



## THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE STATE AND PEASANTS IN THE BACKGROUND OF SHARAT SYSTEM IN COLONIAL MYSORE, 1800-1830

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### **Abstract**

*During early nineteenth century, Mysore state was a victim of East India Company's colonial expansion policy. Social and economic life of the common peasants was insecure due to the colonial economic experiments in this region. An attempt is made in this research paper to find out the basic relationships between peasants and the Government in the background of Sharat system which was a major policy of revenue administration in that time. Mysore revenue administration was expletive to the colonial economic interests. So here I am reviewing the sufferings and difficulties of peasants by the corrupt revenue officials, influential elites, diabolic courtiers and grim moneylenders.*

**Key Words:** Colonial Mysore-Sharat System-Purnaih-Krishnaraj Wodeyar 3rd-Amildars- East India Company-Peasants-Moneylenders.

### **Introduction**

After the fall of Srirangapatna the kingdom of Mysore lost its political freedom and became a protégé state under The East India Company. Lord Wellesley appreciated the old Hindu royal house of Mysore for their implied support in the wars against Tipu sultan. So the Company showed favour to restore the Wodeyar dynasty on the Masnad of Mysore. According to the treaty of Srirangapatna in 1799 the Company tried to show its political convenience in south India. Company divided the state to overcome the Tipu's administrative territory with its military allies to focus on political and economic factors. According to the treaty the parts of baramahal and western coastal areas came under the direct control of Madras province. The regions of Bellary, Ananthapur, Cudapha and Curnool were given to the Nizam of Hyderabad and the northern parts of Thungabhadra river which were controlled by Tipu were given to the Marathas for their military assistance<sup>1</sup>. After the partition was made Company with special premonition, rest of districts such as Chitradurga, Mysore, Bangalore, Tumakur, Kadur, Shimogga, Kolar, Mandya were called The Mysore principality. The Company decided to give this protege state to the successor of Old Hindu Royal House Krishnaraja Wodeyar the 3<sup>rd</sup>. But as the prince was still a young boy Lord Wellesley appointed Purnaiah as Dewan and the regent of the minor prince on 1799 July 01st<sup>2</sup>. Purnaiah had a good experience in state affairs. He had even worked under Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan as a financial officer. Purnaiah had maintained a good relationship with Company officials diplomatically. Purnaiah started his administration by the advice and guidance of Barry Close who was appointed as a resident of Mysore by the Company. Lord Wellesley gave obvious directions to the resident Barry Close to look at the administration of Purnaiah with more vigilance and to submit subsidy without any obstacles to the Company<sup>3</sup>. Purnaiah also knew about the order given by the Company to the resident of Mysore regarding the subsidy. Purnaiah was watchful in a way not to affect the Company's economic interests. He tried to enforce the favourable economic policies of Company officials. So that he would be praised for his work by the company 's officials. He was also grateful to the company for making him the Dewan. He tried to enforce the Company's direction with rigorously in the state. Here we have to notice one important factor is Purnaiah as an administrator that he was only interested in pleasing the officials of the company that the peasants of the state. During the Dewanship of Purnaiah the state of Mysore which was created by the Company witnessed different sort of economic experiments. Sharat system was one of the important revenue policies in this type of experiments. The peasants of Mysore state were greatly affected by this system. The Sharat system was very significant to maintain the revenue relationship between the peasants, bureaucracy and the state. After the end of regent rule of Purnaiah, in January 1812, Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar 3rd took over the administration of colonial Mysore state. To focus on the subsidy, military expenditure Purnaiah made contracts with amildars through this sharat system. After the departure of Purnaiah the experiment of Sharat system became a chief revenue system during the reign of Krishnaraja wodeyar 3rd.

### **Economic Condition of the State**

To realize the relations among the peasant and state in the background of Sharat system it is essential to think about the conditions of economy of the state. According to the treaty of Srirangapatna the payable subsidy to the Company as well as the military expenditure to maintain the law and order had direct impact on the economic life of the peoples of Mysore. After the death of Tipu the Mysore state treasury became empty because of the British. This empty treasury was given to the new state by the Company. It made an adverse effect to the state's economy. So, the Mysore state had faced many challenges under such turbulent circumstances. Firstly Mysore had to submit the subsidy of rupees twenty four and half lakhs in monthly instalment<sup>4</sup>. Secondly according to the 3rd schedule of the treaty, Mysore agreed to contribute towards the discharge of the

