

FORMATION OF PALAYAKARAR SYSTEM BY VISVANATHA NAYAKA (1530-1564 A.D.) – A STUDY

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Abstract

Krishnadeva Raya, the great Vijayanagar Emperor, had divided his empire into more than 200 Nayakdom. Nayakas were the vassals of the Vijaynagar ruler. Tamil country was divided into three Nayakships instead of rajas. Visvanatha Nayaka was the first Nayaka of Madurai Kingdom. By his turn he introduced Palayakarars (Poligar) System in Madurai Kingdom with assistance of Dalavay Ariyanatha Mudhaliyar and divided his region into 72 Palayam. Each Palayams consisting of few villages and the area of territories was an un-uniform. Basically, the palayams were developed as military camps to support the Nayaka kings. Palayakarar were the subordinates of the Madurai Nayaka and were to maintain an army and supplied to the Nayaka. In the case of Nayakas to Vijayanagar kings, the Palayakarars had to pay tribute to Nayakas. The maniyakaran or ambalakaran, the talaiyari, karnam furthermore, kitari were the other authorities of Nayaka government. This paper specially discusses principally Formation of Palayakarars System in detail.

Key Words: Nagama Nayaka, Nayakdom, Palayakarars, Ariyanandha Mudali, Rajyam Kavalkars, and Talaiyari

Introduction

Krishnadeva Raya (1509-1529 A.D.), the great Vijayanagar Emperor, for easy and better administration, he had divided his empire into more than 200 Nayakdom. Nayakas were the vassals of the Vijaynagar ruler. Tamil country was divided into three Nayakships of Madurai, Senji and Tanjavur instead of rajas. Visvanatha Nayaka was the founding father of the Nayaka kingdom at Madurai. By his turn he introduced Palayakarars System in Madurai Kingdom with the advice of Ariyanatha Mudhaliyar, his Dalavay and divided his region into 72 Bastions. Palayakarar were the subordinates of the Madurai Nayaka. The duties of Palayakarar were to maintain an army and supplied to the Nayaka when demanded. Also they maintain police forces called Kavalkara (Police). He distributed uncultivated land to Palayakarar and destroyed the forest in Tiruchirappalli and Trinelvei region. He enlarged cultivation land and to maintain the peace and gave an efficient administration, security to his people. He sent an army under the commander to conquer the Veyand. The present paper scrutinizes predominantly Formation of Palayakarars System by Visvanatha Nayaka (1530-1564 A.D.) – A Study” in detail form.

Methodology

The study would be both descriptive and investigative. By the way of historical research method, various evidences are collected from different kinds. Primary and secondary sources have been critically analysed and utilized in a cogent manner. The facts are documented and substantiate by the way of genuine end notes.

Aim of the Study

The Aim of this paper “**Formation of Palayakarars System by Visvanatha Nayaka (1530-1564 A.D.) – A Study**” is to persuade our oncoming generation how a foreign western federal system implemented in Madurai reign in Tamil country. Also how Visvanatha Nayaka managed Palayam, Palayakarars, military generals, fought different wars during his military campaign. It is also analyses how he possessed leadership qualities and had become the most admired in South Tamil County is to be discussed. This paper is an attempt to highlights the history of the Palayakarars and to bring the concealed information into fresh light.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this paper are :-

- (a) To know about the background of *amaranayakas* system in Tamil county.
- (b) To analyses reason of Formation of Palayams in Madurai region.
- (c) To discover the various vital Official role of Madurai Nayaka
- (d) To detect war achievement of Visvanatha Nayaka.

