

**ECOLOGY, TRADE AND POLITICS :
NORTHERN SIRCARS UNDER ENGLISH COMPANY RULE**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY*

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "ECOLOGY, TRADE AND POLITICS : NORTHERN SIRCARS UNDER ENGLISH COMPANY RULE", submitted by Mr. Prashant K. Kidambi in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy degree of this University is an original work, and has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Saberwal', written in a cursive style.

Prof. Satish Saberwal
(Chairperson)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'N. Bhattacharya', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Neeladri Bhattacharya
(Supervisor)

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements
List of Maps and Tables

	<i>Introduction</i>	1
1.	<i>The Lie of the Land: Ecology and Production</i>	8
	• <i>The Hills Come First</i>	
	• <i>Colonial Forest Policy in the Northern Sircars</i>	
	• <i>The Coastal Plains: A Zone of Possibilities?</i>	
2.	<i>The Politics of Land: The Company and Zamindars in the Northern Sircars</i>	68
	• <i>The Zamindari System at the Outset of Company Rule</i>	
	• <i>Company Policy vis-a-vis Zamindars: The Changing Contours</i>	
	• <i>The Permanent Settlement: From Custom to Contract</i>	
3.	<i>The Networks of Trade in the Northern Sircars</i>	107
	• <i>The Patterns of Local Trade</i>	
	• <i>The Networks of Regional Trade</i>	
	• <i>The World of Long Distance Trade</i>	
	<i>Conclusion</i>	152
	<i>Bibliography</i>	157

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Prashant Kidambi

LIST OF MAPS

Map 1.	<i>Northern Sircars: Early Twentieth Century Administrative Divisions</i>	1a
Map 2.	<i>Northern Sircars: The Hills and the Plains</i>	8a
Map 3.	<i>Northern Sircars: Agrarian Production Zones</i>	37a
Map 4.	<i>Northern Sircars: Weaving Centres in the Seventeenth Century</i>	114a
Map 5.	<i>Northern Sircars: Regional Trade Routes</i>	122a

(*Note: Maps 2, 3 and 4 are based on the maps of the Madras Salt Commission Report, Madras, 1876 with additional details. All maps hand drawn and not to scale.*)

LIST OF TABLES

1.	<i>Annual Rainfall in the Plains and Agency Tracts of the Northern Sircars, 1870-94</i>	22
2.	<i>Pargana-wise Figures of Deaths and Emigrations in the Northern and Central Divisions of the Machilipatnam Haveli 1790-92</i>	51
3.	<i>Nature of Agricultural Seasons in Rajahmundry District, 1820-1853</i>	62
4.	<i>Number of Villages taken over by Government after the Permanent Settlement in the Rajahmundry District</i>	101
5.	<i>List of Principal Salt-markets in the Vishakapatnam District, 1876</i>	132
6.	<i>List of Principal Salt-markets in the Godavari District, 1876</i>	133-134
7.	<i>English and Dutch Textile Exports from North Coromandel in 1682</i>	140
8.	<i>Weaver Households and Looms in Andhra, 1680s and 1820s</i>	146
9.	<i>Raw cotton prices in North Coromandel 1660-1680</i>	148

Introduction



MAP 1: Northern Sircars: Early Twentieth Century Administrative Divisions.

The geographer Norton Ginsburg is quoted as having once remarked, 'There is no universally accepted definition of the region except in as it refers to some surface of the earth.'¹ The observation may be taken as a point of departure in trying to define the limits of this inquiry, which is in the nature of a preliminary foray in understanding the making of a region. Such a task is fraught with problems, for a region can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. One can study a region in terms of the environment that shapes its contours, the socio-economic and political structures that define it, the cultural traditions that animate it, the networks of circulation that bind it together and so on. As Bernard Cohn so succinctly put it: 'There would seem to be as many definitions of regions as there are social science disciplines and problems that social scientists investigate.'²

In this study, I focus on the Northern Sircars, comprising the northern coastal districts of what we recognise today as Andhra Pradesh. At the outset, I would like to clarify that it is not my aim to encompass in my

1. Cited in Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among The Historians*, Oxford, 1987, p.101.

2. *Ibid.*

discussion all the possible ways in which a region can be constituted. This study is to be construed more as an attempt at exploring some possibilities in the delineation of a region which has hitherto not received adequate attention from scholars.

In a sense, this inquiry has moved away somewhat from its original moorings. I began by focussing on the interaction between settled agrarian communities and groups on the fringes of the arable within the Northern Sircars. However my preliminary research in this direction impressed upon me the need to understand the nature of the ecological terrain in which this interaction was framed. This led me to pose certain questions about the role of the environment in shaping the identity of the region. What was the nature of the relationship between the ecological context and the activities of human societies in the region ? How was this context redefined over time through the utilization of the possibilities it offered ? What part did perceptions of the ecology and the policies prompted by them play in the ordering of the region ? These questions became the entry point for a broader inquiry into the ways in which a region comes to be constituted.

