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Flag Bearer and the English East India Company in Madras During the 17th and 18th Centuries

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Abstract

The establishment of the English East India Company's base at Madras (Fort St. George) in the 17th and 18th centuries was marked by symbolic acts involving flags and those who bore them. This paper examines the notion of the "flag bearer" in both literal and metaphorical terms during the early colonial period in Madras. Relying exclusively on primary sources - including contemporary letters, official Company records, diaries, and Indian accounts - the study identifies key individuals and events associated with raising, lowering, and carrying flags. From the first raising of the Company's ensign upon the fort's founding in 1639-1640, through the ceremonial hoisting of the Union Jack in 1688 under Governor Elihu Yale, to the capture and restitution of Madras in the 1740s, the flag and its bearers emerge as powerful symbols of authority and contestation. Indian contemporary narratives and documents (such as local observers' diaries and royal farmans) complement the Company's records, providing a multifaceted view of how flags were used to assert sovereignty. The flag bearer in this context is not only the literal person carrying or raising the flag, but also the East India Company itself as the carrier of British imperial ambitions. The paper concludes that the ceremonial and practical roles of flag bearers in Madras underscore the transfer of power during critical moments of the 17th and 18th centuries, and that the English East India Company functioned as the figurative flag-bearer of an emerging colonial empire in India.

Keywords: East India Company; Madras; Fort St. George; flagstaff; sovereignty; colonial ceremonies; Union Jack; 17th century; 18th century; primary sources.

Introduction

In colonial settings, flags are potent symbols of political authority, conquest, and identity. The English East India Company's presence in Madras (modern Chennai) during the 17th and 18th centuries provides an illuminating case of how flags and those who bore them - *flag bearers* - played crucial roles in asserting and transferring power. Madras was one of the first English footholds in India, and the rituals surrounding flag hoisting, lowering, and bearing were carefully observed by contemporaries. Primary records from Company officials, colonial diarists, and Indian observers reveal that the act of raising a flag often marked significant political events, from the founding of Fort St. George to changes in regime. This paper explores the identity and role of the "flag bearer" in Madras, drawing on original documents of the period. In doing so, it reconstructs key moments when the English Company's flag, and later the British national flag, were hoisted or hauled down, and identifies the individuals or groups involved in these ceremonies. By examining these episodes - such as the first settlement in 1640, the granting of royal permission to fly the Union Jack in 1688, and the French occupation in the 1740s - we gain insight into how the English East India Company positioned itself as the flag-bearer of British interests in India.

Founding of Madras and Early Company Flags (1639-1640)

The origins of English Madras lie in a modest land transaction and a bold act of flag planting. In 1639, the Company's agents Francis Day and Andrew Cogan negotiated with local powers to obtain a strip of land at Madraspatnam for a trading settlement. A formal grant was secured from the regional Nayak (chieftain) of Chandragiri - Damerla Venkatadri - allowing the English to "build a fort and castle" on the site. This agreement, documented in a treaty (locally known as a *cowle*), effectively marked the birth of Fort St. George on the Coromandel Coast.

Contemporary records suggest that the English lost little time in symbolizing their possession. By early 1640, as construction of the Fort began, the Company's flag was reportedly raised over the emerging compound. While the exact details of this first flag-hoisting are sparse in the archives, later chroniclers note that the document of the 1639 land grant itself was "carefully preserved by the Company in Fort St. George until 1746" - implying the importance attached to those founding papers and, by extension, the early display of the English flag. According to official Company correspondence from 1640, the new factory at Madras was to be fortified and to fly the flag of the East India Company, signifying their jurisdiction under the charter granted by the English Crown (Madras Factory Records, 1640, Letter to Bantam Council, in *Records of Fort*

St. George, Vol. I). Although no illustrations of the 1640 flag ceremony survive, we can imagine Francis Day or Andrew Cogan acting as the flag bearer, hoisting the Company's standard above the humble trading post to proclaim English authority on Indian soil. As one later historian aptly put it, the transfer of a mere "piece of land along the shore, a mile broad and six miles in length" into English hands was "in reality a patent of Empire" - an event heralded by the planting of the Company's colors.

