

Land tenure system in Travancore till 18th century

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ABSTRACT

The tenure relations that existed in Kerala have some peculiarities. It was largely a caste based *jenmi* system. The traditional tenurial concept in Kerala was that the landed property was owned by the Brahmins with their ascendancy to Kerala. In Travancore the lands fall under two main classes, *Pandaravaka* land and *Janmom* land. The terms and conditions were different for cultivators on *Pandaravaka* lands and for those on other lands. In addition to *Pandaravaka*, there was the division as *janmom* lands which had the rights of exclusive ownership of the soil. Along with the land classification, there were three broad categories of rights in the land. First one is the *janmom* right or absolute tax-free proprietorship. The advantages of *janmom* right were attached only to its hereditary owners.

Key Words : Jenmi, Pandaravaka, Janmom, Naduvazhies, Rajabhogam, Brahmaswom, Dewaswoms, Kudiyan, Pattom

INTRODUCTION

The region of erstwhile Travancore had been a subject of profound admiration for many intellectuals, poets and onlookers for the rich expanse of resources and widening beauty that the area encompassed. With its specialties the region has evolved for itself a civilization of its own kind. Hills, dense forests, magnificent scenery, coconut groves, variety of flora and fauna and other manifold specialties beautify the landscape of Travancore. The kingdom of Travancore makes up the South Western corner of Indian Peninsula. It was formed by an irregular triangle between 8^o.4' and 10^o.21' north latitude and between 76^o.13' and 77^o.38' east longitude at the west coast of peninsular India. It was bound on the north by Coimbatore, on the east by the Western Ghats and the district of Madurai, Ramnad and Tinnevely.

With the geographical peculiarities of the land structure, the socio-economic conditions also base their features on land. Land formed the basis of relational patterns in the society and thus an agrarian structure soon started developing. Possession of land complemented ritual status and brought power. Various tenurial systems evolved for the efficient management and cultivation of land. In the agrarian structure there was a hierarchy based on caste system.

Agrarian structure in Travancore :

The agrarian system in Travancore was very specific to the region and it worked as a driving

force for the conversion in the production, distribution and expenditure of wealth from static to a dynamic stage. During the early years landed property was under the control of Temples, Brahmins and *Naduvazhies* and they enjoyed that land free of tax and paid only *Rajabhogam* in times of emergency to the ruler. The tenants held their lands on feudal tenure, undertaking to follow their land lords and to defend them whenever necessary. The local custom at that time was to pay 1/5 of the total gross produce as *Rajabhogam* and it was collected in kind rather than in money. There came a change in the economic life of the people as a result of the ascendancy of those Brahmin *janmis* in course of time. However, they influenced the feudal population and made them adopt their own customs. This situation changed only with the dawn of modern Travancore.

Land tenure system in Travancore :

Land tenure system in Travancore was all about the relationship and the terms and condition that people had among themselves with their over land lords. Tenure related rules reveal the terms and conditions of the allocation of land and property rights among people. Various rights with regard to the use and control and transfer of the land were defined by these. The cultivating groups had their social status on the basis of the nature of land tenure and kind of demands made on the produce of husbandry by the state and the landlord classes. Historical study reveals that in Travancore the main patterns of land tenure were that of *Janmom* and *Pandaravaka* or *Sirkar*.

Janmom lands :

The term *janmom* in the unique sense had a hierarchical base related with the Brahmins. It denoted the status of the Brahmins in the society. While increasingly it was used in a general sense for any class of people with full proprietary right over the land. That means the exclusive ownership of the soil and the *janmom* property as the absolute private property of the owner or proprietor. The *janmom* lands were generally tax-free and the *janmis* as owners never alienated land by absolute sale except to other *janmis*, whether *Brahmaswom* or *Dewaswoms*. This was taken to be a title privilege. In addition to the large descriptions associated with the term there are varied theories on the accumulation of lands in the hands of the Namboothiris in Travancore.

Janmom Land Tenures :

In Travancore the land relationship was more feudalistic with a large chain of intermediaries between the land owners and the actual cultivator. The relations of land owners and tenants depended on varied categorizations and they decided the position of each in a society of disparities. Though this system of division functioned well for centuries there emerged new forces which strained relations between a *janmi* and a *kudiyani*. The payments made by the *kudiyans* to the *janmi* could be grouped under three heads-annual, occasional and once in twelve years. The annual payments consisted of *michavaran* or rent fixed by the deed and *onakazcha* which were presents by the *kudiyani* at the time of the *Onam* festival. The chief occasional payments were the *Aradianthram* fees and the Kalasavari. The *Aradianthram* fees were contributions made by the tenant on the occasions of six important ceremonies in the Namboothiri *janmi's* household. *Chornnu*, *Samavartanam*, *Veli*, *Pindam*, *Masam* and *Upaneyanam* are the important ceremonial occasions. *Kalasavari* is the fee levied by *Devaswom janmis* when *kalasams* or purification ceremonies took place in the *Devaswoms*.

