



# COMPANY'S RULE IN MADRAS: A STUDY ON THE ACQUISITION OF MADURAI AND PERMANENT REVENUE SETTLEMENT BETWEEN 1792 AND 1807

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## Abstract

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Europeans like the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes and the French were entered for trade in Tamilnadu. They established their trade centres in Tamilnadu with the permission of local rulers. Due to the establishment of trade centres, the contest was rose among them. Finally in this contest, the British was won and foundation of political domination in tamilnadu. The period between 1792 and 1799 was characterised by an uneasy side-by-side existence of the two conflicting jurisdictions, each struggling to expand and consolidate its sphere at the expense of the other. The Company was conferred with the right to collect the tribute from the poligars and the revenue of the Carnatic. By the Treaty of 1792 the Company exercised military authority and controlled foreign relations while the Nawab administered revenue and justice which were also liable to be taken over by the Company. The poligars of Madurai withheld payments to the Company, captured circar villages and committed depredations. Nevertheless the Company acquired possession of the different regions of Madurai partly by war and partly by diplomacy. The Company took the acquisition of Madurai in 1801. On 1 December 1801 Edward Clive, the Governor of Madras issued a proclamation to abolish the poligari system and introduce the Zamindari system in its place. The poligars were transformed into a class of Zamindars and they were required to disband their armed establishment and pay enhanced amount to the company's government under a permanent assessment. The period between 1802 and 1807 can be called as the period of the Permanent Zamindari Settlement. After the acquisition of Madurai, the British extended the Permanent Revenue Settlement to Dindigul. Hurdis, the Collector at Madurai was instructed by the Special Commission following by a communication from the Tamil Nadu government to introduce the Permanent Settlement at Dindigul in Madurai. The settlement was extended to the southern part of Madurai. Hurdis decided to extend the Permanent Settlement to Madurai. Thus the Permanent Settlement was introduced in the fourteen estates and forty mittas of Dindigul and ten palayams of Madurai on permanent basis. The East India Company expected that the system would work well. Thackeray in his report clearly mentioned that the system was not suitable, but in favour of Ryotwari Settlement. Hence the system miserably failed and gradually began to decline. After the decline of the Permanent Revenue Settlement, the Village Lease Settlement was implemented. This paper deals with the Company's Revenue system, the acquisition of Madurai, the implementation of Permanent Revenue Settlement and its restriction and failure and finally discussed the decline of Zamindary system between 1792 and 1807.

**Keywords:** acquisition of Madurai, Company Rule, Zamindary System, Poligars, Colonial, British



## **Introduction**

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Europeans like the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes and the French established their settlements in Tamilnadu. The foundation of the English East India Company was the culmination of a long process of mercantile enterprise. The British colonial expansion in the first half of the eighteenth century in India was not a matter of preconceived pattern adopted by the authorities in England. Between the years 1765 and 1792 the English East India Company established their direct authority over Southern India. Taking advantage of the animosity among the native rulers, the Company began to expand its power in Madras. The period between 1792 and 1799 was characterised by an uneasy side-by-side existence of the two conflicting jurisdictions, each struggling to expand and consolidate its sphere at the expense of the other. The Company was conferred with the right to collect the tribute from the poligars and the revenue of the Carnatic. The Company took the acquisition of Madurai in 1801. In consequence, from a group of isolated settlements and areas it emerged into a sprawling province of the British Empire. The British engaged themselves in revenue collection from the conquered and acquired territories. Because of these different kinds of revenue systems prevailed in Madras like the Zamindari Revenue System, Poligari System, Village Settlement Merasi System and Ryotwari System. Historically, Madras played a crucial role in the establishment and maintenance of the British Empire overseas. Through the conquest of Madras, the British not only acquired great material wealth and secured the accumulation of industrial capital; but also obtained a sizeable pool of skilled human resources to facilitate its colonial expansion. After the acquisition of Madurai, the Company was finally implemented the Permanent Revenue System in Madurai after the final acquisitions in Madras. The purpose of this research is to examine the Company's Revenue system, the acquisition of Madurai, the implementation of Permanent Revenue

Settlement and its restriction and failure and finally discussed the decline of Zamindary system between 1792 and 1807.

