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Popular revolts and the state in Medieval South India: A study of the Vijayanagara empire (1360-1565)

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The subaltern classes figure, if at all, only parenthetically in historical studies on medieval South India. This lacuna in research could be ascribed to the fact that peasants and artisans, despite their massive presence, left only a few marks on the historical record due to the nature of the sources — literary works and donative grants to temples and bramhans.

In this context, the extraordinary incidence of popular revolts in the inscriptive record of the reign of Devaraya II (1422-46) provides an excellent vantage point for an examination of the relations between social classes and the state in the Vijayanagara era. These inscriptions, recording as they do the proclamations of the popular classes in rebellion,2 are an eloquent testimony to their strength and vigour. Epigraphical references to these revolts, however, remain confined to the Tamil country and are absent from the Telegu and Kannada countries — regions which constituted the heartland of the Empire. Moreover, even in the Tamil country, the sources do not record incidences of similar protests by peasants and artisans after circa 1450. These temporal and spatial dimensions of the revolts, it will be argued here, illustrate the changing nature of the relations between the nucleus of Vijayanagara power and the peripheral areas over which it claimed hegemony.

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The most dramatic and widespread of these revolts occurred in 1429, when small cultivators and artisans in villages scattered over many parts of the Tamil country rose in protest against a perceived increase in the extraction of surplus. An inscription of 29 April 1429 from Vridhachalam is typical. It records an agreement between the valangai (‘right-hand’ castes) and the idangai (‘left-hand’ castes) of the twelve revenue divisions surrounding Paruvur, meeting in the courtyard of the Tirumudukunramudaiya-Nayinar temple. The pact states that since the raja-nyas (officers of the king) and the jivitakkar (holders of service tenures) oppressed the people in their land, and the kaniyalan (those who held kani or the ‘right of cultivation’) and the brahmanas took the rajakam (taxes), none of those belonging to the assembled castes should give them shelter, and that none should write accounts for them or agree to their proposals. It was further stated that the violators of this agreement should be executed (92 of 1918).

An analysis of the social composition of, and the demands articulated by, these movements may best be considered within the structured relations of domination and subordination in the medieval Tamil country. In other words, the existence of a class of small agricultural producers has historically been predicated on the presence of other classes who are dependent on the former for their basic means of subsistence. Consequently, peasants have always been inextricably enmeshed in a network of social relations with other classes, networks which facilitate the transfer of surplus from the peasants to these other social groups (Hilton 1980:11, 25). Such relationships, however, inevitably generated antagonisms, or, as Marc Bloch once put it: “agrarian revolt is as natural to the seigneurial regime as strikes, let us say, are to large-scale capitalism” (Bloch 1966:170).

Quite clearly, the basic unit of production in medieval societies was the small holding on which, regardless of its legal form, rested the responsibility for making the basic agricultural investments (seeds, maintenance of tools, provision of labour, etc., cf. Bois 1984:393-408). In pre-Vijayanagara Tamil country, control over land – or more accurately, control over the produce of land – rested, however, with the vellalas (dominant cultivating groups), the brahmanas, temples and, less commonly, with wealthy merchants and artisans. By virtue of their ritual and economic power, these groups exercised considerable authority at the local level. Thus, for instance, when a village was granted to a group of brahmanas, the donees collectively functioned as its governing council (sabha). Similarly, those who controlled large tracts of land – or produce therefrom – in the village acted together as village councils (ur) and as assemblies of the micro-localities (nudu). The brahmanas, temples and others who controlled large areas of land frequently left the actual tasks of cultivation to tenants (kudi, kudimakkal). The larger tenants and the
controllers of land cultivated their holdings with the labour of the *paraiyas* (ritually impure landless labourers).\(^5\)

The conquest of the Tamil country by the forces of the Vijayanagara Empire in *circa* 1360 (Raman n.d.:97; Stein 1980:382) superimposed a stratum of officials on these relations of domination and exploitation. For classificatory purposes, the strata of Vijayanagara officials could be divided into two groups: officials in charge of administration and revenue-collection and holders of land tenures. While administrative officials ranged from governors of provinces\(^6\) to functionaries at the village level, the most important holders of land tenures were the *nayakas* (see section II below). In practice, this distinction was seldom apparent, as administrative officials were frequently granted service-tenures for their maintenance. Thus, for instance, even village accountants held shares of village land, unburdened with the usual demands for rent and taxes (Stein 1982:112). The addition of this new stratum to the class of exploiters and the more efficient extraction and transmission of surplus to the political centre of the empire intensified the demands made on small producers.

