

FORMATION OF SALEM

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ABSTRACT

Salem and Attur under the collector, with Head-quarters at Salem, Nammakkal and Tiruchengodu under the general charge Deputy Collector, with Head-quarters at Namakkal, Hosur, Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri, under the Sub Collector, with Head-quarters at Hosur and Thiruppattur, Uttankarai under the Head Assistant collector, with Headquarters at Thirupattur. Tahsildars, magistrates and 6 Deputy Tahsildars were appointed in Omalur, Rasipuram, Sankagiri, Denkanikota, Pennagaram and Vaniyambadi. A Deputy Collector was posted to the District, with powers equal to those of an Assistant Collector and the Divisional charges were completely revised. Though the British administration held responsible for the miseries of the people, at times they also dedicated themselves to mitigate sufferings. It is but prudence tempered with compassion that led to such humanitarian approach and this had a very salutary effect in providing immediate relief measures to the people. This is the first humble study of a particular significant period of the British rule in India focusing attention towards the micro-history.

Keywords: Headquarters, British administration, mitigate sufferings, micro history, etc.,

I. INTRODUCTION

Present districts of Salem, Dharmapuri, Namakkal and Krishnagiri are carved out of old Salem District. It was one of the earliest districts formed by the British when they occupied Mysore and Arcot princely states. Originally Salem District, was situated between 11 and 12 55' of the North latitude and 77 21' and 78 50' of the East latitude. It was a completely land locked district, on the north North Arcot and the South Arcot Districts, and on the south by Trichirappalli District. More or less those boundaries had been the permanent features for centuries. The principal water partings of India had been selected as its fittest political boundaries from the earliest days of civilized history. The southern water-parting of the Southern Pinakini (Thenpennai river) has from very ancient times separated more or less completely separated the northern from the southern part of Salem District.

It was so when the basin of Palar, and the districts bordering on it, formed Tondaimandalam of the cholas of which the northern district of Salem formed a part. The southern part of Salem District, lying within the great basin of the Cauvery river formed the northern most province of the Kingdom of Kongu. In the 9th Century the Chola kings conquered the whole district and subsequently it was passed on to the Hoysala Ballalas. In the 14th Century Salem was conquered by the Vijayanagar rulers and they administered the area till the beginning of the 17th Century, when the district was taken by the Nayaks of Madurai. In 1652, the Mysore ruler Chikka Deva Raja annexed it. Subsequently Salem passed under the rule of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan.¹

The District had been the cockpit of wars between the British on one side and Tipu Sultan of Mysore on the other, after the treaty with Tipu in 1782 A.D. Southern part of the kingdom was handed over to the British. In the Third Mysore War (1790-1792) the British who were planning to give a rude blow to Tipu Sultan, invaded several areas of the northern part of Salem District. The army under Lord Cornwallis captured Hosur, Pennagaram and Krishnagiri and proceeded to Srirangapatnam. When the outskirts of the town were captured Tipu made his submission. By the Treaty of Srirangapatnam in 1792. Tippu was forced to cede half his dominions, pay an indemnity of more than 3,000,000 rupees and surrender two of his sons as hostages. The whole of Salem District, with the exception of the Hosur taluk was made over to the East India Company. After the final defeat of Tipu Sultan in the Fourth Mysore War in 1799, the Kingdom of Mysore was reconstituted under the old Hindu dynasty, and Hosur was also passed on to the English.

II. UNDER THE BRITISH RULE

In November 1799 A.D. a general redistribution of garrisons and detachments took place under the orders of Lord Clive, the Governor of Fort. St. George. The district was divided into three regions Baramahal, Talaghat and Balaghat-with headquarters at Krishnagiri, Sankaridurg and Rayakota respectively. It was joined with the Northern Division of Coimbatore District, administered from Bhavani. In 1804 when coimbatore district, was formed with Coimbatore as headquarters, the taluks on the east of the river Cauvery was formed into Salem District. As it was originally constituted, the size of the District was 7530 square miles. The taluk of Namakkal was transferred to Salem District in 1918 from Trichirappalli.

Lord Cornwallis arranged for the administration of ceded areas from Tipu Sultan. Eighteen days after the conclusion of the treaty, (April 4, 1792) Captain Alexander Read was appointed "Superintendent and Collector of the Baramahal and Salem. Kindersley was the first Collector of Salem District from 30-11-1790 to 3-4-1792. Captain Alexander Read was the second Collector from 14-4-1792 to 7-7-1799, and did splendid services for the consolidation and administration of the District. Alexander Read selected as his assistants Captains Thomas Munro, Graham and Mac Leod. The area placed in charge of Captain Read on April 4, 1792, included the present Salem District with the exception of the Balaghat Taluk of Hosur, which was not acquired until the Treaty of 1799.

