

## INTRODUCTION.

### I

This final instalment of the Diary covers a period of just over a year, from January 1760; to the diarist's death on January 12, 1761. But for the first two months of the year we have a record of ten days only ; and though from March 1 to September 24 the Diary runs without any material break, it there comes to an abrupt conclusion, and the notes of January 10 to 12 of the following year, recording Pillai Avargal's final illness are by another hand, probably that of his nephew. For the greater part of the present volume, the text on which the translation rests is no longer that of the Madras transcript, but that of the original Diary, unearthed by M. Singaravelou, now *Conservateur* of the Pondichery archives, to whom the editor is greatly indebted for much information and assistance. Nor can this work be concluded without cordially grateful acknowledgments of the help afforded by Mr. B. Venkatarama Ayyar, the editor's assistant in the Madras Record Office, in preparing the second half of the Diary for the Press.

For some years, as the patient reader will remember, the diarist had exhibited signs of failing health. At the beginning of 1760 he

had been confined to his house for a lengthy period, described variously as lasting two and four months. He was, it seems, suffering from pyorrhœa; and the dysentery which often follows in its train gradually outwore his strength. He was only in his fifty-second year when he died; but most probably the anxieties of the times, and the privations of the siege hastened his end. Sick and weary as he was, he can have had small desire to chronicle those last dismal months, in which the English squadron in defiance of the monsoon maintained its sleepless watch before Pondichery while Coote drew closer and closer his encircling lines. On October 6 a party from the squadron, commanded by Captain William Newson and Lieutenant Isaac Ourry, cut out the *Hermione* and the *Baleine* from under the guns of the fortress, with the loss of five killed and sixteen wounded.<sup>1</sup> Next month the *Compagnie des Indes*, which had slipped away to Tranquebar in the hope of fetching up a store of provisions, was captured in the Tranquebar roads.<sup>2</sup> Early in December Coote opened his batteries. On the first day of the New Year a cyclone burst upon besiegers and besieged alike. Many persons were killed;

<sup>1</sup> *Military Consultations*, October 11 and 18, 1760.

<sup>2</sup> Letters from Coote and Haldane of November 7 and 10, *ap. Military Consultations*, November 9 and 13, 1760.

four of the English ships were dismasted, and three were driven ashore while three foundered; and the tents, huts and stores of the English army were damaged or destroyed.<sup>1</sup> But the squadron reassembled under jury-masts; the batteries reopened; and no French vessels appeared to break the blockade. Within the walls provisions had become so scarce that the soldiers' rations had been cut down to half a measure of rice, a loaf made of palmyra fruit, and 8 ounces of pounded maggoty biscuit every other day, with an issue of meat—camel, horse-flesh, or whatever could be got—once a week.<sup>2</sup> At last, four days after Ranga Pillai had been carried to the burning-place, Coote's grenadiers replaced the French guard at the Valudâvûr Gate and the English flag was hoisted over Fort Louis.

But though the diarist could not chronicle the final disasters which swept away Dupleix' dreams of national greatness and his own hopes of power and wealth, yet he remains the only person who shows us the beginning of the end through Indian eyes. Naturally enough we hear but little of the military aspect of the siege. Tactical move and counter-move have no place in the old *Courtier's*

<sup>1</sup> Letters from Coote of January 2 and 5, *ap. Military Consultations*, January 4 and 7, 1761.

<sup>2</sup> Orme MSS., *Various*, 27, p. 52.

Diary. But he noted clearly enough the gradual spread of demoralisation, the mutual jealousies and suspicions of the leaders, the growing indiscipline of the rank and file, the insolence of the King's officers, the incompetence of the Company's servants, and the rising alarm of the Indian inhabitants as they saw the power in which they had trusted for protection failing even to protect itself.