In particular, two themes drew my attention. The first related to the manner in which structures of socio-political

authority define a region's identity. In the context of the Northern Sircars, this led me to examine the framework of socio-political authority at the local level that determined the distribution of productive resources in the region. The second theme concerned the part played by the networks of circulation in knitting a region together. Specifically, I was interested in understanding the role of networks of trade in defining the region by linking together centres of exchange within the region, as well as serving as lines of communication with centres outside the region.

The chapters that follow attempt to look at some aspects of the issues outlined above. I do not intend to provide answers to all the questions that I raise. Rather the posing of such questions may be seen as suggesting possibilities for further research.

In Chapter One, I try to construct a picture of the Northern Sircars in terms of its constitutive ecological zones. Studies of this region have tended to see it as an undifferentiated ecological unit, the 'wet zone' and contrasted it with the 'dry zone' represented by the Ceded Districts to the south.³ I have chosen to view the region

3. For such a view, see A. Satyanarayana, *Andhra Peasants under British Rule: Agrarian Relations and The Rural Economy 1900-1940*, New Delhi, 1990, pp.11-13.

along the two broad ecological zones that characterise it, namely, the hills and the coastal plains. Taking my cues from the Braudelian notion of geography as helping us to rediscover 'the slow unfolding of structural realities',⁴ I attempt to highlight the complex interaction between ecology and productive rhythms within these distinctive zones. Here, I have also drawn upon Lucien Febvre's suggestion that natural zones should be viewed as 'regions of possibilities',⁵ in trying to understand how productive activities in the hills and the plains define and are in turn defined by the ecology of these zones.

In discussing the environment of the Northern Sircars, I am not merely concerned with its physical characteristics. I also try to see how 'structural realities' and perceptions of those 'realities' interpenetrate in the definition of a region. Here I focus on the perceptions which informed the colonial understanding of the region's ecology and try to show how these were based on the construction of stereotypes which vested the ecological with pre-given attributes. The hills, for instance were seen by early Company officials as

4. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Vol.1, London, 1972, p.23.

5. Lucien Febvre and Lionel Batallion, *A Geographical Introduction to History*, London, 1925, (Reprint Ed. 1950), p.181.

a zone of 'poverty' while the plains were perceived as a zone of 'natural value'. How these perceptions impinged upon subsequent colonial policy in its engagement with the environment leading to its restructuring, forms a key theme of this chapter.

In the next chapter I examine the structure of socio-political authority which defined the region. I focus on the zamindari system which formed the dominant framework of socio-political authority in the Northern Sircars. In recent times, a number of historians have emphasised the role of intermediary social groups in incorporating local areas in to either a pan-Indian empire or regional state systems in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this regard the influence of key groups of warrior cultivators, merchants and scribal lineages was crucial in mediating relations between state and agrarian society.⁶ The chapter examines how the zamindari system facilitated the incorporation of the Northern Sircars into wider state systems and the transformation of this system during the first half century

6. For this perspective, See C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North India in the Age of British Expansion 1770-1870*, Cambridge, 1983; M. Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and Punjab, 1707-48*, Delhi, 1986; D.A. Washbrook, 'Progress and Problems: South Asian Economic and Social History, C.1720-1860', *Modern Asian Studies* (MAS), 22,1,1988, pp.57-97; also Burton Stein, 'Eighteenth Century India: Another View', *Studies in History*, 5, 1 n.s., 1989, pp.1-26.

of company rule. I study this transformation by examining the impact of the Permanent Settlement which in the nineteenth century served to distinguish the region from the 'raiyatwari' areas of the Madras Presidency. It is noteworthy that the Permanent Settlement has come to be so strongly associated with Bengal that its operation in the Madras Presidency has not received adequate attention from scholars. I try to show how the introduction of the Permanent Settlement was crucial in redefining the nature of zamindari rights in the region. The link between structure, perception and policy also forms an important theme of the second chapter. My account tries to show how perceptions of the zamindari system played a key role in influencing colonial policy vis-a-vis the zamindars. In doing so I also try to draw out links between the ecological context and Company policy, especially towards the hill zamindars.

In Chapter Three, I focus on the realm of circulation in shaping a region. In particular, I look at networks of trade in the Northern Sircars in the early modern period and attempt to study these in terms of three crucial variables : the routes along which trade was carried on, the goods that circulated on these routes and the actors involved in trade. Studies of trade in the Northern Sircars have focussed mainly on the international trade in textiles from the

region.⁷ In my analysis of the networks of trade I try to see how this supra-regional trade was located in a more encompassing world of exchange which included both regional and local trade networks.

7. See Joseph J. Brenning, 'Textile Producers and Production in Late Seventeenth Century Coromandel', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (IESHR), 23, 4, 1986, pp.333-356; also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry and Commercial Agriculture in Late Seventeenth Century South-Eastern India', *Past and Present*, no.126, 1990, pp.76-114.