The social organization of production and the patterns of exploitation contoured the social composition and the orientation of the protest movements under consideration here. Thus, though the principles by which castes were divided into those of the 'right-hand' and the 'left-hand' are as yet imperfectly understood, it is clear that they excluded the most privileged and the most deprived classes — the *brahmanas* and those who controlled land on the one hand, and the ritually impure landless labourers on the other (cf. Arjun Appadorai 1973; Champakalakshmi 1981:422).

In this context, it appears that the various groups exercising power at the local level attempted to transfer the increased tax burden sought to be imposed by the 'higher' authorities (provincial governors, other administrative officials, the Vijayanagara ruler) to those below them on the social scale — tenants, craftsmen, shepherds, etc. Hence, these movements were directed against the privileged classes as much as they were against the state.

The ritually impure landless labourers, on the other hand, were excluded from these movements for a number of reasons. First, there was a tremendous ritual and social chasm separating them from the other social strata.\(^7\) Both the dominant and the intermediate strata, moreover, shared a common interest in maintaining these labourers in their oppressed state, which was stronger than their mutual conflicts. However, the very depressed economic conditions in which the labourers were placed may have implied that the increased demands for surplus could not be passed on to them without imminent threats to their productive and reproductive capacities — if not the more ominous risk of massive social upheaval.\(^8\)
Excluding the dominant cultivators and the landless labourers; the movement of poor peasants and artisans did not aim at a radical transformation of society. Rather, faced with a demand for an increased share of their surplus, they responded with what has been called, in another context, 'radical conservatism'. 9 An important element in this inherent conservatism is what George Rude called "a sort of 'mothers' milk' ideology, based on direct experience, oral tradition or folk-memory" (Rude 1980:28).

Such an ideology posited a particular social hierarchy in which certain persons - the king and his agents, *brahmanas*, religious institutions and preceptors - were entitled to a share of the produce of land. This share was 'justified' by ideology as purveyed by the *brahmanas* and by past experience. However, a demand for an increased share of the produce of peasants and artisans, or of the revenues of merchants was perceived as 'unjustified', sanctioned neither by law nor by custom (for similar beliefs in pre-industrial England and France, cf. Rude 1980:30). This is illustrated in a 1429 inscription from Korukkai which records the deliberations of a meeting of the 98 sub-sects of the two caste-coalitions as follows: "Because they did not tax us according to the yield of the crop but levied the taxes unjustly . . . we were about to run away. Then we realized that because we of the whole country were not united in a body, we were unjustly (dealt with) . . . Hereafter we shall but pay what is just and in accordance with the yield of the crops and we shall not pay anything levied unlawfully" (*ARE*, 1917-18, 216 of 1917, para 68).

At the present stage in the research on medieval South India, it is difficult to determine with any degree of precision the level of taxation widely accepted as justifiable. The different rates and terms of taxation that appear in the inscriptional record suggest considerable spatial and temporal variation in the levels of surplus appropriation.

Popular revolts are indeed merely one indication, albeit the strongest one, of an intensification in the levels of exploitation during the reign of the Vijayanagara emperors. The increased demand for surplus imposed on the popular classes is also reflected in petitions to the Vijayanagara emperors by the temple authorities, 10 or the *nadu-kanikkar* (a revenue collection official), 11 asking for a reduction in these cesses, which caused much hardship within the village communities. In these cases, the Vijayanagara emperor ordered his subordinates in the concerned regions to annul the unjustified taxes and to take measures to guard against such impositions in the future. 12 A Vijayanagara inscription from Tirumakottai records an order to the governing council of the *brahmana* village of Palaiyur to revive the old method of levying taxes in grain instead of the then prevailing practice of collecting taxes both in money and in grain. 13 It has also been recorded that the *sthanattar* (temple managers)
of the Puliparakoyil temple had been collecting unjustified taxes from the weavers living in the temple precincts.\textsuperscript{14} The local officials also sought to increase the effective rate of surplus extraction by changing the units of land measurement. For instance, an undated inscription of the fifteenth century from Pennadam states that those who use a measuring rod other than the \textit{muvayiravan-kol} would be punished in the same way as enemies of the gods, the village and the 'micro-locality'.\textsuperscript{15} Similarly, a 1447 inscription from Kugaiyur records a petition from the members of the assemblies of the 'micro-localities' of Magadai-\textit{mandalam} to Vasudeva Nayakkar (and?) Tirumalai Nayakkar stating that the practice of measuring wet and dry lands with an 18-foot rod caused ruin. Thereupon it was ordered that the length of the rod be increased by two feet (97 of 1918; \textit{ARE}, 1917-18, para 69).