## **The Company Acquired Madurai and End of Poligari System**

The Company was acquired Madurai district as piecemeal. They obtained the Dindigul country by conquest from Mysore and they secured the Madurai country by the assumption of its revenues from the Nawab of Arcot. The revenue administration of both these states, which constituted the district, was conducted on somewhat different lines owing to the peculiar condition that prevailed in each, till 1885.<sup>1</sup> By the Treaty of 1792 the Company exercised military authority and controlled foreign relations while the Nawab administered revenue and justice which were also liable to be taken over by the Company. It was extended to the poligari system also. The treaty gave authority to the English to enhance the customary tributes paid by the poligars. The dual authority exercised by the Nawab and the English created such a predicament to the poligars that they felt the English were mainly responsible for such a constant desire to regain their independence, so that they could be free from exactions and interferences.<sup>2</sup> The Nawabs amuldars also encouraged them to this effect. For fear of an open conflict with the Nawab, the English hesitated in taking any strong action against the recalcitrant poligars. Thereupon they tried to persuade the Nawab to agree to a modification of the Treaty in order to check the defiant attitude of the poligars.<sup>3</sup> As the Nawab was making regular payment of his dues to the Company, it could not force the Nawab to yield to its pressure. The Madras Government found an opportunity to assert itself and directed the poligars not to obey the instructions of the Nawab unless sent through the Madras Council.<sup>4</sup> The rigorous measures adopted by the Company to enforce its authority embittered the poligars. This led to anti-English feeling among them.<sup>5</sup> The discontented people attributed their miseries to the policy of the English and rose under the banner of the discontented poligar with a

view to liberate the land from the British domination.

The poligars of Madurai withheld payments to the Company, captured circar villages and committed depredations. They were emboldened by the outbreak of the Fourth Mysore War.<sup>6</sup> John Bannermann routed the Kallan tribes of Melur and the poligars of Manaparai before he succeeded to Tirunelveli to take action against Kattabomman of Panjalankurichi and other rebels in Ramanathapuram. Kattabomman resisted the British might gallantly for some time; but Bannermann got more reinforcements from different places and attached the rebels and caused several losses to the rebels. The English sequestered the *pollams* of various other poligars, demolished their forts and deprived the inhabitants of their fire arms.<sup>7</sup> It deprived the poligars of their rights and privileges like village watch and *deshkaval* which they enjoyed from immemorial times. Thus the Company took all positive measures to suppress the poligars and strengthened the authority of the Company. However, the British representatives discovered certain papers of Srirangapatnam. The Commission appointed to examine the details of the correspondence found nothing incriminatory on the papers.<sup>8</sup> Yet the Madras Council decided to proceed with the annexation. So it declared the assumption of the administration of the Carnatic by the Company. The English, who were the de facto rulers of this region for more than two decades became de jure also. Hence the transfer of power appeared more formal than real. Nevertheless the Company acquired possession of the different regions of Madurai partly by war and partly by diplomacy. This was the logical conclusion of the trends at work during the preceding decades. Now the Madras Council, made a determined effort to annex the Carnatic and Mysore with it. The British annexed Madurai District in 1801 by the Carnatic treaty. The Collector of Dindigul was appointed, Collector of the whole region after the assumption of the Madurai District. He took charge of the district from the Nawab's Faujdars.<sup>9</sup> The Government issued a proclamation which

made way for the appointment of Hurdis, the Collector of the whole reorganised Madurai District.