Military Organisation Relation with Feudalism

The origin of militia was inextricably associated with the functioning of feudalism. Military organization during the medieval period in South India was based upon the feudal features, in which the king relied on his vassals for armed forces. Feudalism was a system where Government and society functioned on the basis of holding land. The social, political and military institutions thrived on the contract of vassalage and the distribution of lands calls, fiefs. Under this set-up the subordinate and local chieftains and the vassals of the kin supplied fighting men to the autonomous in the hour of need and also participated in the war. In turn, they received grant of land and got their authority recognized by the king. The system survived through the twin principles of ‘service and protection’. The leadership of the king and the service of vassals enabled north of them to survive with security.¹

Integration of Rajyas

Krishnadevaraya (1509-1529 A.D.) the Tuluva dynasty of greatest ruler of Vijayanagar Empire was distinguished as a marker of an era of multi sided personality. He

was a great warrior, administrator, patron of art and literature. During his reign of twenty years, the glory of the empire attained its highest water mark.[2] During the Krishnadevaraya administration, the rajyas governors were not sympathetically willing towards the central government. He had sent an expedition into the Tamil country to strengthen the loyalties of the Nayakas to the central government. As per plan he sends a large army under four leaders namely, Vaiyappa Nayaka, Tubaki Krishnappa Nayaka, Vijaraghava Nayaka and Venkatadri Nayaka. The imperial army settled down the issues and fixed the revenue. [3] Tamil country was politically divided into *rajyas* instead of *mandalams* of the early days. During the Krishnadevaraya period, the Tamil territory was divided into five Rajyas and the Pandyas of Tenkasi and rulers of Travancore paid tribute and enjoyed quasi-independent power. The five Rajyas of the Tamil territory are:- [4]

- (i) Chandra Giri Rajyam
- (ii) Pandi Vidu Rajyam
- (iii) Tiruvadigai Rajyam
- (iv) Chola Rajyam
- (v) Pandya Rajyam or Madurai Rajyam

Formation of Nayakdom

Krishnadeva Raya, the great Vijayanagar Emperor, for easy and better administration, had divided his empire into more than 200 Nayakdom. Nayakas were the vassals of the Vijaynagar ruler. They were able to supply 3,20,000 foot soldiers, 21,600 horses and 235 elephants to Vijayanagar.[5] Nuniz has given an account that Achyuta Raja maintained six lakhs of soldiers and 24,000 horses sent by his nobles.[6]

Potential of Senapathi Nagama Nayaka

The whole Tamil country was divided into three Nayakships namely Madurai, Senji and Tanjavur instead of rajyas. ‘Then the whole Tamil country was brought under the effective control of the Amaranayakas instead of Mahamandalesvara. In the last years of Krishnadevaraya, problem started in Madurai region local Amaranayaka was not able to handle situation. Virasekhara Chola invaded Chandrasekhara Pandya’s kingdom and annexed with Chola territory’.[7] Chandrasekhara Pandya had complained to Vijayanagar Emperor Krishnadevaraya in 1525 A.D. In this crucial situation, Vijayanagar Emperor Krishnadevaraya chose powerful and responsible *Senapathi* Nagama Nayaka, to solve the problem. Because, he had a strong military contingent, who was monitored the capital of Vijayanagar Emperor with 40,000 Cavalry, 1000 Elephantary and 10,000 Camelary forces. Apart from that, he has maintained by own forces of 6,000 Cavalry and 20,000 Infantry soldiers.[8]

Visvanatha Nayaka War against Nagama Nayaka

Senapathi Nagama Nayaka came to Madurai and defeated Virasekhra Chola. Instead of handing over the kingdom to Chandrasekhara Pandya, he ruled the kingdom himself. On his usurpation occurring Chandrasekhara Pandya, again went to Krishnadevaraya and complained against the Nagama Nayaka.[9] The tempered Krishnadevaraya immediately sent against Visvanatha Nayaka, the son of Nagama Nayaka to resolve the situation. Visvanatha Nayaka then a competent young man was attached to Imperial court in Vijayanagar while his father was serving at Madurai. Visvanatha Nayaka helped the emperor in his northern campaign in Richur in 1520 A.D.[10] Visvanatha Nayaka marched towards Madurai and defeated his father and took him a war prisoner to the Krishnadevaraya's court at Vijayanagar. After the success of the assigned task, Krishnadevaraya encouraged the Visvanatha Nayaka and appointed him as Amaranayaka[11] of Madurai region and Madurai was assigned to as Nayakkattanam in the year 1529-1530 A.D.