To facilitate administration, Captain Read divided the District into three portions. They were:

- 1) The Northern Division in the charge of captain Graham, with headquarters at Krishnagiri.
- 2) The Central Division in charge of Captain Munro, with head-quarters at Dharmapuri.
- 3) The Southern Division in under Captain Mac Leod, with head-quarters at Salem.

The general superintendence of the whole District remained with Captain Read, who made his head-quarters at Tirupattur.

III. REORGANISATION OF DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

Captain Read divided the District into 36 taluks. In 1896-97 (Fasli 1206) the taluks were reduced to 25, those of Kallavi, Mattur Singarapet, Rayakotta, Kaveripatnam, Adamankottai, Javadi, Mallasamudram, Harur, and Morappur being abolished, and new taluks created at Kunnattur, Kmbayanallur, and Mallappadi. From 1799 to 1820 is a period of kaleidoscopic change in administrative charges. When Read resigned, Government abolished the office of Superintendent, and the District was split into two.

- (1) Captain Mac Leod was placed in charge of a Collectorate consisting of the Talaghat taluks of Salem, together with the eastern portion of what is now the District of Coimbatore. His Headquarters were at Salem.
- (2) To Captain Graham was allotted the Baramahal, with the newly Ceded tracts above the ghats, including Venkatagirikota. His Headquarters were at Krishnagiri.

The Balaghat was divided, on its cession, into the five taluks of Hosur, Denkanikota, Kelamangalam, Venkatagirikota and Alambadi, besides the palayams of Bagalur, Sulagiri, and Ankusagiri. The above territorial arrangements continued till September 1801, when, on the transfer of Major Mac Leod to Malabar, and of Major Graham to South Arcot, the Krishnagiri or Baramahal division, together with the taluks lying north and east of the Cauvery which constituted the Talaghat Divisions, were formed into one district under M. David Cockburn as Collector. Kattuputtur, Kangundi and Venkatagirikota were included in this reformed District.

The changes were consequent on the introduction of the Permanent Settlement between 1803 and 1808. The District limits as constituted in 1808 continued unchanged till 1910, with the exception of the transfer of Kattuputtur to Trichirapalli in 1851-52 and of portion of the Javadi Hills to the adjacent districts in 1885. During Hargrave's Collectorate the taluks were repeatedly shuffled, and at the time of his relief in 1820 they numbered only 11. It is significant that the period of frequent changes is synchronous with Narasa Ayyar's gigantic fraud, a notorious scandal of the district. In 1821-22 (Fasli 1231), the 11 taluks (including Mallappadi, which was under an Amin instead of a Tahsildar) were made into 15, and this arrangement remained unaltered till 1860.

IV. DISTRIBUTION OF TALUKS IN 1821-1822

The year 1860 was a year of revolution in the position of the Collector. He had already been relieved of his control of the Post Office in 1854, of Public Works in July, 1857, and of Forest Conservancy in 1858. In 1859 an Act was passed for the organization of a Police Force, and its introduction involved radical changes in district administration. The Tahsildars being relieved of all police duties, which had hitherto formed a considerable portion of their work, Government considered that their number might be reduced. Government were further opinion that the revenue establishment of the several districts should be organized on a uniform scale. A scheme was drawn up by C. Pelly, who was placed on special duty for the purpose, under which the number of taluks was reduced from 14 to 9.

Salem and Attur, under the collector, with Head-quarters at Salem, Namakkal and Tiruchengodu, under the general charge Deputy Collector, with Head-quarters at Namakkal, Hosur, Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri, under the Sub Collector, with Head-quarters at Hosur and Thiruppattur, Uttankarai under the Head Assistant collector, with Headquarters at Thiruppattur.

Tahsildars, magistrates and 6 Deputy Tahsildars were appointed in Omalur, Rasipuram, Sankagiri, Denkanikota, Pennagaram and Vaniyambadi. A Deputy Collector was posted to the District, with powers equal to those of an Assistant Collector and the Divisional charges were completely revised. The above arrangements continued till 1910, additional Deputy Tahsildars being appointed for Yercaud in November 1862 and for Harur in 1865. In 1888 an additional Deputy Collector was appointed to relieve the Collector of the direct charge of the Salem Division. A third Deputy Collector had meanwhile been placed in charge of treasury work.

In 1910, a new scheme came into force, formulated by Sir William Meyer, by which the Taluk of Tiruppattur was transferred to the newly formed District of North Arcot; Namakkal, with the exception of 12 villages, was annexed to Trichirapalli; and a new Taluk of Omalur was formed, consisting of the two Firkas. Alexander Read attempted to introduce a new system of Land Revenue Settlement in Salem District. Earlier he followed the system that prevailed under Tipu Sultan. Later he started extensive survey of land and fixed Land rent to the ryots. They had to pay annual rent of Land to the British East India Company. The Government of Madras favoured Zamindari System. So Read could not introduce Ryotwari System of Land Revenue in 1792.