### **Introduction of Zamindari system instead of Poligari System**

On 1 December 1801 Edward Clive, the Governor of Madras issued a proclamation to abolish the poligari system and introduce the Zamindari system in its place. The poligars were transformed into a class of Zamindars and they were required to disband their armed establishment and pay enhanced amount to the company's government under a permanent assessment. For establishing the company's authority and reducing the poligars to a proper state of subsection the company decided to introduce the Zamindari system in the poligari territories. Meanwhile the English helped the poligars in many ways. As ancient nobility, the poligars had influence among the people. It is true that the English ousted the turbulent poligars. At the same time the English could not think of drastic step of deposing the rest of them as they feared some disturbance among the people. So the English felt that if they made a settlement with them that would allay their fears and would secure their loyal support. They also hoped that these wealthy landlords would improve agriculture as they had the required resources. Therefore, they made immediate settlement with the remaining loyal poligars.<sup>10</sup>

### **Implementation of Permanent Zamindari Settlement in Madurai**

The period between 1802 and 1807 can be called as the period of the Permanent Zamindari Settlement. After the annexation of Madurai, the British extended the Permanent Revenue Settlement to Dindigul. Hurdis, the Collector at Madurai was instructed by the Special Commission following by a communication from the Tamil Nadu government to introduce the Permanent Settlement in Dindigul.<sup>11</sup> In order to introduce the permanent settlement and know the value of the land, Hurdis, the Collector conducted a survey in Dindigul province.<sup>12</sup> At first, Hurdis rented out the lands to the inhabitants at different villages on triennial lease on the basis of the value derived by

survey. The survey and the village settlement were the preliminary arrangements to introduce the Permanent Settlement in Dindigul. The Special Commission also accepted the preliminary arrangements.<sup>13</sup>

The task for the Permanent Settlement in Dindigul was consolidated. The Collectors assumed charge of the six palayams such as Nilakottai, Sandiyoor, Sokkanpatti, Madurai, Palliyappamyakkanu and Idaiyankottai. All the lands of these palayams became government lands. They were further divided into forty estates called mittas. The Collector gathered information from the ryots. The Board of Revenue accepted the proposals of the Collector on 24 October 1804. The six palayams assumed by the Collector for arrears to the Government were constituted into eight back estates of the fourth mittas to their previous poligars. As per the direction of the government, the Collector disposed the remaining thirty two mittas to the highest bidders who accepted to pay a fixed rent to the government.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of the survey, Collector Hurdis decided to introduce the system in the palayam in Dindigul. Hurdis introduced the Permanent Settlement in fourteen out of twenty six palayams. The previous poligars were made Zamindars of these hereditary estates. In this way, the hereditary poligars or owners of these palayams become the Zamindars. The settlement was extended to the southern part of Madurai. Hurdis decided to extend the Permanent Settlement to Madurai. Hurdis took efforts to survey the district. He referred to the revenue officers of the Nawab to fix the revenue. But the Permanent Settlement was applied to only ten palayams such as Jotilnayakkanur, Dodappanayakkanur, Keelakottai, Melakkottai, Nadukottai, Puliankutam and Siruvalai of the Madurai division. These palayams were restored to the original poligaris in Dindigul and those poligars become Zamindars of their respective palayams. They were required to pay seventy percent of the total assessment of their palayams. Thus the Permanent Settlement was introduced in the fourteen estates and fourty mittas of Dindigul and ten palayams of

Madurai on a permanent basis. The East India Company expected that the system would work well. The company also expected large revenue without any burden or interference in the affairs of the native inhabitants. But this expectation did not materialize and the newly created Zamindars did not care on the improving conditions of the ryots.<sup>15</sup>

### **Restrictions and Failures of the Permanent Revenue Settlement**

The Court of Directors, who had been closely watching the working of the permanent settlement felt dissatisfied due to several defaults, rebellions and a large number of auctions of estates. Their discontent further increased when they learnt that the sufferings of the ryots were not mitigated.<sup>16</sup> The main contention of the Court of Directors for the restrictions of the permanent settlement was that sudden innovations must be avoided in India since the Indian institutions were based on age old customs.<sup>17</sup> Bengal, for example, was long under the possession of the Company. The Company was thoroughly acquainted with its resources. Therefore it was wise and politic.<sup>18</sup> Besides, the Court of Directors was constrained to restrict the measure since the bad effects of the permanent settlement had been already noticed. Rebellion, banditry and slackness were rampant throughout the coastal area. Consequently, the Government had to resort to sale and resale of the lands for realising the revenue. Moreover, the permanent settlement which was introduced in the region of Dindigul, failed and the Government sustained a considerable loss of revenue. Finally the Court of Directors came to know that the poverty, prejudices and violence of the natives of India strongly operated against the improvement of permanent settlement. It was difficult to dictate to change their customs but at the same time by appealing to them it could be remedied. Thus the Court of Directors felt that the principle of perpetual unalterable nature of the system was defective.<sup>19</sup> Hence it took a restrictive measure against its extension to the rest of the area of the Province. Still it continued to retain the