In a recent article, Kenneth Hall observed that "the imprecatory verses appended at the end of donative grants to temples in the Cola period denoted the importance of symbolic rather than physical punishment" (Hall 1981:403, fn. 37). In sharp contrast, the popular classes proclaimed death to those who helped the local magnates levy and collect unjustified taxes (e.g., 92 of 1918; \textit{ARE}, 249 of 1928-29, para 78). This is surely a gauge of the depth of resentment felt at the intensification of the level of exploitation.

In medieval South India, as elsewhere in pre-industrial societies, migration tended to be the major form of protest.\textsuperscript{16} Flight, of course, was a viable option only if land was easily available and if local magnates were able and willing to offer the migrants some protection. Where these conditions were absent, the only alternatives to passive submission available to the popular classes against increased extraction of surplus were the surreptitious evasion of taxes or collective resistance and concerted non-cooperation. In this context, the choice of open rebellion rather than clandestine tax-evasion is highly significant. It marked not only the relative weakness of the political centre but also a watershed in social consciousness: the popular classes, realizing their collective strength, banded together and resisted increased exploitation.

\section*{II}

The central issue on which these popular revolts were focused was an intensification in the levels of surplus extraction. Consider, then, the forms by which surplus was extracted – the nature and types of claims made on the popular classes.

In medieval societies, the predominant channel for the transfer of surplus from rural cultivators took the form of rent, though there were different types of rent. Since it is true, as Rodney Hilton maintained in an influential article, that there were no economic reasons for this transfer (Hilton 1962:74), it was usually accomplished by the application of a variety of coercive measures and ideological means. In the Vijayanagara
era, agricultural surpluses were extracted primarily by a system of differential rights to the produce of land: the state claiming the *melvaram* ('superior share' of the produce of land), while the cultivators retained the *kilvaram* ('inferior share', cf. Stein 1958:80-1). A pre-Vijayanagara inscription from Chimakurti records the rate of *melvaram* as varying between one-fourth and one-tenth of the produce of land according to the type of land and crop.\(^17\) A Kanchipuram record of the Vijayanagara period, on the other hand, indicates that the proportion of the yield of land claimed as *melvaram* was reduced from three-fourths to two-thirds on account of a severe drought (*ARE*, 655 of 1919). It is likely that there was considerable variation in the assessment of *melvaram* and that the average was probably somewhere between the rates mentioned in these inscriptions.\(^18\) The *melvaram* was thus a rent on agricultural production extracted by the state or its nominees. It was regressive in nature, as it was assessed as a proportion of the produce. In other words, since it represented a percentage of the yield of land, its incidence was greater on the smaller peasants who would have a lesser amount left to themselves. Thus, it promoted class differentiation within the village communities (Habib 1969:42).

Both the 'superior' and 'inferior' shares in the produce of land were alienable. This led to the rise of a land market, the activities of which were scrutinized by the administrative apparatus. The 'superior' share, which was vested in the Vijayanagara emperor, was often granted to temples, *brahmanas*, administrative officials and private individuals. The beneficiaries of these grants could similarly transfer them by sale, gift or mortgage. The alienation of the right to collect 'superior' shares did not in itself imply any change in the rights and status of cultivators.\(^19\)

The most significant instance of the grant of the 'superior' share of the state was the *nayankara* system (cf. Palat 1986). Under this system, the emperor granted his rights to 'superior' shares in tracts of land called *nayakatana-sirmais* or *amarams* to officials called *(amara-)*nayakas in return for the provision of specified sums of money, men and horses (Sewell 1970:131, 143, 354-55, 357-60; Nilakanta Sastri 1977:254-56, 274, 286; Mahalingam 1969:1, 28, 35-6). This account of the *nayankara* system is corroborated by at least two indigenous literary sources — the *Andhra Sahitya Parisat Patrika* and the *Rayavacaka* (Venkataramanayya 1935:122-23, 171; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya 1946 III:144, 146; Srinivasachari 1943:35). The existence of the *nayankara* system is also confirmed by epigraphical evidence.\(^20\) There are some inscriptive references to 'hereditary *sirmais*.\(^21\) This does not necessarily imply that *sirmais* were inheritable, as there are also lithic reports of *nayakas* petitioning the emperor for the renewal of their grants (*TTDES*:V, 17, 47).