One thousand seven hundred and sixty was indeed a year of misfortune at Pondichery. It opened with the decisive defeat of Wandiwash, which prepared the way for the siege. Through the earlier part of the year men were hoping against hope for the reappearance of d'Aché and his squadron from Mauritius; but the only vessels that escaped the blockade of Admiral Stevens were the frigates that in October were cut out of the roads, and the *Compagnie des Indes*, which was converted into a floating battery to add to the sea-ward defences. From time to time rumours ran through the settlement, that the squadron had been heard of at Mahé or Tranquebar, and would appear in a few days at farthest; but none of these had the least foundation in fact. One day late in March the French and Indian inhabitants thronged the beach to watch eight or ten vessels approaching from the southward, believing that d'Aché had come at last;

but the ships proved to be only the English squadron. Again in July Lally heard that the English had hoisted the signal for a general action and inferred that French ships must be at hand; but the long-shore wind brought no sounds of a cannonade to his anxious ears. Better still than the arrival of the squadron would be news from Europe of a victorious peace that would set matters in their old train, permit the rebuilding of dilapidated fortunes, and withdraw the control of the King's hated lieutenant-general; but though the war had opened well enough for the French, its later stages were marked by persistent defeat in other regions as in India, and peace was not to come in time to save Pondichery from complete destruction.

Meanwhile an ever-growing pressure, financial and military, had to be faced; nor was this facilitated by the dissensions reigning between the King's and the Company's representatives. Lally was to pay dearly for betraying his suspicions of Leyrit, the Governor, and yet leaving him still in office. It was generally believed (and probably with reason) that Leyrit exerted himself to prevent the success of Lally's schemes for raising money. Lally asserted that Leyrit had transformed his plan of levying money from the Councillors' prosperous dubashes into an

oppressive tax upon the poorer Indians, and drove the Governor from his ante-chamber with insult. The enmity extended naturally to Dubois, Lally's agent for finance; and stories were spread abroad that he was swindling the sepoys of their pay. Sore with defeat and impending ruin, both sides were eager to believe the worst of each other. Courtin's conduct, for instance, exhibits the violence of weak men in difficult circumstances. He quarrels first with Leyrit, then with Lally, and exposes himself to a humiliating insult from an officer of the *Régiment de Lorraine*. Râmalingam, who was acting as purveyor to the army, was beaten. The confusion of castes, which Ranga Pillai had long before lamented, grew worse; and his conservative mind was shocked by the sight of scavengers and Pariahs entering the Fort unchecked on horse-back. Violent attacks on Lally were posted in the public places. The annual festivities lapsed or were shorn of half their splendour. There was no bonfire this year on St. John's Eve, and even the King's name-day was meanly celebrated.

To supplement the military resources of the French the militia was embodied; even the Governor and Councillors were forced to serve; and a disorderly parade took place, at which the Governor displayed his military

inexperience, while the Company's servants refused to serve outside the Fort. Razâ Sâhib and the chief merchants, including the diarist, were obliged to accept responsibility for the pay of additional sepoys. At first this was only expected to last till d'Aché's squadron arrived; but as time went on, and the ships did not appear, the obligation was continued; a plan for dividing the cost among a larger number of persons fell through; and Ranga Pillai was constantly vexed by the sepoys demanding their pay or sitting *dharna* at his doors.

Attempts were made to enlist on the side of the French the rising military talents of Haidar 'Alî. Ever since 1752 the Mysoreans had desired vengeance on Muhammad 'Alî for having broken his promise to deliver Trichinopoly into their hands. In the hope of getting the place they had contributed materially to the financial needs of Dupleix; and now it was hoped to buy their support by the cession of Tyâgar and the promise of French help in their projected expansion southward when the English had been defeated. Noronha, Bishop of Halicarnassus, conducted the negotiations to a successful conclusion. A body of Mysoreans under Haidar's brother-in-law, evaded the detachment sent by Coote against it, and reached Pondichery. A ball

was given in honour of their arrival, but, according to the only writer who to my knowledge has described it, it was a dismal affair. The Mysoreans were unfavourably impressed by the scarcity of funds and the scarcity of food. They paid scant heed to the French authorities. Quarrels took place between the French and their new allies, who (Ranga Pillai notes) treated the French officers and people of the Government more like dogs than men; and they speedily withdrew, resolute not to entangle themselves in a failing cause. A Maratha envoy likewise appeared upon the scene, but, beyond the flattery which he administered to the diarist, brought nothing useful or pleasant to the besieged.

While Lally was thus unable to find allies to support his cause, he was similarly hampered by a lack of money. As has been seen in the previous volume, the pressure had been severe; but now it was severer still. Many pages of the Diary for 1760 are occupied with the lists that were drawn up, the assessments that could not be realized, the merchants and others who were kept in prison in order to oblige them to contribute. Even the diarist's nephew, Appâvu, was thus detained, though in his case it seems to have been rather to preserve an appearance of impartiality than to compel him to produce what he had not got.

