges in the port. Pulicat, on the other hand, belonged exclusively to the VOC.

The second and biggest difference between the two ports was the flow of commodities they handled: while Masulipatnam was an entrepot for goods being transhipped from South–East Asia to Persia and West Asia or to Malacca from where those were transhipped to China and Japan, Pulicat was mainly a local centre that catered for VOC–controlled foreign markets. Masulipatnam's connections with the inland market were far wider that those of Pulicat; as noted earlier, Masulipatnam was part of a commercial arc that connected it with Surat on the western coast of India. The subsidiary economic infrastructure that supported these ports were characterized by these different functions. Pulicat had a small shipyard close to Fort Geldria, whereas Masulipatnam had a big shipyard at Narsapore in the Godavari delta where vessels of between 300 and 400 tonnes were launched.

The third significant difference between Masulipatnam and Pulicat was the realtive location of the textile industry. Unlike Masulipatnam, where the textile industry was so heavily concentrated along the river valleys of the Godavari and Krishna delta, Pulicat was mostly supplied by sources close to the port. Locating the industry far away from the coast was not a sensible option in central Coromandel not only because of the logistical difficulties in balancing the supply of and demand for rice but also because of the modes of communication. Since the industry was close to the port, it was easier to transport products. In this sense, the textile industry around Pulicat was intensive.

Compared to Masulipatnam and Surat, Pulicat must have appeared somewhat lacklustre to the enquiring eyes of travellers, given the relatively few pages they devote to the smaller port in their writings. We can infer as much from the general discussion in the itineraries of Jean–Baptiste Tavernier, Francois Bernier and Francois Martin, all of whom travelled in South India in the seventeenth century. The travelogues of Wouter Schouten and Philippus Baldaeus are exceptions because, as Dutchmen, they looked at Pulicat with pride

[69] NA VOC 1450, Instructions dated 22.09.1688 from Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, in Pulicat for Johannes Bacherus, delegated to visit the northern factories of Coromandel and to greet the great Mughal (Aurangzeb) on behalf of the company: f. 966v.–f.967r.

and thus spoke of it in some detail.[70] The attention paid by travellers to Masulipatnam partly explains the rich itineraries available to us of journeys from Masulipatnam to Golconda and Surat. Jean Deloche argues that unlike northern India, where the rulers developed a keen interest in the maintenance of highways, the transit ways were of a more uncertain character in the Deccan and South India, and accounts of them vary considerably from one traveller to another.[71] The shifting nature of roadways might be another reason why no descriptions of highways from Pulicat to the interior survive in the VOC archive. Though there were regular connections with Vellore and villages to the west and south of Pulicat where textiles were produced, no thorough account of them has survived.

The decline of Pulicat in the wake of the disintegration of the Vijayanagara Empire was far from terminal. Investments into the region and efforts to settle it contributed to the survival of the local textile industry and exports. The volume of its oceanic commerce might not have been anywhere near that of Masulipatnam or Surat, but demand for the products of Pulicat's textile industry was successfully tapped by the VOC to forge connections with South–East Asia. Human agencies sustained by local and global economic forces combined to change the fortunes of Pulicat. In the late 1680s the political landscape of Pulicat changed once more when the Mughals annexed Golocnda. For almost a decade the theatre of Mughal wars was quite close to Pulicat: in their pursuit of fugitive Maratha leader Rajaram, for example, the Mughal armies moved between the Coromandel Coast and western Deccan, and during the siege of Gingee (1689–1698) the ports of central and southern Coromandel (including Pulicat and Nagapatnam) found the war almost on their doorsteps. The impact of these wars in central and southern Coromandel in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries will be examined in Chapter 5.

[70] This notion of pride is present even in Heert Terpstra's book which we have cited earlier in this chapter. In the early twentieth century, he wrote a book on the establishment of the VOC in Coromandel. In his book he has used the trope of ours, i.e., Dutch versus the Portuguese.

[71] Deloche, *Transport and Communications in India, Land Transport*: 62–63.