Between 1793 and 1797 Read and his assistants were occupied in the survey of agricultural land. Read introduced annual system of paying Land Tax by the Ryots. But the Government asked him Read to effect a settlement in lease for five years with the inhabitants on rates of assessment so fixed that they might be compelled to pay the tax by force. In the next year Ryotwari System of revenue was introduced in the District. Zamindari System was also there in certain areas.

In 1798 war with Tipu Sultan broke out and Read and Munro were recalled to military duty. The former never returned to his old charge; but before his return to England, drew up and presented to the Board of Revenue a report on Salem District. Munro also never returned to Salem as a district officer. Thus there was no one in Salem to assert the merits of the system introduced by Read. Read's method of assessment is of the greatest interest and importance for it embodies in embryo all the main principles of Ryotwari settlement still in force in the Madras Presidency, and evolves them directly from the indigenous system which he found in vogue in Salem District in 1792.

V. CLASSIFICATION OF LANDS

The land in central and North Divisions were classed into dry (punja) and wet (Nanja), and in the Southern, Divisions under Mac Leod's rule, into dry, wet, and garden **Baghayat**. The classifications were made with reference to the crops which happened to be on the ground at the time of survey. In parts of the Talaghat, a fourth description of land was recognised, known "grass land". Zamindari System is also called permanent Settlement of Land Revenue. Lord Cornwallis introduced this System in Bengal presidency and then in Madras. In Salem District estates were created and given to land lords. Highest Bidder got the estates. They had to pay a fixed amount of land tax for 5 years. Ryotwari System of land revenue also prevailed. Till 1801 local tax collectors called Patels collected land tax similar to Tipu Sultan's system. When taxes were collected directly from the farmers village headmen protested. In Dharmapuri, region nearly 1,500 persons rose in arms against the Government to resist the measures. A Military force was assembled at Dharmapuri, and the

ringleaders of patels surrendered themselves giving security for their future good conduct. The Ryotwari revenue settlement was then conducted without opposition.

By auctioning the Land to the bidders the Collectors created parcels of land called **mitta** and the land lords are known as mittadars. After Alexander Read left the District Mac Leod 8-7-1799 to 13-9-1801 became the collector. M.D. Cockburn (14-9-1801 to Feb. 1805) Greame (Feb.1805 to July 1808) E.R. Hargrave (19-2-1803 to 15-2-1820) were the District Collectors that followed. Actually these Collectors were Head of the Army stationed at Salem Fort as well as Administrators of the Districts. E.Powney and S.Smith followed as acting collectors for a few months M.D. Cockburn returned to the District and served till 11-5-1820.

VI. REVENUE ORGANISATION IN 1914

There were 26 districts in the presidency of Madras in 1914 and among them Salem was fairly bigger than many other districts. It had an area of 6300 square miles in 1911. After the re-transfer of Namakkal Taluk in 1918, the area increased to 6,912 square miles. There were 10 towns and 2293 villages. The Total population of the district stood at 17,66,860 in 1911, and the same was 2,112,034 in 1920. The average of people lived in a square mile was between 280 and 306 persons. The District was divided into four administrative divisions, namely Hosur, Dharmapuri, Salem and Sankari. Each division had two taluks making a total of eight. The taluks were Hosur, Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri and Omalur, Dharmapuri, Uttangarai, Salem, Attur, Trichengodu. The Namakkal Taluk a part of Trichirapally District till 1917. Rasipuram Taluk was created in April 1918, raising the number of taluks to 10. The Hindus formed the majority of the population and number of Muslims and Christians were 47,175 and 15, 375 respectively. Salem Town was the administrative headquarters of the District. The town is situated on Tirumanimuttar, at the tri-junction of the Bangalore, Trichirapalli and Cuddalore roads. It became the official capital of the District in 1860 A.D. The head of the District was styled as the Collector and Magistrate. President of the Salem District Board S. Burn became Revenue Divisional Officer, Hosur.

VII. THE COLLECTOR

The Collector was the administrative head of the district. He was both the principal Revenue Officer and the Chief Magistrate functioning under the supervision of the Board of Revenue Madras. Thus the collector constituted the essential link between the Government and the people. He was the head of the Revenue Administration and was concerned with the land and land revenue and with all matters affecting the peasantry. His organization was directed towards the specific purpose of collecting the revenue and maintaining peace in the District. As the District magistrate he was there to maintain law and order and the criminal administration. The Police Force was under his control and the criminal administration. The Police Force was under his control and the District Superintendent of Police was his assistant for police purposes. It was the duty of the D.S.P. to keep the District Magistrate fully informed by personal contact of all events and incidents in the district. The District Magistrate i.e. the Collector and D.S.P. had the joint responsibility of law and order in the district Apart from the Collector there were other District officials who held full charge over their respective Departments. Besides the D.S.P. there were Civil Surgeons the District Forest Officer and the Executive Engineer. Except in matters of routine, the Collector must be informed of about almost every activity in all these departments. The four divisions of Salem had their own Revenue Divisional Officers. They were Magistrates with first class powers and supervised the land revenue administration of the division.