But Ranga Pillai was obliged to make a further contribution, which he could only provide by borrowing. A certain amount was got together by these forced loans; but it was not much. Pondichery had never been wealthy, save perhaps for those two fat years when Dupleix succeeded for a brief and transient moment in winning fortune to his side. Ever since the town had been steadily decaying. What riches there were were concentrated in the hands of a few Company's servants and their dubashes; and on these sources Lally never succeeded in laying hands, much as he desired to. As a last resort, a committee was appointed by a great council of notables to collect what could be got from the European inhabitants. Some plate was collected and sent to the mint; but here too no great resources were to be found. No one, Indian or European, was willing to lend money to a ruined Company.

Money and other valuables might be sent away or hidden. The last pages of Ranga Pillai's own Diary are concerned with the arrangements which he made to send some money and jewels belonging to his women-folk out of Pondichery to the Dutch settlement of Sadras, whither they were conveyed by the masula-boat carrying Robert Sloper, an English Company's servant who had been captured

at Fort St. David and who was now released on parole. Sloper or his servants doubtless were well rewarded for their complaisance. But grain and cattle could not be similarly disposed of. As food grew scarcer, we hear of supplies being commandeered; searches were made from house to house, and what was found was carried off. Under these growing discouragements—demands for money which could not be got, food scarce and dear with famine in near prospect, and the approaching terror of a bombardment—an exodus naturally set in. The previous forced loans had driven many away. Their renewal, and the well-grounded fear that poverty itself would be no certain protection against demands backed by threats of imprisonment, must have made all Indians anxious to quit Pondichery, save the very few, such as Ranga Pillai himself, whose hopes and reputation were inextricably bound up with the fate of the French. And indeed from the point of view of their Governors, their departure was in the circumstances no loss. It meant the fewer mouths to feed and consequently a few days' longer defence, which might just enable relief to come in time. In this respect Pondichery was worse off than its rival Madras. At Pondichery Fort Louis lay surrounded by the city, and it was impossible to limit the

defence to the citadel; whereas at Madras Fort St. George, ever since the evil days of 1746, stood alone, and when a year earlier Lally had tried to take it, the Company's Government had made no attempt whatever to defend the Black Town, but had concentrated their defence upon the Fort, and had had to lay in stores of provisions for the garrison alone. But when danger of imprisonment and certainty of starvation faced the Indian inhabitants of Pondichery, including the people from the villages outside the walls driven within by fear of Coote's cavalry, they found escape difficult. They feared to take the roads passing by the English camp, lest they should be plundered of what they could carry off with them, and when they attempted to pass southwards, they found the river unfordable. Nevertheless by one way or other most of the dwellers in Pondichery had trickled out of the place before Coote opened his batteries or Ranga Pillai had laid down the pen.

## II

Viewed as a whole, this Diary which covers almost a quarter of a century is a curiously mixed document. No one will ever read it for its own sake. Yet it has great historical importance. Its period was

singularly critical; and the struggle which at first brought Ranga Pillai killa and jaghir, then made him renter of a wide tract of the Carnatic, and at last ruined him, was no less than this: whether India was to be dominated from Paris or London. During the greater part of these twenty-five years, the momentous struggle was being fought out in South India and upon those sullen waters which roll unceasingly on the pale, palm-fringed sands of the Coromandel Coast. Of the men and circumstances of the time Ranga Pillai was a close and interested observer; and he was the only Indian observer whose views are directly, positively known to us. No doubt there were many whose memoirs would have been more precious. Chandâ Sâhib's thoughts upon Dupleix, Yusuf Khân's opinions on the campaigns of Lally, would have revealed important aspects of the conflict. But they could hardly have displayed more fully and closely the Indian attitude towards events which were so deeply to influence the course of modern Indian history. For a considerable time the diarist was the foremost Indian merchant in an essentially mercantile community, and the main intermediary between the Governor and the Indians whom he governed. His business it was to know all that was going forward in the Indian quarter, to learn the

news that the bankers' agents received from their correspondents, to watch the course of trade and feel the pulse of sentiment. For a considerable time too he played the part of Foreign Secretary to the Governor, translating letters or getting them translated, suggesting appropriate answers, settling the minutiae of Oriental etiquette, and himself corresponding with distant ministers. He belonged too to a family which had been peculiarly honoured by the French authorities. Two members of it, Nainiya Pillai and Guruva Pillai, had in turn occupied Ranga Pillai's office of Chief Dubash; and the latter had visited France, to complain of injustice received from Hébert, the Governor, and had there received not only redress but also the ribbon of St. Michel. He was then for a considerable number of years the foremost Hindu resident of Pondichery, better informed on political matters than any other. We may then infer that his Diary probably contains more authentic detail of a political nature than that which any other Indian at Pondichery could have kept. For instance it records the contents of many letters which were addressed to the Governor by the Country powers, and which passed through the diarist's hands.