The cultivators were similarly able to transfer their 'inferior' shares, as is demonstrated by inscriptive references to the sales of land and to
disputes over the right of succession to landed property. Records of such transactions were maintained by the imperial office connected with the collection of revenue (Venkataramanayya 1935:111, 145), and perhaps also at provincial capitals, as is indicated by epigraphical references to the emperors ordering provincial treasuries to make payments (cf. Saletore 1934:1, 154-176; ARE, 294 of 1910; 176 of 1916; TTDES: I, 192). Indeed, when disputes over the legal status of land arose, recourse was often made to the records of the provincial treasuries. For instance, in 1553 the villagers of Viralur and Sattamangalam complained to the authorities at Chandragiri (the provincial headquarters) that the village of Sindavanpundi had been wrongly classified as a madap-puram (land granted to monasteries). After an enquiry conducted by an officer on deputation from Chandragiri, it was settled that the village in question should be divided in the ratio of 2 to 1 between Gurukkal Sevvalinatha and the temple of Tirupparamisvaram-udaiya Nayinar.

Records of land market activities were also maintained at the village level in deeds which clearly specified the rights and liabilities of the vendors and vendees (e.g., TTDES: I, 204, 205A, 205D, 230).

In addition, the state imposed a wide variety of taxes on the popular classes. The most important of these were: a hearth tax imposed on (non-peasant?) familial economic units (e.g., shepherds, village servants); a poll tax on 'professionals' (e.g., soldiers, fishermen); a tax on artisanal production; an impost on membership in the valangai and idangai caste-coalitions; labour-rent (uligam); and, on merchants, export and import duties, sales taxes and tolls. While these rents and taxes were assessed on households and individuals, all available evidence indicates that various collectives – the village, the revenue-division, the different artisanal communities – were held collectively responsible for the transfer of surplus. The demands for a good cow, bull, buffalo and ewe (e.g., ARE, 226 of 1913; 113 of 1936-37; 313 of 1954-55), for instance, can hardly have been met by the average peasant household. Similar indications of communal responsibility for the payment of taxes and rent come from epigraphical references to the village as a unit of assessment (e.g., ARE, 227 of 1920), and from the mention of gifts of taxes by collective groups.

Joint responsibility for the payment of taxes tended to promote cohesion within the village community. The communal organization of the village is also testified by the existence of communal lands (which were used for, among other purposes, providing subsistence to village servants) (e.g., ARE, 253 of 1910; TTDES:II, 38), and by references to land transactions conducted by the village collectively (e.g., TTDES:V, 66; ARE, 33 of 1921; 193 of 1929-30; 126 of 1933-34).

On the one hand, this form of village organization gave the popular classes a means of resistance against those more powerful than themselves, as is forcefully exemplified by the popular revolts under con-
sideration here. On the other hand, as Irfan Habib has suggested in his study of the Mughal economy, the collective responsibility for the payment of taxes reinforced the tendency towards class differentiation within the village. This was because the treatment of the village as a unit of revenue-collection left open the possibility that the wealthier peasants could "dominate the community and distribute the revenue demand at will among their brethren to the great detriment of the poorer peasantry" (Habib 1969:43).

The provincial administrators of the Empire were located, as a norm, in the urban centres which blossomed during the Vijayanagara era. The nayakas, with their attendant retinues and armed retainers, were also largely urban-based (Stein 1969:193). The difficulties in the collection and transportation of rents paid in grain to the urban centres and the stipulation that the nayakas remit a share of their revenues to the imperial treasury led to a bias in favour of commuting these rents to money payments. These were revised at periodic intervals (ARE, 491 of 1937-38; Habib 1969:39ff.).

The practice of commutation of rents exacerbated the process of class differentiation within the villages, since the wealthier peasants could shift more easily to the production of cash crops which would increase their gross revenues. The second major consequence of the commutation of rents was the growth of village markets as peasants were compelled to sell their produce to raise money for rents and taxes. Crucial for the functioning of this 'market-integrated economy' was the development of a professional artisan class dependent on a reliable clientele (Hicks 1986).

III

The very existence of these inscriptive references to the demands of the popular classes in revolt testifies to the success of their protests. In other words, if the state and/or the dominant classes had succeeded in crushing the revolts, it is likely that these resolutions, literally writ on stone, would have been defaced. For a more concrete indication of the success of these movements consider a lithic record dated three months after the outbreak of protests in Vriddhachalam. In this record, of 7 July 1429, signed by representatives of the two caste coalitions, those who controlled land in several specified revenue divisions, the nanadesis and the padinen-vishayattar (both merchant groups), the kaikkolas (weavers), the tandirimar (temple musicians), the senaikkudaivayar (military officials), the manradis (shepherds), the kanmalas (goldsmiths), the san[...], the six classes of tenants and the vaniyar (oil merchants) collectively agreed on the rates of taxes payable in grain and money (91 of 1918).