Amaranayakas Visvanatha Became Nayaka of Madurai

Krishnadeva Raya (1509-1529 A.D.), had divided his empire into more than 200 Nayakdom and Madurai was under the control of Visvanatha Nayaka (1529-1564 A.D.).[12] Ferno Nuniz, the Portuguese Traveller who lived in Vijayanagar from 1535 to 1537 A.D., had pointed out that at Bisnaga (Vijayanagar) there were 200 captains called *Amaranayakas*. [13]

The *amaranayakas* were only military vassals who were assigned *amaram* or *Nayakkattanam* in lieu of their service in financial and military matters to the emperor of Vijayanagar. During 'last years of Krishnadeva Raya appointed Visvanatha Nayaka as Nayaka of Madurai'¹⁴ (i.e in 1529 A.D.). Visvanatha Nayaka the founding father of the Nayaka kingdom in Madurai was a great ruler of gallant qualities, extraordinary ways and potencies to reorganize the dominion amidst tremendous clash and temper. As he was trained within the Vijayanagar imperial system, he applied its principles in a systematic manner at Madurai. The state and court of the Nayaka individuals involving a settled region, bound together by basic laws, propensities and traditions into one body politic, practiced through the medium of a composed government was known as a state. The territory of the Madurai Nayaka under Visvanatha Nayaka controlled Madurai, Dindigul, Tiruchirappalli, Karur,[15], Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Ramnad, Salem, Coimbatore and a part of Travancore regions of present day Tamilnadu.[16]

Strengthening the Madurai Fort

Before Sevvappa Nayaka took over the Tanjavur country (in 1532 A.D.), Visvanatha Nayaka was the governor of the Madurai as well as the Tanjavur areas. As a result of the foundation of the two separate Nayakships, Tiruchirappalli became part of the territory of the

Madurai and Vallam was included in Tanjavur jurisdiction. Visvanatha Nayaka improved the defence of Tiruchirappalli,[17] After took over charge as Madurai Nayaka, Visvanatha Nayaka strengthened the Madurai fort with eight gates following the consultation with the important military officials as Dalavay Ariyanatha Mudhaliyar and Kesavaya Naidu.

Important Official of Madurai Nayaka

The Madurai Nayaka lead as chief military commander, the others officials *dalavay*, *pradhani*, *rayasam*, *kanakkan* and the *sthanapati* were the official authorities just helped the lords to hold political steadiness and suzerainty. Keeping in mind, an administrative office called *dalavay*, delighted supreme and finish complete control over all polite and military organization. The power and responsibility of the Chief Minister and *senapathi* were converging into a solitary office which helped and ably lead in a practicable way.

Pradhani

After *dalavay*, following by vital office of the king was *pradhani*, the finance minister or the revenue minister was called *pradhani*. [18] His principal function was the preparation of the budget for the state. Also in the absence of the Dalavay, he would act as the supreme master of the state. He was entrusted with the entire internal administration of the country.

Rayasam

Another chief administration outstanding officer was the *rayasam* or the Chief Secretary of the ruler. He was the next important to the ministers. The Dalavay, the Pradhani and the *Rayasam* formed the trio of the kings council. The *rayasam* was the king's confidential secretary and his business was to draft correspondence, prepare grants and orders, remember precedents and keep notes of all important transactions as duties of a high order and his position was rather exalted.[19]

Sthanapati and Kanakkan

Other than these administrative apparatuses, there were *Kanakkan* and *Sthanapati*. The *Kanakkan* was the Chief Accountant and in charge of the audit department. The *Sthanapati* was the Foreign Secretary who had dealings with outside rulers.[20] The above clerical offices shaped the focal country of the Nayaka government at the head-quarters. Such an extraordinary great official functionaries remained in help of the Nayakas rulers at all levels and filled in as strong strides for their command. Other than them, the *poligars*, the military delegates, endowed with in-chargeship of the barrier of the bastions at Madurai fort.[21]

Other Important Officials

The *maniyakaran* or *ambalakaran*, the *talaiyari*, *karnam* furthermore, *kitari* were the other authorities of Nayaka government.[22] They held the nearby officers, temple book keepers, *maniyakaran* or the income officer of a town and *talaiyari* or the security of the town *kaval* framework and *kitari* or the judicial leader of the town. They named the sovereigns to areas and for the most part of Telugus to *palayams*. [23]