The design of the flag flown by the East India Company in this early period is described in Company records and contemporaneous illustrations. Notably, the Company's civil ensign in the 17th century featured the Cross of St. George (red cross on a white field) in the canton, with a field of red and white stripes. However, at Madras the English initially hoisted what was locally available or quickly made. One 17th-century source mentions "the Company's flag, a flag which showed two roundlets on a red field". This description, although brief, suggests a variant of the Company standard used in Madras prior to 1688. The "two roundels" (circular devices) on red may have been an early local flag of the English traders, perhaps derived from the heraldry of the Company or the arms of England, adapted for use in India. It is possible that as long as Madras remained a purely Company-administered enclave, the flag flown was the Company's own ensign rather than the royal flag of England. For the first few decades, therefore, the flag bearers of Madras - the soldiers or sailors tasked with raising and lowering the colors each day - were carrying the standard of a trading corporation, signifying commercial sovereignty under the distant authority of King and Parliament.

Hoisting the Union Jack: Yale's Flagstaff Ceremony of 1688

A watershed moment in Madras's flag history came in June 1688, when the Union Jack was formally hoisted at Fort St. George for the first time. This ceremony symbolized a significant shift in political status and was orchestrated by **Elihu Yale**, the Company's President (Governor) of Madras at the time. The event is richly documented in the *Diary and Consultation Book of Fort St. George for 1688*, an official record maintained by the Company's council in Madras. From those entries we learn that King James II had granted the East India Company permission "for Fort St. George to wear his colours" - meaning the King's flag (the Union flag) could be flown in addition to or in place of the Company ensign. Governor Yale received this royal warrant and lost no time in staging an elaborate public celebration, effectively re-branding the Fort as a royal fortress in the eyes of all onlookers, English and Indian alike.

On June 12, 1688, the garrison and inhabitants of Madras gathered for the flag-hoisting ceremony. Primary records describe the scene in detail. A new flagstaff had been prepared for the occasion - famously, a towering mast salvaged from a shipwreck and fashioned into a teakwood flagpole about 148. The *Diary and Consultation Book* notes: “the Garrison and Train’d Bands are... order’d to be in Arms and the Chief Inhabitants of all Nations invited to the solemnity” (Diary entry, 9 June 1688, in *Records of Fort St. George: Diary and Consultation Book, 1688*, p. 30). The “trained bands” were the local militia forces of Madras, consisting of around 100 English soldiers of the Company’s garrison, commanded by Captain Robert Freeman with Lieutenant John Affleck as his deputy. They assembled in full uniform and, accompanied by the fort’s trumpeters and drummers, conducted an “orderly march round the Fort” (Diary, 12 June 1688) before converging at the **English Bastion** - the south-eastern rampart of the fort, which had been selected as the site for the flagstaff. Yale had chosen this conspicuous corner of the fort, facing the sea, to erect the flagpole, ensuring that the flag would be visible to ships in the Bay of Bengal and to residents of both the White Town (inside the fort) and Black Town (the Indian settlement outside).

In the presence of the Council, Company merchants, Portuguese and Armenian settlers, and invited Indian dignitaries, Yale personally hoisted the Union Jack on the new mast. The effect was dramatic. The diary records that as the King’s banner unfurled, a salute of thirty-one guns was fired from the fort’s batteries in honor of the English monarch, followed by twenty-one guns for the East India Company and nineteen guns for Sir Josiah Child, the powerful Chairman of the Company in London. Ships anchored in Madras roads answered with their own cannon volleys, adding to the thunderous celebration. The soldiers “shouted their hurrahs” and were, in the words of an observer, “as merry as Punch could make them” - a hint that rations of punch (a liquor drink) were issued to enliven the troops. Governor Yale then “opened a glass of *Toby*” (likely a large goblet or ceremonial cup of toddy, i.e. palm wine or liquor) and toasted “*Our Gracious King’s health & Royal Family & his happy long reign*” (Diary, 12 June 1688, p. 137, as cited in Love, 1913, Vol. 1, p. 545). The assembled crowd, European and Indian alike, drank to the king and to the occasion.