The relative success of these movements in at least temporarily arresting an intensification of the levels of exploitation raises two important
questions: why were the inscriptional references to active popular resistance to increased exploitation confined to the Tamil country? Why were there no references to such revolts, even in the Tamil country, after circa 1450?

In this context, Stein (1982:107-08) noted a significant difference between historians of the Vijayanagara Empire who based their analyses on Telugu and Kannada sources (Saletore 1934; Venkataramanayya 1935), and those who worked largely on Tamil sources (Nilakanta Sastri 1975; Krishnaswamy 1964). While the former historians perceived little change in social organizations at the local level, the latter saw considerable changes in local institutions. More precisely, these competing views on the consequences of the establishment of Vijayanagara rule on the institutions for the localized management of resources implied "a recognition of the lesser autonomy enjoyed by local institutions in pre-Vijayanagara Karnataka and Andhra as compared to Tamil Country" (Stein 1982:108-09).

While recent research has cast considerable doubts on the extent of the autonomy exercised by assemblies of 'micro-localities' in the Tamil country, it is undoubtedly true that these institutions were almost completely eclipsed under the impact of Vijayanagara rule. The demise of these local institutions can be traced through a variety of indicators, some of which preceded the establishment of Vijayanagara rule: construction of a relatively more centralized administrative apparatus; the increased frequency with which agents of the state intervened in local affairs, the replacement of clientage services by the payment in shares of land as remuneration to village functionaries, the emergence of organizations which transcended the boundaries of the 'micro-localities' (Palat 1981:168-78; Stein 1980:173ff.), etc.

These changes in the local organizations of the Tamil country may best be understood as an attempt by the Vijayanagara state to create 'a series of subsystems' similar to those existing in the heartland of the empire (cf. Thapar 1981:412-13). The Colas had attempted to ensure the cohesion of their empire through an over-arching ideology of ritualized kingship, as Stein (1969; 1980) and others have argued. The strategy for territorial integration adopted by the Vijayanagara rulers, however, placed greater importance on relatively uniform structures of control and surplus extraction in their peripheral areas.

The establishment of a patterned structure of political relations would necessarily have had to be a gradual process, both because it would have fostered resistance and because the Vijayanagara state lacked the coercive strength necessary to stamp out any dogged and widespread opposition that persisted for any considerable length of time. The gradual introduction of the nayankara system, for instance, is corroborated by an exhaustive study of inscriptions. Thus, Krishnaswamy (1964:181-88) finds a total of fifty-eight nayakas in the Tamil country between 1371
and 1530, divided as follows: 6 each in the time-periods 1371-1422 and 1440-1459; 9 between 1465 and 1491; 10 between 1491 and 1508; and 27 between 1509 and 1530. It is surely significant that there is not a single mention of the nayakas between 1422 and 1440, the period of the popular revolts.

The intermediate classes—poor peasants and artisans—are not likely to have been alone in their opposition to the introduction of new structures of political control and surplus extraction. Since these structures threatened to undermine the social and economic power of those who controlled land at the local level, the dominant groups are also likely to have resisted the introduction of the new system. Faced with the possible occurrence of widespread resistance to its policies, the Vijayanagara state attempted to foster local bases of support in the Tamil country.

The Vijayanagara state and the nayakas sought to develop social bases of support in the first instance among the artisans, especially the weavers. Support of the artisans was advantageous to the state for several reasons. First, increased artisanal production implied a rise in commercial activity and hence a growth in the revenues of the state, specifically the taxes on production, sales and tolls. This strategy had the additional advantage of not immediately disturbing the prevalent patterns of domination in the Tamil country, while simultaneously augmenting the resources available to the agents of the state and the nayakas. Finally, the preferential treatment of artisans was possibly instrumental in breaking the alliance represented by the popular classes.

Towards this end a number of inducements were offered to the artisans in general, and to the weavers in particular (Stein 1965:58). These inducements may have been a factor in encouraging the migration of considerable numbers of Devanga weavers from the Andhra and Karnataka regions to the Tamil country (Ramaswamy 1979:121-22). The success of this endeavour is also indicated by numerous references to the increased commercial production of textiles on the Coromandel coast and the demand for them in foreign markets (Ramaswamy 1979; 1985; Palat 1981:359-68).