Formation of Palayams

Like Krishnadeva Raya, the great Vijayanagar Emperor, Visvanatha Nayaka introduced a new system in Madurai Kingdom with the advice of Ariyanatha Mudhaliyar, his Dalavay and divided his region into 72 bastions which are called Palayams.[24] A list of Palayam under Visvanatha Nayaka are given Table 1. below :-

Table 1. List of Palaiyams Under Visvanatha Nayaka in Madurai Reign²⁵

Ser. No.	Palayam	Ser. No.	Palayam	Ser. No.	Palayam
1	Ariyalur	25	Tottiyankottai	49	Taramangalam
2	Turaiyur	26	Mankilani	50	Kuruvukulam
3	Iluppaiyur	27	Periyakuma	51	Paralacci
4	Kulathur	28	Thirumalai	52	Sennlkudi
5	Kattalur Perumbur	29	Aravattam	53	Alankulam
6	Marungapuri	30	Kombai	54	Memandai
7	Natham	31	Velliyakkundam	55	Rajapalayam
8	Thokaimalai	32	Kaccaikatti	56	Talaivankkottai
9	Pillilaimuzhuaki	33	Ezhairampennai	57	Maduvakkuruchi
10	Kumarapalayam	34	Sivagiri	58	Kadambur
11	Ramagiri	35	Ettaiyapuram	59	Neikattanseval
12	Pazhani	36	Panchalamkuruchi	60	Chokkamparri
13	Viruppachikuppam	37	Cettur	61	Urkkadu
14	Kannivadi	38	Kollarparri	62	Urukkadu
15	Ayakkudi	39	Kotikkulam	63	Maniyaachi
16	Mampari	40	Peraiyur	64	Tevaram
17	Idaiyakkottai	41	Cappattur	64	Kambak Kudalur
18	Ayittur	42	Sandaiyur	66	Ualayapatti
19	Maduvur or Vaduvur	43	Mannarkottai	67	Uttapanayakanur
20	Kongarayankottai	44	Attankkarai	68	Kavundankottai
21	Maruvathu	45	Singampatti	69	Uttumalai
22	Emukkalapuram	46	Urkkadu	70	Gurukkalpatti
23	Tavacimadi	47	Ezhumalai (or) Eramadai	71	Nagalapuram
24	Tombattur	48	Talaimalai	72	Azhakapuri

Because the country was very dry and most of the places were forest, where people could not get safety. So he instituted Poligar system in the year 1535 A.D. The Palayakkarar role was to administer their Palayams from their fortified centres. The system was a quasi-feudal organisation of the country. 'Each Palayam was ruled by a Palayakkarar or a petty chief. He divided the responsibility for the defence of each of the 72 bastions of the Madurai Fort'. [26] The total number of the Palayams and power of Poligar varied from time to time. The Travancore was included as the 73rd Palayam as it was a feudatory under the Vijayanagar rule. [27] During the time of Thirumalai Nayaka, the number of Palayams enhanced upto 82.²⁸

The Terms of Palayakkaran

The term of Palayakkar or Poligars of Tamilnadu as appeared in the regions of South India appeared in the political scene neither suddenly nor spontaneously. They came into the political scene through various stages and as the result of interplay of historical circumstances and political consideration. When the Vijayanagar rulers conquered the Tamil country, they were in need of local chiefs to help them in time of peace and war. They divided the territory into *Nayakattinams* and they entrusted them to chieftains known as *Nayakas*. The Nayakas divided the country into *Palayams* and assigned them to subordinate chieftains known as the *Palayakkaran* or Poligars. [29] These warriors had obtained a degree of moral authority from local Brahmins by patronising the Hindu Temples. [30] In the British records, the Poligars of Tamilnadu referred to the Southern Poligars. They were mostly concentrated in the region of Tinnevelley, Ramanathapuram, Madurai, Dindigul and Tiruchirappalli Districts. The English term Poligar seems to be taken from the Tamil word *Palayakkaran* but actually taken from the Telugu *Palagadu* or the Canarese *Palegara*, the meaning is same. The English took the word Pollam, a Poligar holding rather from the Telugu *Palem-u* than from the Tamil Palayam. [31]