Secondly Ranga Pillai is an exact and accurate witness when he speaks to what

passed within his own knowledge. It is true that he often fills pages with matter of a different nature. Many of his statements are repetitions of mere bazaar rumour. But even these are recorded in all probability accurately enough, and, however false they may be in fact, do give us the actual gossip of the place as it passed from tongue to tongue, and enable us to judge how the leading events of the time appeared in Indian eyes.

Thirdly the Diary gives us here and there—it would have been better reading had it done so oftener—curious little vignettes which enable us to visualise the past. For instance in the present volume we see the Governor and Council following the coffin of M. Barthélemy in due funeral procession, but whispering and laughing together as they went over the false news, just received, that Mr. Pigot, the Governor of Madras, had been taken prisoner. Another instance, relating to a more notable figure, is the description of how Duplex, on the march in January, 1748, against Fort St. David, listened to the signal guns from Pondichery announcing that the English squadron was in sight and that he must return, and then jumping from his horse clenched his fists and stamped upon the ground with disappointment. Leyrit too appears in the course of these pages with

great clearness—a solemn man hardly ever condescending to make a joke, overconscious of his dignity and importance, engrossed in his private interests, and hurt in these two most sensitive points by Lally's sarcasms and ill-success. Lally too, the passionate headlong Irishman, quick to condemn, incapable of hiding the feelings of the moment, and expecting everything to go of itself with European regularity, despising the Company's servants, who were nevertheless to bring him gagged to the *Place de Grève* and gloat over his last agonies, appears as the tragic figure he indeed was, destined to lead his followers to defeat. Behind these leaders stand the crowd of Company's servants, guided blindly by their dubashes, constantly watching for douceurs, listlessly executing their duties, and ignorant of the language and customs of the city which they had created and in which they held the foremost places.

This was of course in no way peculiar. The same conditions, the same ignorance, the same vices, were to be found in the sister-settlements, southwards at Negapatam and northwards at Madras. To Ranga Pillai these things were things of course. They aroused in him no anger, no sense of slighted nationality, no feelings of injustice, no desire to remove himself, his family and wealth to some



region where he would be governed by men of his own race and language. Ignorance merely made the French easier task-masters, for they were the easier to deceive; and their other vices were to be found in plenty at the purely Indian courts. Ranga Pillai preferred to remain where he was. Besides, so deep an impression had been made on the Indian mind by the success of Dupleix that it seemed impossible that the tide of French luck had really turned. Their reverses were long reckoned merely as the efflux of a wave. The ground lost would surely be recovered by the next.

But the clearest figure of the Diary is that neither of French leader nor of French subordinate, but of Ranga Pillai himself, both when robed in gown and turban, and girt with sword and dagger, he passes in his palankin through the Fort Gate to pay his respects and report the city news to the Governor of the day, and when, his ceremonious garments cast aside, he sits at ease in his hall, giving audience and advice to his friends and followers. I suppose the first characteristic that strikes the European reader is the meticulous attention which he pays to omens, and his perpetual anxiety to make sure that his personal activities shall not run counter to the cosmic influences of the stars. So long as

every one observed the same set of rules, no one was at any particular disadvantage. But with the coming of Europeans who no longer regarded life as one long ritual and had come to disbelieve in the efficacy of astral conjunctions, the Indian was placed at a grave practical disadvantage, from delays which his beliefs imposed alike in the camp and in the cabinet, and from his inclination to bend his judgment to other than practical considerations.

Allied with this is the exaggerated respect which Ranga Pillai pays to matters of etiquette and custom. Any violation of established ceremonial shocks him. No good can come, he is sure, of treating the low-born with unaccustomed respect, or of employing any one in occupations for which he is by descent unqualified. The foundation of prosperity and good government is the due subordination of the castes. Further this tyranny of custom limited the scope within which the rational faculties of the mind could act. Novel expedient, innovation, reform, were things prohibited by his outlook upon life. A fair deduction from the Diary is that the Indian mind needed to be startled into life by contact with others entirely different from itself.

