

THE REVENUE SYSTEM OF NAYAKS OF MADURAI (1529 -1736 A.D)

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The arrival of Telugus as rulers, governors, poligars, and soldiers produced monumental change in the economic history of Madura country during medieval period. Temples were the centres of economic activities. The people depended on religious institutions for their social and economic momentum. The newly arrived Telugu chiefs followed their own traditional economic practices in agriculture and trade; at the same time they never maligned the existing economic activities of natives which remained the source of livelihood of the Tamils for generation.

Agriculture and Land Revenue

Agriculture and its development were the prominent economic activities of the Telugu chiefs. Before the establishment of Telugu rule agriculture was carried out through age old pattern. Being raw hands to new climatic conditions the Telugu chiefs adopted new measures to increase agricultural produce. During 13th century the people irrigated lands mostly using waters from wells, and barrages. But during 14th century and after the Vijayanagar and Nayak rulers brought monumental change in irrigation. River waters had been used to irrigate lands. As a result thousands of acres of land located on the banks of Kaviri, Vaigai and Tamiraparani rivers connected with channels. The regions which receive scanty rainfall were joined with river channels. Naturally the land during the Telugu's rule was called as wet and dry lands. Crops were raised according to the nature of the soil and new cultivable methods. The commodities such as maize, ragi, cotton were produced abundance in dry lands. The region which possessed water facilities produced rice, sugarcane, vegetable, fruits. During the period of Viswanatha Nayak (1529 – 1564 A.D) pro agricultural works were done. As a result mango, lemon, and coconut groves were largely raised. Seasonal crops were also introduced. Plough, sickle, spade, were prominent farming weapons. Bulls also used for tilling. In addition, rearing sheep, goat, buffalo, cow, was a source of income to the people. During the Vijayanagar rule people undertook agricultural work in three types of lands such as individual lands owned by **Nilakilar**, the brahmadeya lands owned by Brahmins which were given to them by the kings of different dynasties and devadana lands granted temples. The farmers of these lands were paid either by varaha i.e cash or by kinds. The villagers practiced the barter system of exchange.

The Telugu rulers derived major source of revenue from land. The Vijayanagar rulers entrusted the army chieftains called Amaranayakas to collect the tribute from the Tamil territories captured by them during 14th and 15th centuries. The amaranayakas supported their master and paid fixed tribute. The Madura Nayaks changed the amaram system instead they introduced Palayam the small territories consisting of lands. A poligars was made head of the land in return he had to pay tribute to his Telugu masters. The Telugu

speaking poligars kept best lands for their own cultivation and the rest were distributed among the subordinates known as sherogars. The sherogars not only cultivated lands but also rendered military service when their masters in distress. The lands of Telugu rulers were controlled by Pradhani, provincial governors and his subordinates. When the Nayaks were administrative agents of Vijayangar rulers in Tamil country acted as intermediaries between the government and ryot. After the establishment of Madurai Nayakdom (1529 A.D) the crown lands were entrusted to the officials of the government and their heirs. The produce of crown land was not granted to poligars and nobles but the tenants who cultivated the land received cash or kinds as salary. Brahamadeya and devadana lands paid Jodi tax to the royal treasury. The other major part of revenue came to the king known as tribute of Poligars. The amount was fixed based on the possession of lands. There was a custom practiced by them before collecting land revenue the Telugu rulers closely assessed the yield and drought. Sethupathis of Ramnad and the king of Travancore remitted tribute to the treasury.