The British Historian David Shulman called the Poligars as South India's 'Little Kings' as little more than successful bandits. [32] The government was not in the position to safeguard the life and property of the people and enter into collusion with the criminals in consideration of money. Due to the abnormal situation the people appealed the Poligars for protection. They were ready to respond to their appeal. The Poligars appointed their own servants and directed them to safeguard the inhabitants of the village. [33] Meanwhile the villagers were ready to accept their protection in enhanced rates. In course of time more villages seek their protection and *kaval* villages by paying increased rates. Thus the consent of the inhabitants in enhancing the status of the chieftains served as the motivating force.

The poligar, who maintained their own armed forces, extended their aid to the ruler on requisition. The poligar of Kannivadi and the Setupati of Ramanathapuram went to the defence of Madurai against the Bijapuris and Kannadians. Though the army appeared formidable it proved inefficient on the field of battle. The Nayakas particularly of Tanjavur

took interest in the developments in Ceylon, yet the control of the sea engaged no serious attention. However, they gave due importance to the spy system.[34]

Palayakarars Land

Palayam were of small territories consisting of few villages and the area of territories as ununiformed. Basically, the palayams were developed as military camps to support the Nayaka kings. Additionally, as in the case of *amaranayakas* to Vijayanagar kings, the Palayakarars had to pay tribute to Nayakas. Thus the land held by the palayakarars on military tenure had no ownership right over the lands for them. The lands granted to them consisted mostly forest areas, waste lands and cultivated lands. “The palayakarar kept the best lands for their own cultivation of their palayam and the rest were distributed among the chief inhabitants known as ‘*sherogars*’ who cultivated the land in times of peace but during the time of war they rendered military service.”[35] Palayakarars were not equally distributed land by Madurai Nayakas. The Nilakkottai Palayakarar was given a large territory consisting of 108 villages from Dindigul in the North to Sithayankottai in the west.[36] But the Koppayanayakkanur Palaiyam consisted of only 24 villages.[37]

Responsibility of the Palayakarars

“The Palayakarar was to the Nayaka what the Nayaka was to the Emperor”. Palayakarar were the subordinates of the Madurai Nayaka. The duties of Palayakarar were to maintain an army and to supplied to the Nayaka when demanded and also maintain police forces called Kavalkara (Police). As well, some other duties of Palayakarars to collect revenue from his jurisdictional area and administer justice within his sphere. Peasant paid their dues to the Palayakarar’s agent. He in turn paid his dues to the Palayakarar. The palayakarar remitted his due to the Nayaka and the Nayaka did to the Emperor. However, Kaval or watch represented a basic duty of the Palayakarars[38]. They also provided sentries to Madurai for protection. ‘The number of soldiers prescribed to be posted on behalf of each of the palayakarar in the Madurai Nayaka’s bastian was not less than 100 soldiers’[39]. Palayakarars played as local military commanders for the territory under overlord kingdom. The palayakarars were regarded as guardian of peace and security. They were entrusted with the task of detecting crime and dispensing justice.[40] They exercised the power to collect the revenues as well as the maintenance of the military force. He was the virtual administrator of his territory, renter to his sovereign, commander of force, guardian of public welfare and a ryot among his people.[41] However in normal times they undertook charitable activities, cleared forest, executed irrigation works and built villages.[42]

Poligars - Kaval system

In addition to the military establishment of Poligars, there existed a police setup called the Kaval. The word Kaval means “watch” and a person who performed the duty was called Kavalkar. The Kaval system in each village was controlled by the village councils. They were of four descriptions viz., sentinel:-

1. *arasu kavalkars* (government),
2. *nadu kavalkars* (district),
3. *desa kavalkars* (region) and
4. *sthalam kavalkars* (village).

