



WESTERN POLIGARS UNDER NAYAKS & NAWABS – AN OVERVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Nayak's rule and the Poligars system in the southern region of India would be traced from the period of Vijayanagar rule over Madurai. The Vijayanagar rulers could wrest the region from the Sultan of Madurai.

While Mohammed Bin Tuglaq led an expedition to the far south in 1327-28 he subdued the chiefs of the southern region and appointed Jalal-ud-din Ashansha (1335-40) who is regarded the founder of the Sultanate of Madurai.¹ The last ruler of this dynasty was Alauddin Sikander Shah (1372-77).²

He was defeated and the Vijayanagar rule over Madurai was founded during the reign of Bukka - I (1365 - 1377 AD) who despatched the younger son Kumara Kampana with the mission of dislodging the Sultanate power over Madurai - Kumara Kampana could accomplish in 1378 AD³. The removal of Sultanate led to the immigration of Telugu people into Madurai country. The Telugu accommodated themselves in the new region i.e. Madurai.⁴

NAYAKARA SYSTEM

The Nayakara, system was introduced in Madurai under Vijayanagar ruler. By the Nayakara system the Vijayanagar king was considered as the owner of the soil and the Nayak of Madurai who ruled over Madurai as the representation who obliged to serve the sovereign i.e the king of Vijayanagar. For the service of the Nayak of Madurai he was rewarded with grants of territory. As far as the internal administration was concerned the Nayaks enjoyed considerable authority and power of jurisdiction. The Nayaks introduced the Paligar system in order to govern their vast region.⁵

The origin of Paligar system their relations with Nayak's Emperor Krishna Deva Raya of Vijayanagar were responsible for the foundations of

Nayakingdom. He anointed Viswanatha Nayak as the ruler of Madurai in 1529. At the time, when Viwanatha Nayak came to Madurai the whole region was disorganized state local important chieftains were very eager to assume more power so as to connect a lot of people to their faith.⁶ The absence of internal peace, threat of foreign invasions and the spirit of independence made Viswanath Nayak to introduce the Poligar system.⁷

Viswanatha Nayak and his general Ariyanantha Mudali found the necessary of taking into confidence the old local chieftains who were the vassals of the Pandyas.⁸ So immediately on assuming power Viswanatha Nayak in order to stabilize the power introduced the institution of Palayam as a permanent and efficient body for the administration of the country and for the defence of Madurai. The western Palayam means an armed camp. The chief of the Poligars.⁹

The term Poligar literally means the chief of the camp¹⁰ and the English seems to have called them Poligar. The term derived not from the Tamil Palayakara but from the Tamil Polegadu or the Canerese Palegara. The meaning of cadu or caru is identical which means Kara.¹¹ This kind of Poligars system had been introduced by the Kakatiya ruler Partaparutra II 1295, 1326 of Warrangal.¹² Viswanantha Nayak divided the entire region under his control into 72 Palayams the Poligars, the head of the Palayams were vested with enormous police and judicial powers. They were to pay tribute to the Nayaks.

The tributes were one of the annual income from the territory they held from the Nayak.¹³ They were to restore peace and order to improve agriculture, clear the forest and to bring the waste lands under cultivation.¹⁴

In the times of storms and stress they were to rally round the object in introducing this system might be to promote integration, between the Telugu-conquers and the Tamil subjects.¹⁵

Telugu and Tamil chieftains were appointed as Poligars indiscriminately in order to have necessary union and to keep an everlasting peace on the religion of Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram.¹⁶ To effect a permanent peace and order Viswanantha Nayak sent the general Ariyanatha Mudali to Tirunelveli, who later built a fort and kept an army there. This place known as Palayamkottai gained strategic in the Military history of Southern Poligars.¹⁷

Though the aim of Viswanatha Nayak was to create Poligars to restore peace and order in the region. It resulted badly. The activities of the Poligars were contrary to the expectation of the sovereign of Madurai. In course of time the Poligars formented with great ambitious. Weakened the Nayakdom. From the beginning onwards the Poligars became independent practically.¹⁸

NATURE OF POLIGARS ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

The Poligars kept a government of their own Maintaining nominal officers known as Pradhan of Dalavay and ministers called Stanapathi.

He was not allowed to construct any fort and had no right to punish the inhabitants in the capital punishment.¹⁹ In practice the Poligars built forts according to the wish for the safety. For instance in Tirunelveli, Madurai, Dindugul there was 25, 12 and 8 forts respectively.²⁰

The Poligars kept a part of their land for their livelihood and distributed the rest among the shorogars who provided timely military aid. The actual cultivation was entrusted to the field workers who filled the soil and received a little any grain for their survival and they were relegated to the status of slaves. The cultivated lands had for inner division namely Kirusal of black cotton soil- sheval - red soil - Pottal or mixture of black or white soil and Veppul - brown for the cultivated lands, the Poligars gained 50% share of total output."

Additional to the land income the Poligars actively participated in usurpation of Circar properties (territory under the Nawab). Above all acting as watchers were not even received Kaval fees (wealth) for the inhabitants of the low lands. But also made it as manual (Custom).²¹ The inhabitants did not feel it as an oppressive and felt the Palayams as the place of shelters from the over exaction of the amuldars.²²

MAJOR PALAYAMS

The carnatic treaty of 1792 mentions the name of 46 Palayams, major ones of which Sivagiri, Uthumalai, Naduvakurichi, Talavankotti, Surandai, Aundzipuram, Vadagarai, Settur seems to be prominent in the western parts of Tirunelveli Dist.²³

DRESS

The Poligars dress themselves elegantly and wore turban, turban band of golden colour laural adorning the head gold chains, bangles gold belts tied round the waist/white fleece, sticks, flags, torch and parasots, horses, camels, elephants and palanquins served a man of the trend.²⁴

ORIGIN OF THE WESTERN POLIGARS

Of the Poligars of Nayak country those in Tirunelveli were in two groups namely Western block and the Eastern block. The former was dominated by the Maravas and the latter by the Nayaks.²⁵ The Western block was headed by Pulitever of Nelkattan Seval. South Eastern by Kambomman of Panchalamkuruchi.²⁶ Pulitever had acquired as ascendancy

among Western Poligars, because of his strength of character and stability of intellect and the members of the Western block were generally guided by him.²⁷

TRIBUTE

The Western Poligars paid tribute to Madurai Nayak through Dalavai Mudali of Tirunelveli. Dalavai Mudali had full power to collect the tribute.²⁸ All the Poligars went to Dalavai's Palace and paid homage to Dalavai with Kists.²⁹

FORTS

The Western poligar region constituted of a few forts namely Sivagiri,³⁰

Nelkattanseval, Vasudevanattan and Paniyur³¹ and these forts were controlled by the Poligar i.e. Sivagiri and Nelkattanseval. Sivagiri fort was larger than the other forts. It was capacious and regular with parapet of find with and loopholes to fire through the woods. It was entirely new and some few parts of it remained unfinished and there was a wet ditch and bamboo hedge which surrounded it.³²

CONCLUSION

The Mughals created the Nawab of Arcot during the reign of Aurangzeb in 1693. Daust Ali (1732-40) the Nawab of Arcot in his attempt to extend his suzerainty sent his son Safdar Ali and his son-in-law Dewan Chandra Saheb against the Nayaks of Madurai in 1734 and brought Madurai under his power in 1736. Thus the Nayakingdom was superseded by the Nawab of Arcot.³³

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