increased expense incurred by the augmentation of the military force and the unavoidable charges of war such a sum as shall appear to the governor general in council of fort William on an attentive consideration of the means of His said Highness to bear a just and reasonable proportion to the actual net revenues of His said Highness<sup>5</sup>. Money was quickly drained to suppress the resistance against colonialism such as Dhondia Wagha's rebellion, Iguru Nayaka's revolt and Wayanadu revolt in the early times of Purnaiah's Dewanship<sup>6</sup> and money was also essential to maintained the administration machinery. After observing these Purnaiah proceeded to organise the income sectors in the state. In 1799 Company give 13,74,076 of kantiraya pagoda of revenue areas to Krishnaraja wodeyar 3rd<sup>7</sup>. Ninety percent of the state income came from land revenue, and the remaining income came from sawyer, tobacco and excise duties. So government concentrated more on the high income sector of land revenue. Due to this Purnaiah experimented with the sharat system to collect revenue in a specified time.

### The Peasantry

Purnaiah made a peace proclamation after taking the charge of Dewanship to draw the attention of peasants<sup>8</sup>. According to this he decided to restore the revenue system which was prevalent before the time of Haidar Ali and waived the pending revenue. More than 90% of population belonged to rural society in Mysore. Agriculture and its ancillaries were the main occupations of the society. According to Wilks the ayyangadis were compensated for their duties in two ways a) either in allotment of land from the corporate stock or b) in fees consisting of fixed proportion of the crop of every farmer in the village<sup>9</sup>. The socio economic life of peasants was influenced by local chiefs like gowdas, patels, and shaanbhogas in every village. The following table shows the statistics of the estimated population, houses, and villages from 1801 to 1804<sup>10</sup>.

	Before 1801	In 1804
Residing villages and koppals	23,017	25,303
Non residing villages and koppals	4,810	2,962
Houses in the villages and koppals	4,87,939	5,67,456
No of families	4,25,624	4,82,612
Estimated population	19,15,326	21,71,754

The estimated population of the state in 1804 was 21,71,754. All classes of people in society were dependent on agriculture directly or indirectly. Peasants were socially divided into numerous castes like vokkaligas, lingayats, kurubas, devangas, golla, nayakas, untochables. Meanwhile peasants had a different sort of land tenures across the state. Among them khandaya, batai, kayamgutta, jodidar, amanitalav were important. In khandaya land tenure peasants paid the tax in the form of money.

Peasants in batai tenure paid the tax through grains. Jodidar was an inam tenure; it was a rent free tenure and was given to Brahmins especially. The cultivated land covered under the tank irrigation is known as amani talav. This type of land tenure belonged to the peasants who lived in the villages around the tank<sup>11</sup>. Another important factor that affected the peasants' life was feudalism. During the regime of Haider Ali and Tipu, they tried to control the feudal power in the village level of the state. But unfortunately it continued to grow anew in colonial prevalence. Many of the zamindars and the wealthy became the owner of fertile agricultural land in the village level. Because of the redundant tax rate imposed on peasants as well as breakdown of the price of agricultural productive goods. So many peasants became began to barrow money. It caused the growth of new moneylenders. Totally the peasant community were exploited by amildars, zamindars, and money lenders.

### The Nature of Sharat System

The sharat system was one of the important revenue policies which directly affected economic life of the common peasants in Mysore state which was overcome by colonial administration in the beginning of nineteenth century. This system was not a quest of Purnaiah's administration. It was in existence before the regency of Purnaiah<sup>12</sup>. This system was practically prevailing in the dewanship of Purnaiah but it became a part of revenue system of the state during the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar 3rd. According to this system the government made a contract with the amildars. The amildars were the chief revenue officers of the taluks and were responsible to collect the revenue from peasants and submit it to the royal treasury. So the amildars had obtained legal rights from the state to collect the revenue from the peasants. So it understood that the sharat system was an obligation or a contract on the part of the amildar to realise annually a certain amount of land revenue compulsorily on behalf of the state. The amildars wrote an agreement to the government which was called '*sharti muchhalike*'. According to this if the amildar had failed to collect the specific amount of revenue from peasants, he had to compensate it with his personal money, and if it exceeded the surplus had to go to the state. The amildar accepted the terms and conditions of the state and in return he wrote an agreement to the government. This type of revenue collecting method is called sharat system and the amildar's written document is called '*sharti muchhalike*'. This type of revenue method existed in pre-colonial times. To protect the welfare of his own peasants, Tipu ordered accurate directions to amildars<sup>13</sup>. Every amildar

had to visit to all villages in his own jurisdiction according to the '*muchhalike*' agreed by him. Amildar had to impose revenue on peasants on the basis of their crops. He had to collect a specific amount and if the collection fell short he had to compensate for that.