Each taluk was under the charge of a revenue officer and magistrate called Tahsildhar, who belonged to the Sub-ordinate Service. He was a magistrate with second class powers. He spent some months regularly in camps touring the taluk. A number of revenue inspectors assisted him. The revenue inspectors supervised the work of the village officers in a number of villages. About 2293 villages and 10 towns were distributed within the 10 taluks of Salem district. The village was the lowest administrative unit.

VIII. LOCAL BODIES

The people of the District had their part to play in the Local Government bodies. The Salem District Board had the Collector as its president and 162 members out of which 32 were elected. So it functioned almost as a wing of the revenue administration. There were taluk Boards in Salem, Sankaridurg, Hosur and Dharmapuri.

IX. CHALLENGES OF FIRST WORLD WAR

The aim of the present study is to analyse the cross section of the developments during the period from 1914 to 1919 A.D. in the field of district administration. This period is considered to be one of the most significant periods of the British administration in India. The scope of the study includes the activities of various administrative departments in the district of Salem such as Revenue, Judicial, Police, Local Boards, Public Works and Education.

The significance of the period could be stated as one of the golden periods of the British administration. The present study commences from 1914, which was also the commencement of the Great War. It traces the history of the district up to 1919. Though the hostilities ended with the Armistice of November 1918, the immediate effects of the war continued to remain up to 1919. The benevolent Collectors E.W. Legh introduced many measures which gave much relief to the sufferings people of the District. Montagu Chelmsford Reforms were introduced in 1919. As a result of it the first elections were conducted with a broader based electorate than the previous one. The Collectors were deprived of many of their bureaucratic powers and the popular system of local self-government with an elected, majority came into vogue. The Great War period from 1914 to 1918 witnessed a major shakeup in the bureaucratic policies of the district authorities. The District authorities were given the task of helping recruitment of the youth to the Indian Army which became the source of solace for the disgruntled youngman in Salem.

The period under study witnessed the tenure of four district collectors. In fitness of things the place of E.W. Legh, Collector of Salem must be fixed with a proper perspective. As an able administrator and notable economist who did his best to minimize the strains of the war economy, he is acclaimed as benevolent administrator who stayed a longer period at Salem than many others. Even nationalists reserved their praises for him. He represented the 'Ma-Baap' Government and proved to be the best 'Provider' of the people.

X. E.W. LEGH

E.W. Legh was a student of University College, Oxford; joined the Imperial Civil Service on October 23, 1897 and arrived in India on December 6, 1897. He joined duty as the Assistant Collector and Magistrate of Coimbatore District. After holding various charges in different districts, he took charge of Salem District as the Collector as the Collector and the Magistrate on January 2, 1914 and served here till the end of Great War. His total stay in India was for a period of 18 years 7 months and 19 days.

Gilbert Slater, the great economist who had personal contact with Legh appreciated his capacity as an administrator and economist C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) who was the Chairman of the Salem Municipality, had paid rich encomiums on his services to India. Rajaji in his letter to the Salem District Board has stated that he appreciated his liberal and sympathetic attitude towards the advancement of local self government and in general, his courtesy, genuine sympathy, board views, high character and sense of duty that marked his administration a grand success for a period of four years. Swadeshbimani, a nationalist newspaper, eulogized E.W. Legh for his effort in putting down the drink evil by reducing the number wine shops and public houses in the district. On his departure, Swadeshbimani observed that "Legh's administration of Salem during the last four years affords a striking example of what the district authorities can accomplish if they use their power for the good of the people". Legh's tenure of office as Collector and District Magistrate of Salem was full of events that affected the people as well as the entire fabric of district administration in both ways. He was the war-time Collector of the District and wielded enormous powers. He proved to be humane in his approach and very sympathetic to the sufferings of the people. With all his efforts he helped the people to face the stresses and strains of the Great War as well as to endure the natural calamity such as influenza that spread in the years following. In January 1919, the Shevapet Merchants' Association of Salem opened a new bazaar of grain trade in the town and named it as '**Legh Bazaar**' in recognition of E.W. Legh's services as the collector as well as the Ex-Officio President of the Salem District Board.

XI. CONCLUSION

If a true picture of the past is to be painted objectively a balanced approach is necessary. Though the British administration held responsible for the miseries of the people, at times they also dedicated themselves to mitigate sufferings. It is but prudence tempered with compassion that led to such humanitarian approach and this had a very salutary effect in providing immediate relief measures to the people. This is the first humble study of a particular significant period of the British rule in India focusing attention towards the micro-history.

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