system because of their longing towards the system.

William Bentinck, the successor of Lord Clive as Madras Governor, entertained the opinion that the zamindari tenure was not a system most applicable to a large part of the territories. Most of the arrears under Fort St. George were not assessed for settlement in perpetuity. He called Thackery, the District Judge of Masulipatnam to state his sentiments on the subjects of ryotwari and permanent zamindari settlements. He said that the permanent settlement was not the best and that the condition of Madras was different from that of Bengal.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently the zamindari settlement miserably failed in the estates except the descendants of the ancient poligari families.<sup>21</sup> The introduction of the zamindari tenure on the basis of the survey and settlement of Hurdis turned out to be incorrect as proved by subsequent experiments. All lands were over-assessed.<sup>22</sup> Parish, the successor of Hurdis, reported to the Government that most of the zamindaries in Dindigul fell into arrears to the Company. The over assessment was aggravated by extra-ordinary calamity of season which made it difficult to enforce the demands of the rent from the ryots. In these critical circumstances the cultivators were unable to pay the excessive demands in the over-assessed fields.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, the newly purchased *mittahdar* failed to discharge his duties and the *peshcush* fell into arrears. It forced the District Collector to assume the estates to adjust for arrears. To add to their miseries, the over-assessment was aggravated by severe drought which brought about the collapse of the system within a few years of its introduction. The Company could have done justice and it concluded individual settlements with the peasants and connected upon sentiments and expediency rather than respect for rights. No wonder, with the lapse of time the permanent system came to be discredited. In Chingleput, Dindigul, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli the system failed and a great part of the land fell into the direct possession of the Government.<sup>24</sup> The Board of Revenue attributed the failure of this

settlement to over assessment and the neglect of cultivation by the zamindars.

A few points may be noted as to the effects of the permanent settlement. In the Northern Circars it immediately resulted in the increased facility and regularity of revenue collection. But even here, as elsewhere where it had been introduced, it trenchoned upon the rights of the ryots and left them practically at the mercy of the zamindars. The Court of Directors, as will be seen, remarked that the patta regulation had become a dead letter, which the ryots could hope to procure little redress from the courts over-burdened with a heavy load of arrear of suits. Nor were the directors slow to realize the revenues of the zamindaries and abandoning forever the increase of revenue from the waste lands brought under cultivation.<sup>25</sup> They soon began to distrust all systems which imposed middlemen, whether zamindars or others, between the Government and the ryots and believed that the interests of the latter could only be best secured by making engagements directly with them. In the meantime, in Dindigul, Salem, Chingleput and some of the southern *palayams*, the permanent settlement completely failed and a great part of the land reverted back to the Government. The Board ascribed this to over-assessment and the introduction of strangers as zamindars.<sup>26</sup> The permanent settlement concluded with the ancient zamindars, poligars and the purchasers of the newly-created estates called *muttahdars* or *mittadars* very soon showed signs of failure. The result was that, within about ten years, several estates accumulated large arrears and the Government found that for realising these arrears they had either to attach these estates and manage them for some years or to put them up for sale.<sup>27</sup> The peasants could seek justice from the courts but for all practical purposes this was not easy. The poverty – stricken people, ignorant of the proceedings of the court found it impossible to defend themselves against the powerful zamindars. The Company could have done justice and it concluded individual settlements with the peasants properties.<sup>28</sup>



