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Agricultural Status and Land Revenue Administration in Madras Presidency

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ABSTRACT
In the pre-independent Tamil Nadu, the Collector of each district took control over the Administration. Their primary goal was to levy a huge tax on the working community and generate huge money, thereby increasing the economy. However, specific presidencies were understaffed, especially the Madras Presidency. The Collector was held responsible for almost all the activities that were carried out. After the East India Company was to a considerable extent firmly established in the Madras Presidency by 1801, the process of consolidation of its political power and setting up of its administrative machinery to govern this vast area had taken place. Simultaneously, they were accompanied by new revenue policies, as its motivation was primarily economic. The major cause is that the colonial policy followed by the British had a huge negative hit on the economy and the socio-political life. At the reach of the19th century, there were abrupt variations concerning agriculture-based practices followed in India. All through the centuries farmers were cultivating similar kind of crops like wheat, rice, oilseeds, variety of pulses, jute, spices, indigo, and cotton.

KEYWORDS: Agriculture, Madras Presidency, Land Revenue, Administration

INTRODUCTION

Indian agriculture was quite orthodox and straight forward and did not have a global reach until the early 20thcentury under the British rule. They had to meet the increasing demand for the growing popularity of handicrafts across the globe and hence faced the heat from the British. This led stayed simply an income of survival for almost all the farmers. On the other part of the19th century, starvation worsens the circumstances of farming even more. The British rulers were not taking enough steps in developing irrigation related facilities.[1]

In the pre-independent Tamil Nadu, the collector of each district took control over the Administration. Their primary goal was to levy a huge tax on the working community and generate huge money, thereby increasing the economy. However, specific presidencies were understaffed, especially the Madras presidency. The collector was held responsible for almost all the activities that were carried out. After the East India Company was to a considerable extent firmly established in the Madras Presidency by 1801, the process of consolidation of its political power and setting up of its administrative machinery to govern

this vast area had taken place. Simultaneously, they were accompanied by new revenue policies, as its motivation was primarily economic. The major con is that the colonial policy followed by the British had a huge negative hit on the economy and the socio- political life. At the reach of the19th century, there were minute variations concerning agriculture-based practices followed in India. All through the centuries Indian farmers were cultivating similar kind of crops. All through the centuries farmers were cultivating similar kind of crops like wheat, rice, oilseeds, variety of pulses, jute, spices, indigo and cotton.

All the variety of crops were grown in India utilizing simple tools as well as implements like sickle and spade, wooden plough which is a light material, supported using animal power. Unenclosed, open field based cultivation were the practices of India. The traditional kind of crops based rotation was carried in regaining the fertility. Farmers found to utilize only natural manures. Marketing, as well as storage facilities, were insufficient.

WAR AND AGRICULTURE

A new scenario surfaced concerning agriculture, which enabled debt reduction to farmers if there was a rise in prices or crop failure. This put a smile on the farmers' faces.[2] However, the advantage could not be availed by many people, since a majority of the cultivators in the Presidency did not have any surplus at all to reap the gains of higher prices, but they were only subsistence farmers and even those benefited by the higher prices had to buy other manufactured goods at increased prices. Also, there were serious shortages of food grains due

1. Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India, AHSI Proceedings; 1839
2. Butani, Dhamo K."Mango: Pest problems." Mango: Pest problems.(1993)

to some exports purchases made by the defense services and due to the lower production consequent upon the failure of monsoons, cyclones and other factors, this had necessitated apart from the 'grow more food' campaign introducing, many measures such as stopping of exports, increased imports of food materials, the setting up of the procurement machinery, a wide rationing system, statutory price control and various other measures. Besides, price control there were many economic controls instituted during the war which were comprehensive of almost all economic activities of the Presidency. These were meant to divert resources to the war purposes and to distribute the scare supplies equitably among the more significant number of purchases.

IRRIGATION SYSTEM

The legislation, Rules and Regulations Relating to Irrigation - Regulations under the East India Company

The rules prescribed by the Board of Revenue of the East India Company for Collectors of Districts related to the repair of tanks, water courses and other sources of irrigation constituted the first regulations on the subject. While at this time, no law was laid down as to the Government's proprietorship over water sources, the rules proceeded on this assumption in cases of 'Sirkar Lands generally', but more particularly in districts where no part of the land revenue was permanently settled. The rules were generally to prescribe the forms of estimates and accounts and auditing of actual repairs of tanks, water sources and other sources of irrigation.[3]

The rules prescribed forms of estimates required for new works or repair of old works; the daily wages to be paid to carpenters, bricklayers, smiths, coolies and tank diggers; the rates of materials to be used; hiring charges for carts; the forms to be submitted on completion of work and soon.