The growing economic prosperity of the weavers, especially of the kaikkola community, was reflected in their claims for higher social status. Such claims ranged from ‘symbolic’ privileges like the right to ride a palanquin and the right to occupy houses with two floors, to the appointment of weavers as village accountants, trustees and treasurers of temples, etc. (Ramaswamy 1979:134). The ascent of the artisans, socially and politically, was largely responsible for the absence of references to popular revolts after circa 1450. This was because their privileged position widened the gulf between them and the poor rural cultivators, thereby fracturing the alliance between the two classes.

Indeed, with their economic and social strength, it is likely that the weavers both challenged the dominant position of controllers of large
tracts of land and helped agents of the Vijayanagara state undermine the assemblies of the 'micro-localities'. Using the artisans, then, as a counter-weight, the state increasingly made encroachments on the powers of these assemblies, encroachments which ultimately led to the virtual demise of these organizations. Indicative of these encroachments on 'client-patron' relations in the Tamil country is the appearance of three new functionaries at the village level in the inscriptive record of the Vijayanagara period: the maniyam (headman), the karnam (accountant) and the talaiyari (watchman, cf. Krishnaswamy 1964:104; Stein 1982:112). Perhaps the clearest indication of the eclipse of the powers of the erstwhile dominant classes is the change in the meaning of terms relating to land tenure. Thus, for instance, while the melvaram in the Cola inscriptions may have referred to the share of the 'owner' of land, as Heitzman (1984:40-1; 1985) seems to think, it denoted the share of the state in the produce of land in Vijayanagara inscriptions, as has been argued above.32

In short, the imposition of Vijayanagara rule led to a gradual re-structuring of power relations in the medieval Tamil country. The most crucial aspect of this transformation was the precipitation of the decline of assemblies of the 'micro-localities'. These institutions were replaced by an administrative apparatus and a class of holders of land tenures. Initially these new groups, with their attendant claims to surplus, were superimposed on the prevalent relations of domination and exploitation. This implied that the privileged classes attempted to pass on the burden of the increased revenue demands to the poor peasants and artisans. The consequent intensification of exploitation led to active resistance by these peasants and craftsmen. Indeed, the relative insignificance of the privileged classes in the Telugu and Kannada countries accounts in large part for the absence of references to popular revolts in these regions.

In the face of this opposition in the Tamil country, the state fought a long, though successful, war of attrition, enlisting the aid of artisans, against the privileged classes in the Tamil country. The virtual elimination of the erstwhile privileged classes led to a greater resemblance between the structures of control and exploitation in the Tamil country and those in the heartland of the Empire.

NOTES

1 Some exceptions to this generalization are the studies by Habib (1983; 1984), Karashima and Subbarayalu (1983), Ramaswamy (1979; 1985) and Vannamalai (1971).

2 The term 'popular classes' is used here to distinguish small cultivators and craftsmen from administrative officials, holders of land-grants, brahmanas and other dominant groups on the one hand, and landless labourers on the other.
The first successful instance of such action, as far as can be determined, comes from an inscription of 1419 from Tiruvarangulam (Puddukkottai state, 344 of 1914). Inscriptions regarding such protests in 1429 have been found at Tiruvagavur (Papanasam Tk., Thanjavur Dt., Annual Report on (South) Indian Epigraphy (hereafter ARE), 1914-15, 59 of 1914, para 44); Korukkai (Mayavaram Tk., Thanjavur Dt., ARE, 1917-18, 216 of 1917, para 68); Vriddhachalam (Vriddhachalam Tk., South Arcot Dt., ARE, 1917-18, 91 and 92 of 1918, para 68); Pennadam (same Tk., and Dt., ARE, 246, 254 of 1928-29) and Elavanasur (Tirukkoyilur Tk., South Arcot Dt., ARE, 490 of 1937-38, para 64). For a similar protest in 1447-48 cf. ARE, 313 of 1954-55 from Kanchipuram (Kanchipuram Tk., Chinglepet Dt.).


This discussion of the organization of production at the village level takes as its point of departure the work of Heitzman (1984:40-2; 1985) and Tirumalai (1981).

These were the Udayagiri, Penugonda, Chandragiri, Padaividu, Tiruvadi, Mulavayi, Aruga and Tuluv rajyas, cf. T. V. Mahalingam (1969:1, 185); Saletore (1934:1, 79, 168); A. Krishnaswamy (1964:161); Venkataramanayya (1935:143-45). I have attempted to map the territorial extent of the Chandragiri and Padaividu rajyas using epigraphical evidence, cf. Palat 1981.

The paraiya community was forced to live in isolated sections of the villages called ceris, cf. Mahalingam 1969.