The zamindari system was a total failure of the Madras Presidency in general and Dindigul in particular. In Dindigul, out of thirty-five *mittas*, twenty nine which were wedded to permanent settlement failed owing to the excessive rate of assessment made on the land. They were sold for arrears and finally reverted to government before the end of 1806. Six *mittas* and four zamindaries remained with the proprietors and the rest were either sold for arrear of public revenue or surrendered by the owner in lieu of receiving allowance.<sup>29</sup> The Madras Government expressed its displeasure to England in December 1807 regretting the improper application of the principles of permanent settlement in Dindigul and promised to conduct an enquiry to find out the real cause of its failure. Consequently, the Government deputed Hodgson, the Senior Member of the Board of Revenue on 15 May 1801 to investigate the cause of this heavy deficit and it was established that the over-assessment led to the termination of the system.<sup>30</sup> He toured the District, found out the cause of the failure and submitted his report to the Government on 21 July 1808.<sup>31</sup> In his report, Hodgson stated that Hurdis' survey valuation of land on the triennial settlement was too high and disproportionate to the former revenue history of the country. Meanwhile, the objections raised by Lord William Bentinck and Thackeray in 1809 to the permanent settlement asserted the Court of Directors to pay heed on the subject that had come to the matter for discussion and deep consideration.<sup>32</sup> The Court of Directors thus became less enthusiastic about the extension of the permanent settlement. Their attention was now directed towards another system which was becoming more and more popular among the ablest civil servants of the Company like Munro and Macleod and Ravensha and Graham who served as Collector in various districts of the newly acquired territories of the Ceded district and the Carnatic.<sup>33</sup> The effect of all these was a turn and change in the policy of the Court of Directors. They began to reconsider the issue in the light of the new criticisms and arguments of their servants in the Presidency.

As a result, they abandoned the idea of its further extension and ordered the Madras Government to stop the process of introducing it in the other unsettled areas of the province until they got orders, contrary to this decision from the Court of Directors themselves. Permanent settlement would have been extended in other parts of the Madras country, had the Court of Directors not issued the announcement of abandoning the idea of its further extension.<sup>34</sup> The popularity of the Ryotwary Settlement among the collectors made the permanent settlement vanishing into the background and with the advent of the Village Lease Settlement in 1808 its extension was mostly given up once for all in the Madras Presidency.

#### **Decline of Permanent Revenue Settlement**

The Company was not the implementation of Permanent Revenue Settlement in all areas of the territories under Fort St. George. According to William Bentinck (1803-1807), the Governor of Madras, the Zamindari system was not applicable to a large part of the territories. He appointed Thackeray as the District Judge in Masulipatinam to examine the principles of the Permanent Settlement and submitted his report to the Governor on 29 April 1806. Thackeray in his report clearly mentioned that the system was not suitable, but in favour of Ryotwari Settlement. Hence the system miserably failed and gradually began to decline.<sup>35</sup> After the decline of the Permanent Revenue Settlement, the Village Lease Settlement was implemented.

#### **Conclusion**

With the advent of the European powers like the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes, the English and the French. Having consolidated their power in the Tamil country, the British framed their administrative policy to suit the existing political condition. After the Second Carnatic War the Company gained ascendancy over the powers, European as well as in the South. Between 1792 and 1799 when the Company established their direct authority over Madurai. The victory over poligars made Madurai coming under the British control enabling them to get a strong

hold in Madras. In 1801, the Company acquired of Madurai after the fall of Poligars. The land revenue administration was organized only after the acquisition of Madurai under the Britishers. The Britishers introduced a system of land revenue administration known as Permanent Settlement or Zamindari System. It was advocated by Lord Cornwallis. Accordingly, the Court of Directors directed the Madras Government to enter into a permanent settlement with the intermediaries which was introduced all over the Presidency by Lord Cornwallis. It resulted in the introduction of Permanent Revenue Settlement laying stress on the principles of the Zamindari tenure. In Madurai, it was introduced in the palaiyams. As the system failed both in the zamindaries and in the created *mittas*, the Government investigated the causes of the failure. As an alternative to the system, traditional village settlement was reintroduced.

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