The Collectors were permitted to apply to the Superintendent, Tank Repairs, for estimate forming and

superintendence which is simply thereby beginning the collaboration between the Revenue and the nascent 'Public Works Department' Native Maisteries' could be engaged for purposes of measuring work performed, taking levels, and superintendence. Such 'Maisteries' were to work under the instructions of the Superintendent, Tank

3.Prakash, Anita K., I.V.MuraliKrishna, P.K.Mishra, and R.V.R.K. Chalam, "Deciding alternative land use options in a watershed using GIS. Journal of Irrigation and drainage engineering133, no.2 (2007): 162-174 repairs. There were specific instructions that 'Collectors were also instructed to take measurements of work, mud work in particular, by more than one person, and as often as practicable under their inspection, and that of their assistants or the Superintendents of Tank Repairs, to prevent 'fraudulent measurement'. The Inspector of Estimates of Tank Repairs was also required to assist the Collectors.

MODES OF IRRIGATION

The three main methods or sources of irrigation in Tamil Nadu are rivers, tanks and wells; streams and spring channels are other sources of minor importance. Rivers are utilized either through river channels into which water flows by inundation which means a natural rise in the level or through canals into which water is made to flow either from storage or from obstructive construction, such as dams, anicuts or bed regulators. Tanks can be solely rain fed, or they may also be supplied by rivers or by flow from other tanks in an upper reach. In many areas, the additional storage provided by tanks lends support to river-based irrigation. Tanks also function as a source of recharge for wells located in their ayacut which means the irrigable area of command. Wells may constitute the sole source of irrigation to a field, or they may supplement water available from rivers or tanks. Thus, there are varieties of situations in which the three modes of irrigation interlock and reinforce each other.[4]

The area under irrigation increased at the rate of 0.7 million hectares per year during the First Flan period, and the growth rate accelerated to 1.6million hectares and 2.2 million hectares per year. During the Seventh Plan period, the area under irrigation was proposed to be increased at a rate of 2.5 million hectares per year.

AGRICULTURE IN TAMILNADU

In the state of Tamil Nadu, the contribution of agriculture (inclusive of crops, livestock, fisheries and forestry) to the Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) at constant prices has been undergoing a decline over the years.[5] From 52 per cent in 1930-31, it declined to 40 per cent in 1939-40 (constant 1930-31 prices). The decrease from 1940-41to 1951-52 was from 39 to 29 percent (constant1940-41prices). While a similar structural change

1. Ines, Amor V.M. Ashim Das Gupta, and Rainer Loor,"Application of GIS and crop growth models in estimating water productivity." Agricultural Water Management 54, no.3 (2002) : 202-225.
2. Agriculture Polley vision 2020, (2001), Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi.

has taken place at the national level, the magnitude of the decline in the share of the agricultural sector has been much greater in Tamil Nadu. The drop at the national level was from 49 per cent to 40 per cent during the same period. Although in both cases, the structural changes are a result of the development process, the relatively greater decline in the share of the agricultural sector in Tamil Nadu has to be also ascribed to the lack of sustained growth in agriculture.

One of the significant changes that have taken place in the agricultural economy of TamilNadu over the last three decades has been in respect of the cropping pattern. The percentage of Gross Cropped Area

(GCA) under cultivation of significant crops from1930-31 to 1955-56. It was seen that the dominant crop in the state has been paddy. Despite variations in the cropping pattern, it had maintained its predominance throughout the period. However, a major development was on the decline in area under coarse cereal such as cumbu (Bajra) and ragi. In the fifties, the proportion of GCA under coarse cereals was of the order of 25per cent. The proportion started declining in the sixties.

CONCLUSION

The high assessments and constant revision of land revenue had a deleterious effect on agriculture and disastrous effects on the condition of the people. It resulted in a rapid drain of capital from the countryside. Because of the high assessments, cultivators were left with no savings, hindering their expenditure on agriculturalimprovements.[6] The frequent reappraisal of individual holdings for enhancement led to the taxation of the cultivator's improvements, killing the formers motivation to increase agricultural productivity. This caused a general absence of enterprise and initiative in the countryside, stagnation and decay in agriculture and all-pervading poverty in the Indian villages.

The high pitch of land revenue assessments caused frequent and severe famines, contributing to the decay in agriculture and placing at terrible risk, the health, and the survival of the people. The massive assessments eroded the staying power of the peasant, the lack of which

6. BOS, Marimus G.,D.H. Murray-Rust, Douglas J.Merrey, H.G. Johnson, and W.B. Snellen."Methodologies for assessing performance of migration and drainage management." Irrigation and drainage systems 7, no.4 (1993 : 231-261.

'transformed every drought into a famine'. These conditions prevailed all over the country. The period between 1759 to 1943 saw 32 famines sweeping over the sub-continent, of which a high proportion(20) were in the 19th century alone with an estimated mortality of 32.4 million people.

The assumption of control over, and the management of irrigation works in the Madras Presidency, as much as in the rest of British India, was an intrinsic part of the land revenue administration of the British colonial government. The law and policy relating to irrigation during this period primarily served the objective of enhancement of land revenue from the extension of wet cultivation. The primary development in land revenue administration in which it provides the context for the development and management of irrigation.

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