If any theft occurred, the *kavalkars* concerned had to pay the money for the damages. The *kavalkars* discharged police duties. The poligars collected taxes and paid tribute to the sovereign. In order to protect themselves, they constructed forts of mud or of stone. They followed guerrilla methods of warfare.[43]

Dalavay of Ariyanadhar Mudhaliyar

Ariyanantha Mudhaliyar was mastered the ancient Martial arts like *silambam*, sword fight, wrestling etc; at the age of sixteen he came to the court of Krishnadevaraya. He worked as a chief accountant (*paradhani*) of Visvanatha Nayaka reign.[44] ‘Visvanatha Nayaka introduced a new Palayakkarar system in Madurai Kingdom with the advice of Ariyanatha Mudhaliyar, his Dalavay and divided his region into 72 bastions which are called Palayams’.[45]

Establishment of Muthaliar Kottai

As Visvanatha Nayaka was a Telugu and outsider of Madurai region, he was compelled to concentrate the organization with the dedicated help of his Tamil subjects. Every one of the authorities, was principally depended with the obligations to upgrade the troops and advance the treasury of the state.[46] To help the Madurai Nayaka, Dalavay Ariyanatha Mudhaliyar brought his friends and relatives lived in Kanchivaram and made them to settle down at Cholavandan. He constructed a colony of about 300 houses for the protection and convenience of his relatives.[47] Even today that area is called as Muthaliar Kottai.

Development of Madurai Territory under Visvanatha Nayaka

At that time, the robbers were disturbed the traders and pilgrims. Forest was the dwelling place of robbers. With the help of Dalavay, he destroyed the forest and the roads were constructed for traders and pilgrims. During that period minor chieftain ruled in south Tamilnadu they were called as *Panchapandyas in Tirunelveli* reign. They were revolted and disturbed to the people Visvanatha Nayaka suppressed with the help of Dalavay of Ariyanadhar. He destroyed the forest in Tiruchirappalli and Trinelveli region to maintain the

peace and order. He sent an army under the commander to conquer the Veyand because he protected and gave aid to the Christians. Visvanatha Nayaka believed strongly and supported to the Hindu religion. Ariyanandha Mudali of Madurai, Sevvappa Nayaka of Senji both they were directly involved in the battle of Talaikottai (1565 A.D.). Krishnappa Nayaka was the next ruler of Madurai. He sent an army under the leadership of Ariyanandha Mudali against the Muslim power of the Deccan'. [48]

Other Achievements

Visvanatha Nayaka was completely engaged to consolidate and maintain with in his territory under assistance of his Dalavay Ariyanandha Mudali. 'He suppressed rebellion of Kambam- Koodalur areas under head ship of his loyal Ramabatra Nayakar'.⁴⁹ Visvanatha fought a series of wars against the Pancha Pandyas of Tirunelvli and in the supersession of the local power.⁵⁰ During his times, Tenkasi Pandyas ruled independently.⁵¹ On the whole, the Pandyas seemed to have been loyal to the Nayakas of Madurai. They regularly paid tributes to the Nayakas. The Nayakas also allowed the Pandyas to rule peacefully without much interference. He sent troops for assistance, when Vijayanagara Emperor invaded to Travancore.

Conclusion

The establishment of Nayak dynasty was of very significant in South Indian History. The political feudalism system of Nayak Kingdom was well maintained that Vishwanatha Nayak introduced a novel way of the seventy two Palayam systems. He was the founder of Nayakaship in Madurai and handsome and courageous military leader ruled Madurai for thirty years. He work hard, unified the southern Tamilnadu and successfully implemented the Poligars system in sixteen century. It was one of the prime duties of the poligars to defend the kingdom from the invaders and provide military security to the kingdom. He suppressed rebellion of Kambam- Koodalur area, Pancha Pandyas of Tirunelvli and cordial relation with Tenkasi Pandyas. He newly established *Palayakarars* system and able to administration of western federal system in South Tamilnadu. It was more effective during the Thirumalai Nayaka period. Through his loyalty, he earned good will of the Vijayanagara Emperor. He did a lot for the improvement of the internal administration of Madurai kingdom and always honoured his Dalavay Ariyanandha Mudali. Scholars believed that Vishwanatha Nayak died in 1564 A.D., at the age of sixty nine and date of the death was not recorded in any of the chronicles.

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