Policy of Taxation

The taxation policy of the Nayaks was varied according to the fertility of the soil. According to a copperplate information dated 1673 -74 A.D stated that **magamai** tax was levied at the rate of one **kalam**. Both barren and fertile lands measured in terms of kuli, veli, ma. Rods, bamboo sticks, human feet were used for measuring lands. **Kudimai kadamai, ponvari, nali** were prominent land tax collected from the people. According to Jesuit records the amount of land tax was fixed as half of the produce but this statement shrouded obscurity. The Poligars collected half of the produce from the tenants at the same time they remitted certain amount to royal treasury either in cash or kinds. Nelson pointed out that the Nayak rulers received land tax only cash (pon) from the private land owners. During the 15th and 16th centuries the Vijayangar kings regularized land revenue system and from that period cash payment was mostly accepted. The term like **ponvari, ponvaraha, nelvaraha** and **dhana varaha** indicate the revenue had been collected by cash. The land revenue policy adopted by Telugu chiefs in Madura country was unique. In order to facilitate the collection of revenue they formed territorial divisions. Each division was placed in charge of an administrative officer. An official hierarchical set up was followed for collecting taxes. The task was entrusted to Pradhani, Provincial governors, poligars, Kanakkan, Ambalakaran or Maniakaran and Kanakkupillai. During the Nayak rule Pradhani was the finance minister of state who issued orders connected with taxes and land revenue on behalf of the king. Provincial governors were asked to execute the orders of Pradhani. Collection of the land and other revenue from **nadu** or **mahanam** and **semai** was the foremost responsibility of provincial governors. The poligars who were incharge of collecting revenue from Palayam acted intermediaries between the king and the farmers. Kanakkupillai who assisted the Poligar possessed entire records of the village. Sometime he collected land revenue from the cultivators on behalf of the Poligars and landlords. Ambalakaran or Maniakaran another prominent official of the state served as village revenue officers. He not only looks after the land revenue but collected individual and professional taxes in the villages. It is important

to point out that the Major portions of the revenue was utilized in wars, construction and renovation of temples and other charitable works. Thus the Telugu chiefs followed systematic revenue practices to enhance the economic standard.

Industrial Revenue

Besides agriculture, cottage industries received considerable development. The Telugu rulers encouraged the manufacture of fine quality oils, jiggery, and salt. The upplian worked in salt pans. Pottery making was also occupied prominent place and considered as hereditary occupation. Due to the advent of sourashtras the fine variety of textiles were produced and supplied them to royal families and nobles. As far as trade is concern the Telugu chiefs concentrated inland trade much because they lacked sound knowledge of naval forces. Trade guilds controlled the prices of commodities. The guild was properly administered usually the Chettis were the office bearers of guilds situated in capital. The trade guild sometime helped the kings to buy good quality of precious stones, pearls, gold and silver. Though the Nayaks failed to have trade contact with aliens, the Marakkayars of Kayalpattinam involved overseas trade. Then Portuguese and Dutch landed and established trade link with Madura country. Horse elephant from Arabia and Ceylon, species from Malacca and hide from Japan were important item of imports. The goods like Tanjore's rice, Madurai's linen and herbal were exported to Arabia, Worms and Ceylon.

Thus the Nayaks of Madurai established an organized revenue system which brought decent revenue. The revenue received from various subjects was properly used by the rulers for better administration.

End Notes

1. Somaley, Madurai Mavattam , vedaranyam, 1980, p.125
2. Interview with Muthusamy, Farmer, Katrampatti, 28. December, 2010.
3. Anbunathan. S. **Ayuthangalum Deivankalum** (Tamil) S. Kottai, 2004, p. 48
4. A man possessed vast lands.
5. Nelson. J.H. Madura country The Manual, New Delhi, p. 144
6. Krishnaswamy. A, The Tamil country under Vijayanagar, Annamalai Nagar, 1964, pp. 179,180.
7. Kulandaivelan. K., R. Nagasamy (Ed) Palayapattukalin Varalaru, Vol- IV, 1981,p.87
8. A.R.E 7 of 1923
9. A place where the agricultural produce were measured.
10. Sathianathaia. R History of the Nayaks of Madura, Madras, p. 121
11. Vedachalam. V, Thirumalai Nayakkar Cheppedugal (Tamil) Chennai, p.xxvi
12. **Varaha** means money
13. Irupthinankumanaiyar varalaru , Madurai, 1989, p.55