Outside the sphere of politics the French contributed little towards this revivifying contact. Like the other Europeans of that generation established in the East, they could see no half-way house between complete indifference and thorough proselytism. On the whole, like other Roman Catholic nations, they leaned towards the latter course, while the Protestant nations (except the Danes) inclined to the former. But even conversion in those days did not imply any great cultural contact. There was at Pondichery a considerable Indian Christian congregation; Ranga Pillai's uncle, the Chevalier Guruvappa, was a Christian;—but it remained essentially Indian in tone. Ranga Pillai himself, in spite of his constant intercourse with the leading Frenchmen of the place, had no tincture of French culture. He could speak French, he could, it seems, read French; but when he wished to draw up a document in that language, he did not depend on his own knowledge, but employed others, like the watch-repairer Clegg. In his ordinary dealings with the Governor and Councillors, he employed that bastard Portuguese dialect, which lingered on in Malabar down to the present generation, and which in the eighteenth century was the normal medium of intercourse between one European nation

and another, and between all Europeans and Indians, on all the Eastern Coasts from Mozambique to Malacca, a barbarous *lingua franca* like the Hindustani of a modern port. The diarist's knowledge of the West, as innumerable references prove, was trivial and inaccurate, while of course Indian learning was not the business of his caste.

As against this he possessed a considerable store of practical knowledge and experience. He might know no language well but his own; but he had a rough and ready knowledge of several. He could interpret a Persian letter when it was read to him; he could probably speak and write Telugu and Malayalam, besides his French and Portuguese. His mind was a storehouse of diplomatic precedents; and he could tell with unfailing accuracy whose *vakîl* should receive *pân* from the Governor's own hand, and whose from that of an inferior, how far the Governor should go to meet an embassy from the Nawâb and with what salute presents from Poona or Hyderabad should be greeted. He was the standing authority on the customs and privileges of the castes of Pondichery, a matter of no small moment when an inadvertent permission allowing a marriage procession to pass along an unaccustomed street, or to use unauthorized insignia might provoke a riot

that would set the whole Indian quarter by the ears and perhaps lead to the temporary abandonment of the town by the washers, or the scavengers, or some other indispensable element of its population. Lastly he was a merchant of long experience, skilled in piece-goods, brown, bleached, dyed or printed, knowing to a cash how much the Company's merchants would give for the broad-cloth imported by the last ship, familiar with the ever-varying exchange between rupees and pagodas, and ready to provide any article of Eastern produce that the Governor wanted for his private trade.

In the exercise of these duties Ranga Pillai evidently took great pride ; and in consideration of them he enjoyed a position of great dignity, though he failed to obtain the honour which he chiefly coveted, that of having the guard turn out with drums beating when he entered the Fort. He was chief of the Hindus in the town, and we may be sure he thought the more of his position because it was in a manner hereditary, and enabled him to maintain the rank and grandeur of his family. He celebrates the marriages of his daughters with extraordinary pomp, and secures a visit from the Governor and Councillors, for whom he provides proportionate gifts. He is resolved that his magnificence shall be spoken of

far and wide ; but his vanity here and elsewhere is less personal than ancestral. The severest blow that befell him in the whole course of his life was not his temporary supersession by Kanakarâya Mudali, because that might be and in fact was overcome ; not his extrusion from political business by Madame Dupleix, though that was bitterly resented ; not the death of his wife, though she was sincerely mourned ; but the destruction by Mysorean plunderers of the Choultry which his father had founded fifty years before. It had been spared by the Marathas in their great raid of 1740 ; the Muslim troops of Anwar-ud-dîn, and Nâsir Jang had passed it by ; even the English had not touched it. But at last, in the middle of 1760, 'the beggarly Mysoreans' carried off and sold the pillars, beams, rafters, and the very doors of the Brahmans' houses, leaving the place empty and uninhabitable. Ranga Pillai did not live to see it, but within a twelve month the proud and dazzling *Gouvernement* which Dupleix had built had undergone the same fate, dismembered and sold piece-meal to adorn the palace which Muhammad 'Alî was about to build under the protection of the English guns.