

## KARAIKAL – A RICH HERITAGE

Karaikal has historically been a part of the Tanjore estate and has witnessed most of South India's famous dynasties. The Cholas, the Pallavas, the Pandyas and even Muslim rulers of the north have held power at the modern-day Tanjore and Tiruchirapalli districts at some time in history. The Cholas excelled in foreign trade and maritime activity, extending their influence overseas to China and South-east Asia. Towards the end of the 9th century, southern India had developed extensive maritime and commercial capabilities.

Tanjore was conquered by the Marathas in 1674 who ruled as Maharajas of Tanjore until 1739 when Dumas, a man who was anxious to extend the French territory in India by smooth means, negotiated with Pratap Singh of Tanjore for possession of Karaikal, the fortress of Karakalcheri and 5 villages. On 14.2.1739 the French took possession of Karaikal town, the fort of Karakalcheri and 8 dependent villages. By 1750 Pratap Singh had ceded to the French 81 villages around Karaikal. This was all the territory the French possessed around Thanjavur when they surrendered to the British in 1761. The territory then passed twice to the British control before it was finally handed over to the French in 1816/1817 under the Treaty of Paris, 1814.

The French ruled this district till 31 October, 1954 on which date the French flag flying atop the government house at Karaikal was lowered with due military honors before a large gathering of officials and non-officials. Thus the de facto transfer of power took place on 1 November 1954 followed by de jure transfer on 16 August 1962.

Karaikal is known for its rich religious heritage, and is a destination for those seeking leisure and serenity. The town enjoys a harmonious society comprising of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and people of other religious persuasions. Tamil is the predominant native language of the people. As the area was formerly a French possession, the French language is also found, especially among the elder generation.

Karaikal is known all over the country for its unique and the only temple devoted to the Lord Saneeswara (Lord Saturn) at Thirunallar. Karaikal is the Gateway to various places of worship in the eastern coast of Tamilnadu. Two famous shrines, Velankanni for Christians and Nagore for Muslims are nearby Karaikal. The French flavour still persists in the peaceful land of Karaikal.