Similarly, in the widespread rebellion that occurred in 1330 in the Delhi Sultanate when Muhammad Tughluq raised revenue demands, the rebels were largely rich peasants, as “the weak and resourceless peasants were made completely prostrate” (Habib 1983:33; see also Habib 1984:22).

In her study of peasant movements in fourteenth-century England, Rosamond Faith says that “in claiming ancient rights and keeping alive the idea of ancient liberties, whether real or fabricated, people were, in fact, making a radical plea for social justice in terms that seemed most appropriate to them” (Faith 1981:50-1).

For evidence of migrations by peasants due to excessive taxation during the Vijayanagara era cf. e.g., ARE, 36 of 1913; 246, 247 of 1916; 103 of 1918; 450, 483 of 1921; 290 of 1928-29; 192 of 1929-30; 13 of 1933-34; 208 of 1934-35; A. Appadorai (1936:1, 310, fn. 959); Saletore (1934:1, 198); Sewell (1970:323); Venkataramanayya (1935:95, 99-100, 241-45). For migrations of shepherds cf. ARE, 362 of 1936-37, and for migration of kaikkola weavers cf. ARE, 1909-10, 354 of 1909, para 53; 471 of 1920; 102 of 1922; 201, 370 of 1923; 429 of 1925.
18 In Mughal India the rate of surplus appropriated varied between one-third and one-half of the produce. However, it has been suggested that the level of surplus appropriation may have been higher in medieval South India since the subsistence requirements of the population were significantly lower than in the northern parts of the sub-continent, cf. Habib 1969:35-36, 38. I hope to arrive at some tentative hypotheses on the levels of exploitation in medieval Jayankondacolamandalam in my forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation.

19 For grants of villages in their sirmais (military service tenures) by the nayakas, cf. TTDES:II, 87, 126; III, 90, 213; A Collection of Inscriptions on Copperplates and Stones in the Nellore District (hereafter NDI): II, Nellore Tk., 34A, 104; III, Gudur Tk., 108; ARE, 238, 249 of 1916; 169 of 1929-30; 64, 159 of 1933-34. For grants of villages that had earlier been granted to the donors see e.g., TTDIES:III, 119, 142. For the grant of rights to land which were not alienable (obviously an exceptional instance), in lieu of salaries, cf. ARE, 193 of 1916. For the grant of rights to land which explicitly state that the tenants should not be disturbed (kudininga-devadana) cf. A. Appadorai (1936:1, 111-12), ARE, 32, 45 of 1922; 1921-22, para 41; 300, 305 of 1928-29; 61, 235 of 1934-35.

For evidence of the mortgage of temple lands, cf. ARE, 193 of 1916; 408 of 1922; 28, 176 of 1932-33; 245, 251 of 1938-39. For sales of land and villages by temples to private individuals cf. ARE, 61 of 1908; 446 of 1921; 45 of 1922; 368 of 1923; 407 of 1928-29; 155 of 1929-30; 45 of 1933-34. Temples also sold land and villages to nayakas (ARE, 46 of 1938-39), royal officials (e.g., ARE, 280 of 1955-56) and to other temples (ARE, 373 of 1913).


For the headmen of villages have been known to sell land to individuals, too (ARE, 217 of 1917; 171 of 1932-33). Sales of land by the members of the nadu assemblies to individuals are recorded in ARE, 133, 358, 390 of 1923; 102 of 1932-33; 125 of 1933-34; 213 of 1936-37. Individuals also bought land from collective groups of brahmanas (ARE, 230 of 1922; 49 of 1935-36; 36 of 1944-45; 107 of 1946-47; 340 of 1954-55) and merchants (ARE, 102 of 1932-33) of villages. For sales of land by private individuals to temples cf. ARE, 61, 62, 335 of 1908; 224, 27 of 1910; 7 of 1911; 33 of 1921; 209 of 1929-30; 301 of 1954-55; IMP-I, Chinglepet Dt., 193-B. The Maravas ("a clan of warriors-cum-agricultural holders", cf. Tirumalai 1981:366) are also reported to have sold land to temples (ARE, 50 of 1916; 1915-16, p. 141). For sales of land between individuals see e.g., ARE, 373 of 1921; 223 of 1922; 70 of 1923; 172 of 1932-33. For sales of land see also TTDIES:1, 191, 229, 231, 232; II, 40, 73, 135, 136; III, 7; IV, 13, 18; South Indian Inscriptions (hereafter SII): I, 52; IMP-I, Chinglepet Dt., 193-C; ARE, 386, 390, 454 of 1905; 356 of 1911; 202 of 1921; 23 of...
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1922; 149, 350, 359, 360, 389 of 1923; 201 of 1929-30; 54 of 1933-34; Granda 1981.