Purnaiah continued this policy and made some changes in it during his administration. Purnaiah had imposed it on a few amildars in whom he did not have confidence. He made an agreement or *muchhalike* with the new amildars. By the sharat system more revenue came to the treasury of Mysore state<sup>14</sup>. If the tax collected was more during the time of assessment, more commission was available to Purnaiah. He obtained five percent of commission on total revenue every year of his administration. Every month he got 600 kontiroi pagoda as his salary. The following table shows the statistics of commission amount which he obtained from royal treasury in his first five years of dewanship<sup>15</sup>.

First year	16,000 kp*
Second year	17,930kp
Third year	19,789kp
Fourth year	19,894kp
Fifth year	21,275kp

\*kp- kantiroi pagoda

So it indicates that his working efficiency was limited to collect revenue only. M.H. Gopal opines that Purnaih was an ingenious financial minister without a soft heart, he was hauteur officer and plaguing favouritism as administrator. He sought to develop his success by increasing the royal treasury than the happiness of the people<sup>16</sup>.

Meanwhile Krishnaraja Wodeyar 3rd had taken direct control over the state affairs after the retirement of Purnaiah from the Dewanship and regency. The new king was surrounded by the elites the wealthy, maratha brahmins, and other courtiers by patron Purnaih. Ramrao was appointed as a Dewan who worked as a fouzdar under the Dewanship of Purnaiah. There was a loss to state because of high administrative expenditure in the early days of Ramarao's Dewanship. The state faced horrible economic problems in time of Krishnaraja Wodeyar 3rd. Even his Dewans also failed to face these problems. Sometimes Dewans themselves yielded for bribery and greed and appointed worthless, fabricated and dishonest persons in key posts of state administration. As a result, the administrative machinery started to collapse. Conversely it should be noted that as a Dewan and regent Purnaiah had complied the favouritism policy which was also responsible for it. The British colonialism and its march towards conquering territory in different cities like Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras witnessed the rise of new elite class. In Mysore it opened up opportunities to Maratha Brahmins as Purnaiah belonged to a Brahmin family (originally from Maharashtra) whose forefathers had migrated to Tanjore in Tamilnadu for service. He brought in a large number of 'Maratha Brahmins' for jobs in the Mysore administration. The opportunities were used for their social and economic interests under the shelter of the East India Company, and acted as a intermediate class between the Company and the peasantry.

Purnaiah created a new elite and bureaucratic class by appointing people of his own community to use his influence of power during his time<sup>17</sup>. As a result of this the royal court of Krishnaraja Wodeyar 3<sup>rd</sup> was surrounded by this type of elites and prestigious class. These classes began to grow more influential in state administration. Inevitably Krishnaraja Wodeyar 3rd depended on corrupt Fouzdars and elite bureaucrats who surrounded him in the court. The Amildars began to bribe by misusing the powers of Sharat system. They engaged in exploiting the peasants because of the incitation of the courtiers and corruption of higher officials.

### **The Role of Amildars in Sharat System**

According to '*Sharat muchhalike*' the amildars had a right to collect the revenue from peasants. So they acted like an executive mediatory between the state and the peasantry. According to Sharat system the amildars played a key role in revenue collection. They managed numerous responsibilities of revenue department of the state. According to Sharat system the amildars conducted a study tour to specific places with their subordinate officers during the beginning start of sowing and harvesting of crops. Generally they visited rural areas for observing the cultivatable land prepared by peasants in January or February. As usual, in October or November they calculated the harvested land. When the new amildars were appointed they got accurate information related to Taluk affairs from the previous officers. They identified the arrears from previous years. They informed about the useful land without cultivation in the Taluks to the government. The amildars had the right to issue Taccavi loans in the Taluk level for cultivation and purchase of agricultural equipments to the peasants<sup>18</sup>. Government had a

right to transfer each and every amildar to any Taluks in the state. Government gave strict directions to the amildars who did not engage in agricultural activities. If the state had no confidence it had a right to repeal the Sharat contract of any amildars at any time without intimation.

From all these factors the amildars became the contact bridge of economy between the local peasants and the state. To abuse the Sharat system beyond their jurisdiction the amildars joined hands with the local Gowdas and patels, the local wealthy and elites and maratha brahmins who enjoyed good socio-economic status from the time of Purnaiah. It caused excessive economic damage on peasantry. It increased the dissatisfaction by peasantry against the state.