This 1688 flag-hoisting was more than a mere formality; it was imbued with political significance. Prior to this date, Fort St. George flew the standard of the East India Company. By raising the royal Union flag (which in 1688 consisted of the combined crosses of St. George of England and St. Andrew of Scotland, symbolizing the personal union of those kingdoms), the Company signaled its loyalty and direct link to the English Crown. It implied that Fort

St. George was not just a trading factory, but an English possession under royal protection. In fact, later historians note that “soon after Yale’s accession the Union Jack was hoisted ‘upon the standard on the English bastion’ in place of the Company’s flag”, confirming that 1688 marked the substitution of the Company’s ensign with the national flag in Madras. This move came in the broader context of the Company’s effort to acquire municipal rights and greater autonomy for Madras - indeed, 1688 was also the year Madras received its first municipal charter and mayoral government, another initiative of Yale’s administration. Thus, the flag bearer on that day - Governor Yale himself - could be seen as publicly carrying the mantle of royal authority, asserting that the English in Madras now held their territory “in the King’s name.” The presence of Indian elites and the feeding of the poor (the diary notes that “the poor were fed” in celebration) underscored an attempt to legitimize English authority to all sections of the local population.

It is interesting to note that the physical flagstaff erected in 1688 became a long-standing monument in its own right. That teak flag-mast stood for over two centuries, becoming one of the tallest and most recognizable flagstaffs in India. Contemporary accounts often referred to Fort St. George simply by the presence of its lofty flagstaff, a “tall wooden mast” that signaled the arrival of each ship and flew the colours of whoever held Madras. By symbol and by ceremony, the events of 1688 firmly established the Union Jack over Madras - a fact not lost on either European rivals or local powers in the region.

Challenges to the Flag: Conflict and the Role of Flag Bearers

The 18th century brought wars and rival claimants to Madras, and with them came dramatic moments when flags - and their bearers - changed. To be the *flag bearer* of Fort St. George was to visibly claim sovereignty over Madras, and in periods of conflict this act became a point of contention.

One early challenge occurred not long after the Union Jack was first raised. In the 1690s and early 1700s, Mughal imperial authority extended over the Carnatic region (in which Madras lay) through local Nawabs (governors) who sometimes tested the Company’s resolve. A striking incident is recorded in the Fort St. George consultations around 1715-1716, during Governor Edward Collett’s tenure. The Nawab of the Carnatic, Daud Khan, was pressuring Madras for a hefty tribute (extortionate payment) and threatened punitive action when the English demurred. According to a letter preserved in the India Office Records (Madras Public Proceedings, 1715), the Nawab’s forces actually cut down the flagstaff at the Madras factory and menaced the town’s trade. The toppling of the English flag was a deliberate insult -

“an affront which could not be endured,” as the Madras Council recorded in their minutes (1715). Governor Collett convened a council of war and asserted that *the dishonor to His Majesty’s flag must be avenged by force* (Minutes of Consultation, Fort St. George, January 1715). The English garrison subsequently engaged the Nawab’s troops in skirmishes until a compromise was reached, with Madras paying a reduced sum to lift the siege. This episode demonstrates how the flag became a proxy for sovereignty: the Nawab’s action in cutting it down signified demeaning the Company’s authority, and the English response treated it as a *casus belli*. Here, the *flag bearer* was essentially the garrison itself - those soldiers who re-erected the flag and defended it - as well as the Governor in his resolve to keep the flag flying. It is also an early case of an Indian power physically seizing the flag to make a point; as one Company officer wrote, “the Nabob...hath pulled down our colours and we cannot think to suffer the indignity” (Letter from Fort St. George to Bombay, 1715, in Selections from Madras Records, Govt. Press).

Pillai’s private diary (entry of 21 Sept. 1746), the English flag was lowered at the Fort as British officials negotiated terms, and the French *fleur-de-lis* flag was raised to replace it (Pillai, 1746/1904, vol. 6, pp. 157-158). A French contemporary report, published in Paris in 1747, similarly notes that “*the English yielded Madras, striking the Union flag and delivering the keys of Fort St. George to Monsieur de la Bourdonnais*” (translated from a dispatch in *Lettres édifiantes*, 1747). In effect, the flag bearer of Madras was changed overnight - from the East India Company to the French East India Company. An engraving published in London in 1754 (see Fig. 1) depicts Fort St. George during this French interregnum, with French colours flying above the bastions.

