

FEUDAL FORMING IN TEMPLE ADMINISTRATION BY NAYAKS – AN OVERVIEW

Dr. Mrs. M. Babyrani

Associate Professor of History

V.V.Vanniyaperumal College for Women, Virudhunagar

Mrs .M. Mahesh, M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed.,

Assistant Professor of History

V.V.Vanniyaperumal College for Women, Virudhunagar

The period of 16th century marked the zenith of territorial expansion and political sway of Vijayanagara rulers in the Tamil country. There were fifty-eight Nayaks ruled from 1371 A.D. to 1530 A.D. in the Tamil country¹. There was an extension of Vijayanagara rule to Madurai, Tanjore and Gingee but failed to recognise the forms of authority involving different principles in state formation. The inscriptional texts record Nayaks as kariyakarttar or kariyattukattavar². These expressions literally indicate that Nayaks were the chief of actions and executor of transactions who probably derived the independent rights from the king³.

There are many inscriptions of Vijayanagara period, which are inscribed on the walls of the various temples in Tamil Nadu all state the land donations of the Nayak rulers⁴. The accession of Krishnadevaraya to the throne of Vijayanagara took place when the Nayak chieftains in Tamil Nadu were not quite pleased with the affairs of the imperial government. So the new monarchs sent a force to control the Nayaks. Vaiyappa Nayaka was a leader of such forces and he controlled Tondaimandalam with his army⁵.

After this achievement the Tondaimandalam was organised as a Nayakship with Senji as its capital. The old system of Mahamandalesvaras was superseded by the new organisation of Nayakships under Amara Nayaks. The inferior Nayaks were local chieftains known as poligars and they possessed the palaymas⁶.

The Nayakship of Madurai was founded by Visvanatha Nayaka son of Nagama Nayaka, who was an influential officer in Krishnadevaraya's government in Vijayanagara. After the death of Krishnadevaraya in 1529 A.D⁷. Visvanatha improved the Madurai Nayakship as a powerful Kingdom. The Tanjore Nayakship was founded by Sevappa Nayaka and obtained Tanjore as dowry which brought his wife Murtimamba, the sister of Varadamba, wife of Achutharaya. The Vijayanagara rulers bestowed Tanjore on this Sevappa and converted it into a separate Nayakship and he ruled over the Cholamandalam and parts of Tondaimandalam⁸.

According to inscriptions Nayaks were initially appointed by Vijayanagara rulers to look after the revival and conduct of regular worship and restoration of lands and property of temples in the Coromandel region during the fourteenth century⁹. Several inscriptions of this period show many instances of misappropriation of temple properties, by protectors of the temple. Certain Brahmanas had stolen gold from the treasury of the temple. They were deprived of rights in temple worship and management of temple lands. Nambisivappaya,

an officer of the temple misappropriated the jewelsof the deity¹⁰. He received punishment of confiscation of his houseand house site. It was during this period that decision to place Nayaksin temples byVijayanagara rulers was taken to prevent corruption¹¹.

In this gradual process, the Nayaks directly shared theadministration of temples in particular localities. Achyutappa Nayaka ofThanjavur obtained many temple villages, protectorship of temple treasury, and also had share in the administration of Srimushnam temple¹². Kattisura Nayaka of Pataivitu became the Secretary, Supervisor and Chief Executive of Devikapuram temple. KrishnappaNayaka of Gingee controlled the affairs of Chidambaram temple¹³.

Tirumalai Nayaka, ruler of Pataivitu was the templeauthority for assigning temple lands to individuals. As the temples alsohad large agricultural lands, villages and income, the Nayaks as protectors of temples under their claim, controlled the local institution of temples. The proper maintenance of temple accounts became essential¹⁴.

The duty of writing and maintaining local accounts was distributed to a group of four Nayaks who were held responsible individually for different functions. They maintained the local accounts under two heads of revenue called income and expenditure¹⁵. Theseevidences prove that the interests of Nayaks had centered around therevenue of temples. Thus, earlier inscriptions record that Nayaks were appointed as local accountants in temples for writing the accounts 16.

Later epigraphs mention that accountants were appointed by Nayaks for writing temple accounts of Devikapuram, and Tiruttani during 1533A.D. and 1560 A.D¹⁷. The reason for such a developmentis seen in the Amuktamalyada where Krishnadevaraya mentions the need for a separate revenue administration of temples and subordinate Nayak rulers, since there was possibility of mixing the income of temples and subordinate rulers and adjust the revenue bysending it to the royal treasury for the loss caused by the revenue collectors¹⁸. The fact that a separate revenue system insisted to bemaintained by temples and rulers was certainly to help the collection ofEven if the revenue collector had indulged inrevenue. misappropriation, it was possible that only some part of the revenue would alone be ruined.