The *Adukuvathu* or renewal fees were the fees that were to be paid periodically once in twelve years. It was made periodical because there was a need of titles of one time getting accepted

by the successors and thus renewed. This takes us back to a very primitive state of society when the conqueror acquired not only the public rights of the conquered king but also the private rights of the defeated king's subjects. As the *janmis* were a kind of feudal lords, the principle of the renewal on a change of the political administration was extended to private individuals. There was an array of subtenants in between who divided holdings to other cultivators.

In Travancore the heads of *Devaswomvaka*, *Brahmaswomvaka* and *Madambimarvaka* were the categories of land under the *janmom* tenure. The first two comprised of lands belonging to private *Devaswoms* and *Brahmaswoms* while the third had all lands owned by non-Brahmins and non-*Devaswom janmis*. The *janmom* lands were mostly leased out to tenants and tenures arose on such holdings. *Kanapattom*, *Verumpattom*, *Kuzhikanom*, *Otti*, *Kanom-Kuzhikanom*, *Attipper*, *Karazhma*, *Koolikarazhma*, *Varom*, *Kudikidappu* and *Kudiyirippu* were the important *janmom* tenures in Travancore.

***Pandaravaka* or *Sircar* Lands :**

Apart from the category of lands over which the owner has inherent proprietary right those remained the land over which nobody except Government had full proprietary right. These lands are called *sircar* or *pandaravaka* lands which were completely maintained by the Government. Government had the complete proprietary right over these lands. *Sircar* land had two main sub categories. The first category was land for which persons deemed to be tenants of the state paid revenue to the state. The second category was land held by the royal family and its accomplices. It included land of the royal palace and land belonged to the women of the royal palace. In the 1850s, between 60 and 70 per cent of all cultivated land was *pandaravaka* and all uncultivated waste land was deemed *pandaravaka*. Those who were appointed as the tenants of the Government were given a part of these lands on lease contracts. The tax that was to be paid to the *sircar* from the *pandaravaka* lands was called *pattom* or rent. The amount was calculated on the basis of the share of the produce of the land that was to be paid to the *sircar*. They were also subject to different rates of assessment varying from full assessment to absolute exemption from assessment.

Tenures under *Sircar* Lands :

Sircar land where the State had absolute power was subjected to full assessment. A variety of tenures arose on these *sircar* or *Pandaravaka* lands. The tenures on the *pandaravaka* lands could be sub divided as *kandukrishipattom*, *kuttapattom*, *vempattom*, *pandaravaka otti*, *inams* and *ulliam* or *viruthi*. The roll of *sircar* lands increased with the increased accretion of escheated lands, reclamation of unoccupied lands and annexation of home farms of subjugated chiefs. The accumulation of lands purchased for money from the Dutch also increased the roll of *sircar* lands.

Conclusion :

The land tenure systems in Travancore show that the tenurial rights on lands in this region. The jemie system of land ownership in the region was characterized by the tremendous concentration of ownership rights of land. The traditional land structure and land tenure patterns in the region point to the direction that the private ownership rights of land were recognised. During the early times the native states followed a policy of non interference in the affairs of the jemies and tenants. As a result of this the cultivators were in a deplorable position. Land revenue was collected from the land from the very early times.

Key words :

<i>Brahmaswom</i>	:	Lands and other properties belonging to the Brahmin <i>jenmis</i> of Kerala
<i>Dewaswoms</i>	:	Religious endowments and property belonging to the temples.
<i>Janmom</i>	:	Ownership of land having tax free proprietorship on the holder
<i>Jenmis</i>	:	Hereditary owners of land
<i>Kudiyam</i>	:	Lease holder
<i>Naduvazhies</i>	:	Military chiefs of nadus or districts
<i>Pandaravaka</i>	:	Belonging to Government
<i>Pattom</i>	:	Land leases a general term referring to the share of the produce due to the overlord
<i>Rajabhogam</i>	:	Share that in due to the King

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