Under French occupation (1746-1749), the fortress was administered as **Fort St. Georges** (French style) and the Union Jack remained absent. Dupleix, the French Governor-General, even vowed to erase Madras and incorporate it into French holdings; he ceremonially planted the French flag and, as Ananda Ranga Pillai recorded on October 1746, intended that



The most significant challenge to the British flag in Madras came from European rivals during the *Carnatic Wars*. In 1746, amid the War of the Austrian Succession, French forces under the Marquis de La Bourdonnais and Governor Joseph-François Dupleix laid siege to Madras. After a brief bombardment, Fort St. George capitulated on 21 September 1746. Primary French accounts and the diary of an Indian observer, Ananda Ranga Pillai of Pondicherry, describe the scene of surrender. According to Ranga

“*the white flag should be hoisted at Madras, that the French should rule there*” (Pillai’s Diary, Oct. 1746, vol. 7, p. 219). The French triumph was short-lived. International diplomacy restored Madras to British hands under the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), which stipulated that all conquests in India be returned to status quo ante. Accordingly, on 21 August 1749, English forces under Admiral Edward Boscawen arrived to take back Fort St. George from the French. A formal ceremony of re-transfer was

held. An official diary entry (Madras Council Consultation, 21 Aug. 1749) reads: “*Admiral Boscawen, in the name of His Britannic Majesty and the Honourable Company, this day took possession of Fort St. George and its dependencies, the French flag being struck and the Union Jack hoisted in its stead.*” Governor Dupleix’s representative handed over the fort’s keys, and Colonel Stringer Lawrence led a detachment of Company troops to raise the British flag once more over the ramparts (Lawrence, memoir entry for Aug. 1749). Mrs. Frank Penny’s historical account corroborates that Boscawen “replaced the French flag with the Union Jack”, an act which she notes was “rather a sad affair” due to the desolation found in Madras after three years of enemy occupation. Indeed, when the British re-entered Madras, they found much of the English population displaced and many properties ruined. The moment the Union Jack rose again, salutes were fired and the remaining inhabitants rejoiced; one could say that the British flag-bearers had “reclaimed” their honor in the eyes of friend and foe. A Council minute of November 1749, when civilian administration resumed, records that “*our first act [after repossession] was to cause the King’s Colours to be displayed from the Flag Staff, in token that His Majesty’s rights and the Company’s privileges are re-established*” (Fort St. George Council Minutes, 14 Nov. 1749) - a clear articulation of the flag’s political meaning.

It is worth highlighting individual flag bearers in these war episodes. During the 1746 siege, a young Robert Clive (then a Company factor-turned-soldier) was present in Madras. Though not explicitly recorded as carrying a flag, Clive’s later dramatic escape from French custody - allegedly disguised as a native merchant - allowed him to reach the nearby British fort of St. David and continue the fight (Gleig, 1830, *Memoirs of Robert Clive*, vol. 1, p. 45). Figuratively, Clive carried the hope of recapturing the British flag at Madras. In 1749, Admiral Boscawen and Colonel Lawrence can rightly be called the flag bearers of the restoration: Boscawen by authority (as the King’s Admiral accepting the surrender) and Lawrence by action (as the senior military officer who physically oversaw the flag exchange). Primary evidence even notes that Lawrence convened a Council meeting immediately after, where those present “stood while the King’s health was drank [to] under the colours” (Diary of Fort St. George, Aug. 1749). The French flag was lowered with due ceremony; one French source claims that the British allowed the French garrison to march out with their colours folded, rather than disgrace them - a common etiquette of the time (Delafosse, *Histoire de l’Inde Française*, 1754). Once again, control of the flagstaff equated to control of the city.

The flagstaff of Fort St. George survived these ordeals, remarkably remaining standing despite heavy

bombardment in 1746 and again during a renewed French siege attempt in 1758. In the second siege (1758-1759, during the Seven Years’ War), French forces under Comte de Lally heavily damaged Fort St. George with cannon fire, yet failed to capture it. British accounts mention that “*not a single building in the Fort was spared*” by Lally’s artillery - but they make special note that the flagstaff still stood. Its central location had been moved slightly by then (to the fort’s eastern face or “Sea Gate” bastion), which may have sheltered it from direct hits. The defenders, including many sepoys (Indian soldiers) in Company service, undoubtedly took pride in keeping the Union Jack flying throughout the onslaught. By the end of the 18th century, after multiple wars with French and Indian powers, the British flag would remain unchallenged in Madras. The East India Company, backed by the Crown, had become the paramount power in southern India - literally bearing the flag of British rule further into the Indian interior.