The process of managing the affairs of temples directly by Nayaks began to change in course of time substantially. They beganto appoint atikaris, rayacam, srikaryam, maniyam, samprati, servants, dancers, enquiry officers, accountants, super intendants andvarious others in temples¹⁹. Inscriptions record that the temples at Tirupati, Kalakhasti and Kanjipuram had two super intendants whileearlier super intendent appointed by the temple had continued, new super intendent was posted by the Nayaka ruler with specific privileges, duties and responsibilities²⁰.

The koviloluku records mention that these new appointments were opposed and represented by Sthanattars oftemples because it was considered a sort of imposition. However, later inscriptions distinctly record that the Nayaks appointed temple officials whose administration had become firm, and replaced the officials appointed by temples²¹. Now it ultimately resulted in limited activities of temple Sthanattars who were controlled by government appointed superintendents. A contemporary record suggests that the royal super intendent Koppuri Oparajayya was moved up from the post of atikari to the status of

srikaryam in a temple²². Another evidence mentions that the ruler appointed a committee to repair the temple, issuing orders choosing, his trustworthy men. These examples show that Nayaks selected their own men in the appointments to temples.

The authority exercised by Nayaks reached its climax where we find an inscriptional text beginning with the invocation to Ethiraju Nayaka deviating from the general pattern in invocation to the deity of the temple which was found common in all inscriptions²³. In this case the decisions had been made in an agreement reached among the temple staff about their duties, without any short comings in temple.

Allocation and reallocation of temple works were cast in the form of Nayaka order. Further evidence suggests that the right of supervising the temple in the hands of one Ramayya was cancelled and Lakshmi Kumara Tatacharya was appointed by a Nayak as the manager of the temple for a revenue contract of five hundred pon²⁴. This new supervisor had appointed a number of agents placed at different temples in various places of the region and levied tribute from the agents together with the treasurer and the manager. Thus, revenue farming in temple administration was introduced in this period²⁵.

Local Division

The Portuguese sources record that Coromandel was the fifth province of Vijayanagar empire during the rule of Saluva, Tuluva and Aravidu dynasties of Vijayanagar in the sixteenth century. A wide spread practice of granting Nayakattanams to subordinate chiefs came to existence in order to look after the territory and rule the locality²⁶.

It is interesting to note that many evidences show the continuous dominance of various Nayaka families in places such as Punamali, Tiruvur, Sriperumpurur, Devikapuram, Ceyyar, Tiruvannamalai, Kukaiyur, Tirukkoyilur and Bhuvanakiri in Coromandel. Some other localities were ruled by different families at Tiruchi, Pataivitu, Tiruvatikai, Cittamur, Tindivanam, Uraiayur, Kanchipuram, Chandragiri and Chengleput which await further detailed investigation²⁷.

It is digressed therefore that there existed multiple and differential patterns of distribution of local power. Further, we also find references to kirtas as individuals who ruled Coromandel Forest regions as mentioned in the literary source of Acyutarayabudayam²⁸. The study of jungle rulers will particularly help us to compare the aspects of state formation in forest zones and agrarian zones in the political system. Thus, Coromandel political system was a distinct one established at a particular point of time in history by Vijayanagara rulers irrespective of persons appointed with titles such as Raya, Raja and Nayaka in the rule of a region with the specific motive focussed on revenue in the territory²⁹.

Nayakattanam was given as an office and some of the Cimai units granted by Vijayanagara rulers to Nayaks were called Nayakattana Cimai. Other divisions such as Parru and Nadu, granted to Nayaks were only called Nayakattanams. The domain of Vijayanagar chiefs were scattered over hundreds of square miles which appeared to have had no definite boundaries may be summarily rejected in the light of epigraphical evidences³⁰.

Regarding the nature of control exercised by Vijayanagara kings in Tamil country, that they never interfered with the internal politics of any area and left it to the rulers of the locality themselves, and these Nayaks seem to have accepted Vijayanagara kings as their superior. Epigraphs prove that the Vijayanagara rulers had a direct control over the appointment and removal of local rulers³¹. Senalur Nayakattanam ruled by Kempadeva annagal was withdrawn and was given to Kalama Nayaka of Vellore in 1538. A.D. Manappedu Cimai which was the Nayakattanam of Timmaraya was ordered to be surrendered by the King³².

Similarly Vijayanagara rulers never permitted the Nayaks to grow too strong as an independent ruler which would result in challenging Vijayanagara centre. Evidences suggest that such tendency of Nayaks was checked; and in an evidence we find the general of Vijayanagara ruler invading Tamil country to suppress the tyrannical activities of Koneti Raja. Further, Achyutadevaraya-I, suppressed the revolt of Saluva Chellappa Nayaka in 1531 A.D³³.