For additional information on taxes see: Poll and Hearth Taxes, ARE, 91 of 1918; 1917-18, para 68; 246, 254 of 1928-29; 480, para 64 of 1937-38; Taxes on production, EF:VI, 8; SI:XXVII, 679; IMP:1, Chinglepet Dt., 193-D; ARE, 138 of 1904; 65, 364 of 1908; 221, 293 of 1910; 1910-11, para 51; 323 of 1911; 364 of 1912; 59 of 1914; 1913-14, para 44; 622 of 1915; 217, 252 of 1916; 1915-16, p. 139; 91 of 1918; 1917-18, para 68; 284 of 1920; 1920-21, para 43; 203 of 1921; 1921-22, para 41, 43; 207 of 1922; 400 of 1923; 246, 254, 414 of 1928-29; 190, 207 of 1929-30; 170, para 37 of 1932-33; 16, 62, 220, 264 of 1934-35; 104 of 1935-36; 490, 507, para 64 of 1937-38; 315 of 1954-55; 68 of 1958-59; 193 of 1961-62; Taxes on Sales, Export and Import Duties, Tolls, SI:XXVII, 264; EF:VI, 22; NDI:II, Nellore Tk., 105; IMP:1, Chinglepet Dt., 14-A; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya 1946:111, 44-5; ARE, 196, 294 of 1910; 309 of 1912; 1912-13, para 51; 157 of 1924; 36, 103 of 1932-33; 159 of 1933-34; 200, 201, 202 of 1937-38; Taxes on the Idangai and valangai communities, ARE, 23 of 1905; 426 of 1921. For information on Labour Rent cf. Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya 1946:III, 158; ARE, 226 of 1913; 1912-13, para 54; 113, para 56 of 1936-37; 313 of 1954-55. For water-cesses cf. ARE, 69 of 1909; 133, 194 of 1921; 424 of 1922; 145 of 1924; 34, 47 of 1933-34; 41 of 1934-35; 421 of 1937-38; 167 of 1943-44; 16 of 1944-45.


The members of the nadu assemblies are also reported to have made gifts of taxes, cf. ARE, 211, 257, 261 of 1928-29; 44 of 1933-34; 59 of 1914; 1914-15, para 44; 188 of 1968-69, p. 12; EF:VI, 8.

For the grant of taxes by those controlling land in villages (uravar) cf. SI:XXVII, 732, 737; IMP: North Arcot Dt., 215-a; ARE, 366 of 1911; 213, 377 of 1912; 384 of 1914; 138 of 1916; 308 of 1921; 22 of 1923-24; 216 of 1936-37. References to the donation of taxes by the members of the governing councils of villages to brahmanas come from SI:XXVII, 737; ARE, 396 of 1911; 205 of 1913; 144 of 1943-44; 83 of 1953-54, p. 7.

The nagarattar (hegemonic group of the urban centres; traders) are also said to have made gifts of taxes, cf. ARE, 283 of 1905; 261 of 1909; 273, 275, 276 of 1959-60. They also granted taxes in association with the nattar and the padinen-vishayattar, cf. ARE, 119 of 1943-44.

For the gift of taxes by the 'left-hand' community of Chandragiri province cf. ARE, 4 of 1906; 215 of 1910; 217 of 1916; 126 of 1943-44; 24 of 1944-45; 315 of 1954-55; 193, 194 of 1961-62.

27 Hettzman (1984; 1985) demonstrates that there were at least three types of relations between the nucleus of Cola power and the areas over which they claimed hegemony. In the core area of the Cola domains, administration was centralized under the Colas, with little or no role for the assemblies of the 'micro-localities'. These assemblies were also largely absent from those outlying areas which were administered by local chiefs in...
alliance with the Colas. Thus, the assemblies, according to him, were prominent only on the edges of Cola power.

28 For instance, there is considerable evidence for the control of irrigation tanks in villages by the state and its intermediaries, cf. Palat 1981:181-84.

29 Stein (1982:110) argues that the system of payment by ‘special village tenures’ was a practice prevalent in the Kannada and Telugu countries that was “introduced into the Tamil country during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries”.

30 For some important revisions and qualifications to this portrayal of Cola statecraft cf. Heitzman (1984; 1985).


32 However, the time of this change in the meaning of this crucial term has yet to be researched thoroughly.

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