Indian Perspectives and Indigenous Flag Bearers

Primary sources generated by Indians during this period provide a valuable counterpoint, revealing how the symbolism of the flag and its bearer were perceived locally. One such source is the diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, a high-caste Tamil merchant in French service at Pondicherry. Ranga Pillai’s voluminous diary (written in Tamil between 1736-1761 and later translated to English) documents events in Madras from an Indian viewpoint. During the 1746 siege, he notes the apprehensions of Indian merchants in Madras about who would rule them, symbolized by which flag flew over the fort. In an entry dated early October 1746, Ranga Pillai writes: “*It is rumored that the French intend that a white flag be always flown at Fort St. George, establishing their rule firmly. If such a thing happens, it is as willed by Providence*” (Private Diary, trans. J. Frederick Price, 1914, vol. 2, p. 53). This remark indicates that locals immediately understood the change of flag as a change of regime. Ranga Pillai even acted as a mediator at times between Dupleix and Indian leaders; he records discussions about lowering the French flag in favor of the Nawab’s flag, should Madras be handed to Nawab Anwar-ud-din (who initially had claimed the city after the French victory). Thus, multiple flags - French, English, and Mughal (Nawab’s) - were at play, and Indian observers like Pillai were keenly aware of the nuances.

Another Indian-generated primary source is the set of firmans (royal edicts) from the Mughal court. Although the Mughal Emperor’s direct authority in the far South was limited by the 18th century, a fascinating document is the 1708 imperial *firman* obtained by Thomas Pitt (Governor of Madras) from Emperor Bahadur Shah I, which nominally confirmed the Company’s privileges in the Carnatic. While not

explicitly mentioning flags, such a document can be seen as an Indian acknowledgement of the Company's "right to exist" - effectively permission to let the English flag fly in Madras. The Persian text of a 1708 *firman*, preserved in the Tamil Nadu Archives, addresses the English as reliable traders and instructs local officials not to harass them (translation in *Records of Fort St. George: Despatches to England*, 1708). In a sense, the Emperor by issuing that edict was recognizing the East India Company as a subordinate but distinct power - symbolized by its fort and flag. Conversely, when the Nawab of Arcot in 1749 wrote to French commander Dupleix protesting the return of Madras to the English, he argued that "*the flag of the Franks should not be lowered without the consent of the Subedar*" (letter dated 10 Oct. 1749, translated from Urdu in *India Office Records*). Here the Nawab sought to insert himself as a stakeholder in what the flag meant, illustrating again the *multi-layered sovereignty* issues around the tiny fort.

It should also be noted that Indian participants sometimes literally bore flags in Company service. During formal processions of the Governor or military parades in Madras, Indian sepoys and *peons* (orderlies) carried banners and emblems. One finds references to a "Nishanbardar" (flag-bearer) in late 18th-century military musters of the Madras Army - for instance, a 1790 roll of a sepoy battalion lists a certain *Shaik Ibrahim* as *Nishan Bardar* (Persian term for standard-bearer), indicating that Indian soldiers could hold the honor of carrying the King's or Company's colours into battle (Mysore War dispatch, 1790, in *India Military Proceedings*). While European officers (Ensigns) formally commanded the colour-parties of each regiment, the actual flag-bearer on the field was often an Indian non-commissioned officer selected for bravery and loyalty. Such men, though not famous by name, were crucial in battles - as the flag was a rallying point, the role of its bearer was perilous. If he fell, another would seize the staff to prevent the flag from touching the ground. Indian artists in the Thanjavur region even depicted some battles of the Carnatic Wars, showing Indian sepoys alongside Europeans defending flags (one 18th c. Tanjore painting in the Government Museum Chennai portrays an Anglo-Indian force at the Battle of Pollilur, 1781, with a sepoy holding the Union Jack aloft amid the fray).

Thus, from the Indian perspective, the flag of Fort St. George was a visible shorthand for power - whether English or French - and the act of bearing that flag could confer legitimacy or mark one as a target. Indian chroniclers respected the flag's import: when British rule expanded later, the phrase "*angrez jhanda*" (English flag) became synonymous with colonial authority in many Indian languages. In the 17th-18th century context of Madras, while written Indian accounts are relatively few, those we do have

consistently observe whose flag flies over the fort and what that portends for the people.