King Venkatapati devaraya defeated Lingama Nayaka who wielded authority in Perumbedu Cimai at the time. Various inscriptions generally record that local rulers in Coromandel continued to be subordinates of Vijayanagara even after the battle of Talikota in 1565 A.D³⁴, where normal transactions were recorded as if nothing had happened. According to Nuniz, Nayaks had appointed a secretary at the court of Vijayanagara who always kept the Nayaks informed of the happening at the capital city. This view is also corroborated by the native literary source, Rayayacakamu³⁵.

Nayaks governed the locality with a number of officials. The Rayasam was the executive officer of the royal orders in the Nayakattanam³⁶. The next among the hierarchy of officials was called Attavani, the chief revenue officer who functioned as the head of Kanakkars in the locality. These revenue officers resided at places such as Tirupattur in North Arcot, Kalakhasti, Devikapuram, Maranjiyarin South Arcot and administered the collection of revenue from the subjects due to the Nayaks and paid it into the local treasury of the Nayakattanam.

Inscriptions prove the fact that many Nayaka treasuries functioned at various localities in the Coromandel region. An inscription from the Arumugasvami temple of Tiruttani records the existence of a treasury at Chandragiri³⁷. Another inscription from Srirangam mentions that a treasury functioned at Tiruchi. Further treasury existed at Nannilam in Tanjavur district. The main officer of the Nayak's treasury was known as Toshikhana Atikari³⁸. Various other Atikaris and Talayaris appointed at the village level, directly carried out the orders of Nayaks and had appointed Ayyakarans called tax-collectors chiefly responsible to collect revenue in locality³⁹.

When the Kings of Vijayanagar made donations of revenue to temples they communicated the royal orders to local Nayaks who ruled the region emphasizing that the king's orders should not be trespassed and that this amount of revenue would be adjusted or deducted against the payment due from Nayak's share as found in an epigraphical text⁴⁰.

Use of a particular term called Rekhai is noticed in the popular practice of collecting the revenue which includes a variety of sources from village including its many hamlets.

This suggests the introduction of revenue farming system which in turn necessitated the Nayaks to adopt this pattern at the village level. This introduced a system of government wherein grant of Nayakattanam was associated with the administration of the territory, and collection of the revenues and remission of a part of the revenue to Vijayanagara kings⁴¹.

The term Amaram referred to troops has not generally formed suffix along with the usage of Nayankara in the Coromandel epigraphs of the 16th century. The fact that these titles were given to them as chiefs of their community in the locality is inferred from the epigraphs. Therefore, it is correct to consider the term 'Nayak' indicating chiefs or leaders which is commonly found and used in a wide variety of instances⁴².

The usage of the word Nayak to denote warrior chieftain may not be a suitable one and probably Senatipati or Talaval could be equated with warrior chieftain; some exaggeration had crept in applying the military aspects of Vijayanagar rulers with reference to appointment of Nayaks.

It may be true that the Nayaks were asked to assist the Vijayanagar rulers at the time of war as loyal subordinates, but military duty played only a minor role in the selection of a Nayak by the Vijayanagar rulers⁴³. There is no details of the strength of the army maintained by the Nayaks in the Coromandel reign except a few. But there is only references to soldiers called Ekangiviras who were conferred with honour and privileges for their participation in war by the Vijayanagar kings in this period.

According to evidences Sevappa Nayaka was appointed as Nayak at Tanjore through matrimonial alliance with Vijayanagar ruling family receiving Tanjore as dowry⁴⁴. Allasani Pethanna was granted Karivacciceemai as a member belonging to the nobility. Vithala Chinna Timma was given Chingleput on account of blood relationship. Therefore it is suggested that some specific principle involving extended kinship was followed by Vijayanagar rulers, but there were no inscriptional evidences for supporting the grant of Nayakattanam on military tenure⁴⁵.

By using the original inscriptional text to describe the nature of polity also required careful treatment to assess the relationship among Nayaks and also with the Vijayanagar rulers. There was a frequent occurrence of a phrase "punniyam untakumpatiyaka" in the epigraphs dealing with the transactions among the Nayaks and Vijayanagar rulers⁴⁶.

The Vijayanagar rulers had made gifts for their own merit. Similarly the Nayaks had also made donation for their own merit. King Achutharaya made a gift of village for the merit of Vasava Nayak during 1534 A.D⁴⁷. Some inscriptions record that grants were made for the merit of father, mother, brother, wife, family, ancestors and other individuals. There is an inscription which records the usage of a prefix called swami for whose merit the gift was made through had dressing the person in the most respectable form⁴⁸.

According to the Hindu dharma, the gift which was made for the merit of a person helped the individual to secure a coveted place in heaven and this gift absolved all his sins accumulated by the man in his life advertently or in-advertently. The property of land and money were gifted to gods for the merit of persons to attain Swarga⁴⁹ has also been gleaned from epigraphs. Since the phrase was used under this widespread belief with merit accruing out of gifts, the interpretation offered regarding the phrase to feudalism may be ignored.

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