### **The Effects**

From the abuse of the sharat system the amildars started to exploit the peasants by the backing from diabolic elites and corrupt courtiers. Even the Maharaja himself, influenced by the bureaucrats, behaved like a centralised totalitarian officer. Therefore the administration indirectly came under the control of bureaucrats. Thereafter the amildars started to exploit the peasants in the name of 'sharat muchhalike'. Government key posts were sold by state officials. The elite courtiers landed on to earning money through the sale of fouzdar, amildars and shirestedars posts. Its effects on peasants were very bad. The amildars in taluks not only acted as revenue officials but also as judiciary officers in their jurisdiction. Thus the amildars became more influential. There was a bad effect by the amildars from their abuse of their executive powers with self-centredness. The corruption of bureaucrats had a bad impact on the administrative machinery. Junior officers resorted to the practice of bribery for saving their positions. Amildars gave bribe to Fouzdars to avoid the baulk of transferring power which state had accorded in the Sharat system. Even the dewans also got one share of amount from this bribe money in the time of Krishnaraja wodeyar 3rd<sup>19</sup>. The Fouzdars did not punish the amildars when they made mistakes in their affairs because they were satisfied from the bribe money of amildars. Irregularities and bias took place even in the recruitment of amildars. For example in Nagar region seven persons worked as amildars in different taluks who were the close relatives of Veene Venkatasubbaiah, a most acumen counsellor in the Maharaja's court<sup>20</sup>. The amildars who were recruited by influential elites exploited the peasants beyond their executive limitations. Some amildars gave abetting to illicit activities like robbery, theft etc. It was recorded that the amildar of Chennagiri taluk Annigeri Venkatarao supported the persons who robbed the commercial bank in 1827 at Yadehalli<sup>21</sup>. To resist being plagued by amildars, the peasants became borrowers for paying high taxes. The loan facilities were provided by the local wealthy people, rich traders and zamindars to peasants. So it caused to grow the new money lending class in the society. By giving loans this money lending class made the peasants' life more difficult. Because of the harassment of revenue officials and mishandling of moneylenders some peasants found it impossible to continue the cultivation. As a result of this the useful agricultural land became barren. The zamindars and the local gowdas and patels made an agreement with the amildars, and started their agriculture activity as a tenant on same barren agricultural land left by peasants. This created a new class of landless peasants in society. Government concentrated on collecting land revenue only. On one side the richest zamindars paid tax in specific time so the government did not think about the financial difficulty of peasants. On the other side the Zamindars extended their lands with the help of amildars. In due course the amildars indulged in bribery, to confiscate the land of those who did not pay the tax, and made a big loss to the government treasury by selling the confiscated land at lower prices. These factors became a major part of the administrative system. The years of 1816-17 and 1823-24 the Mysore state witnessed drought and famine. Even during this time the amildars misused their powers and forgot to save the welfare of peasants. Making false accounting and tampering the accounts corrections became a common habit of amildars. Moreover they worked with favouritism. Mainly it destroyed the social welfare. Colonel Cole decided to write a letter to Madras government to inform the demerits of the Sharat system. In August 1822 Cole wrote to the Madras government that the influence of Mothikhane Narasingarao under the sharat system had become immense and that his wealth had enabled him to buy off all complaints both against him as well as the amildar who were his proteges<sup>22</sup>. Through Sharat system the junior officers acted like agents under their senior officials. The Sharat system emerged and prevailed because the Mysore administration had an elaborate mechanism from the King to dewan and the Dewan had commission agents in the Foujdars. They in turn had the amildars as their agents and ultimately the patels and shanbhogas were the agents of amildars and exploited the peasants.

### **Conclusion**

Mysore state had weak and incompetent revenue officers. So the method of revenue collection was inadequate. The peasants had intensive botheration from this method. This created an insurrection situation against the administration. An enquiry commission came on December 12, 1833 to find out the causes and effects of Nagar insurrection. It stated the bad effect of sharat system was one of the major cause for that insurrection. Peasants were tired of the harassment of corrupt revenue officials and they were ready to attack them. Agricultural production had intensively broken down because of the errors of sharat system. Government was at loss due to this effect. In 1825 Sir Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras visited Mysore. He warned the Maharaja about the maladministration carried out by his closest courtiers<sup>23</sup>. Maharaja was helpless to control



the corruption in revenue administration. Because he was influenced by the dominant courtiers that surrounded him . B.L. Rice also opined that peasants were exploited by sharat system from Purnaiah's time to Krishnaraja wodeyar 3rd<sup>24</sup>. The revenue officials exploited the peasants because of the British policy on agricultural marketing which was lucrative and it increased the greed of these officials. This had bad impact on the economic life of the peasants.

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