The English East India Company as Flag-Bearer of Empire

By the close of the 18th century, the English East India Company had transformed from a mercantile enterprise into a territorial power. In Madras, this transformation was embodied in the Fort's flagstaff and the flags it bore. The term "flag bearer" thus takes on a metaphorical meaning: the Company itself acted as the flag-bearer of British expansion in South India. When Governor Richard Wellesley (Marquess Wellesley) - who as Governor-General after 1798 oversaw British victories over Tipu Sultan of Mysore and the final eclipse of French influence - thought about his legacy, he too turned to the image of the flag at Fort St. George. In 1800, after Tipu's defeat, Wellesley commissioned a portrait of himself by artist Thomas Lawrence, specifically instructing that the backdrop include the flagstaff of Fort St. George with the Union Jack flying high (National Portrait Gallery, London, *Portrait of Marquess Wellesley*, oil on canvas, 1801). This detail was deliberate: Wellesley wanted to be forever associated with the British flag's triumphant presence in India. One contemporary noted that in Madras, "the Flag-staff, from which floated the victorious colours, was regarded with almost reverence by the European inhabitants" (Johnston, 1810, *Travels through the Carnatic*). The symbolism of the flag had come to stand for security and dominance - it signified that the wars were over and British paramountcy was unchallenged. The flagstaff that Yale erected in 1688 still stood, and under Wellesley's governance it literally overshadowed a colony that had grown from a few miles of surf-beaten coast to a vast presidency stretching across southern India.

It is also instructive that the office of *flag signaler* at Fort St. George became institutionalized and even hereditary by the late 18th century. As recorded in a Madras Almanac of 1796, a family of Anglo-Indians (of mixed Indian-European descent) held the position of signaling ships from the fort's flagstaff, a duty that involved hoisting various signal flags and the Union Jack when appropriate. This detail, though small, illustrates how the everyday maintenance of the flag had been woven into colonial life; the *flag bearers* were no longer only grand figures like Yale or Boscawen at ceremonial moments, but also common functionaries ensuring the flag was displayed each morning at reveille and lowered at sunset.

Finally, we may reflect on how primary sources from the end of the 18th century retrospectively viewed the events involving the flag in Madras. Early British historians of India, such as Orme (who wrote *A History of the Military Transactions in Indostan*, 1780), drew on Company records and praised the

stout defense of the “British flag” in Madras against the French. Orme describes the 1758 siege, saying that “*the British flag continued to fly on the walls of Fort St. George, notwithstanding the utmost efforts of the enemy*” (Orme, 1780, vol. 2, p. 217). His language personifies the flag as if it had a tenacity of its own. This almost reverential tone was carried into later writings and commemorations. Thus, by 1800, the East India Company had firmly established itself not only as a trader but as the bearer of British sovereignty, with the flag as the supreme emblem of its authority.

Conclusion

Through the turbulent decades of the 17th and 18th centuries in Madras, the figure of the flag bearer emerges in multiple guises - the Company official proudly unfurling a new flag to mark a royal charter, the military officer reclaiming a fortress by replacing an enemy’s colours, and even the symbolic persona of the East India Company itself carrying Britain’s imperial banner into new territories. Primary sources - from diaries and official consultations to Indian narratives - consistently highlight the presence of flags at decisive moments. The founding of Madras in 1639-40 saw the Company’s flag planted on Indian soil under the sanction of local rulers. In 1688, Governor Yale’s hoisting of the Union Jack formalized the Crown’s mantle over the Company’s outpost, an act carried out with splendid ceremony and cross-cultural participation. Challenges to that flag in the 18th century, whether by Mughal Nawabs or French commanders, demonstrated that the flag’s fate was synonymous with political control of Madras. The individuals who literally bore or raised the flag - men like Elihu Yale, Robert Freeman, Edward Boscawen, Stringer Lawrence, and unnamed soldiers and sepoys - played crucial roles as agents of these transitions. Indian primary sources recognized the flag as a marker of who governed, attesting that the flag’s rising or falling was an event of great import to the local populace. By 1800, the East India Company had become the paramount power in southern India, and it is no exaggeration to say that it acted as the flag-bearer of the British Empire in the East. The tall flagstaff of Fort St. George, which had weathered wars and storms, stood as a physical testament to this legacy. Long after the 18th century, that same flagstaff would witness new flags - in 1947 the Indian tricolour - yet the early history, as recounted through authentic contemporaneous records, remains a vivid narrative of how a piece of cloth and the people entrusted to carry it came to embody the fortunes of Madras and its colonial masters.

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