Chapter 1

*The Lie of the Land:
Ecology and Production*



MAP 2: Northern Sircars: The Hills and the Plains

The region known as the Northern Sircars during the colonial period, comprised the northern coastal districts of Madras Presidency from Ganjam to Guntur. It has been described as 'a narrow slip of maritime country',¹ bounded on the east by the Bay of Bengal and ringed on the west and north-west by the Eastern Ghats, which divided it from the erstwhile Nizam of Hyderabad's dominions as well as the province of Berar. In the north the Chilka lake marked off the Sircars from Orissa, while on the south the river Gundlakamma separated the territory from the districts of Ongole and formed " on that side the most distinguishable modern frontier to the Carnatic Payenghaut."²

Broadly speaking, one can divide the Northern Sircars into two distinct ecological zones, namely the hills and the coastal plains. (See Map 2) The hills, known as the Dandakaranya Ghats, face the Andhra coast on the south and descend into the valley plains and uplands of Bastar towards the north.³

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1. James Grant, 'Political Survey of the Northern Sircars', in Walter Kelly Firminger (ed.) *The Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East India Company dated 28th July 1812*, (hereafter *The Fifth Report*), Vol.III, Calcutta 1918, Appendix no.13, p.3.
 2. *Ibid.*, p.4.
 3. R.L.Singh, *India: A Regional Geography*, New Delhi, 1971, p.731.

They are part of a larger unit known as the Dandakaranya region, a well-demarcated physical zone located between the Chattisgarh Basin in the north, Andhra Plateau in the south, Maharashtra Plateau in the west and the eastern littoral zone. Like the hills, the coastal plains are part of a larger geographical unit, the Eastern Coastal Plains, running from modern day Orissa in the north to Kanyakumari in the south.⁴

This division provides us with a preliminary framework in trying to understand the Northern Sircars as a 'natural region'. The picture, however, needs to be drawn out. In this chapter, I will attempt to do so by considering each of these zones in turn.

The Hills Come First

The Dandakaranya Ghats, which formed the western frontier of the Sircars, extend from the valley of the Mahanadi river to the Godavari river valley. (See Map 2) This zone comprising numerous hills and criss-crossed by fertile valleys, was until the beginning of the twentieth century, relatively isolated from the coastal plains below.

The population was sparse and scattered all over the hill tracts in small groups. According to the 1891 Census,

4. *Ibid.*, pp.93-95.

the density of population in the hills of Ganjam, Vishakapatnam and Godavari was 68 persons per square mile as compared to 281 persons per square mile in the plains.⁵ Most of the hill communities inhabiting this zone belonged to the same racial stock as the Gonds of Bastar, and spoke the Kui language, laced with Oriya and Telugu influences.⁶ Of these communities, the Koyas, Konda Reddis and Konda Doras, were mostly concentrated in the Godavari region, while communities such as the Gadabas, Khonds, Parjas, Kotias, Dhulias, Panos, Saoras, Gonds, Dombos, Kudulus, Ghasis, Uriyas and Paidis were predominant in the northern areas of Vishakapatnam and Ganjam.⁷

Over the centuries, these communities had evolved shared ways of life, which imparted a distinctive character to these hill tracts. This had partly to do with the fact that most of the hill communities followed similar subsistence activities. The primary mode of subsistence for these communities was shifting cultivation, locally known as 'podu' or 'konda podu'. This form of agriculture had been

5. *Census of India*, Vol.XIII, Madras, 1891.

6. Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol.IV, Madras, 1909, p.37.

7. A. Aiyappan, *Report on the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Province of Madras*, Madras, 1948, p.6.

followed for ages in the hills. As practised in this region, shifting cultivation first involved clearing a small tract of land on the slopes of a hill. The trees were felled and the undergrowth cleared and spread evenly over the portion to be cultivated. During March-April, the dried wood was burnt, the ashes serving as manure for the crops. The soil was not generally touched with implements of any kind.⁸ With the first rains a variety of cholam known as 'konda jonna', maize, ragi and samai were generally sown. Occasionally a second crop would be obtained from the same place, but usually the spot was deserted till the trees grew high enough to attract fresh cultivation.⁹

Within the broad category of shifting cultivation, however, there could be different types. The 1907 *Godavari District Gazetteer*, for instance, notes two distinct types of shifting cultivation, namely, the ordinary (chalaka) podu, and the hill (konda) podu.¹⁰ The former involved cultivating certain recognised clearings for a year or two at a time, allowing the forest to grow again for a few years and then burning and cultivating them. Under the latter practise, clearings were not returned to for a much longer

8. F.R.Hemingway, *Godavari District Gazetteer*, Madras, 1907, pp.78-79.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

period and were sometimes deserted forever. While in 'chalaka podu' land was ploughed once or twice before and after sowing, in 'konda podu' it was hardly touched.¹¹ This suggests that the former practice was influenced by the sedentary agriculture of the plains.

The nature of the terrain was a crucial variable in determining cultivation patterns. In Ganjam, for instance, shifting cultivation was confined to hill slopes, whereas in the hills of Keonjhar, it was practised both on hilltops as well as slopes.¹² The hills in Ganjam were peaked making cultivation on hilltops difficult, whereas the flat-topped hills of Keonjhar rendered cultivation possible.¹³

Similarly, not all hill communities followed the same methods of shifting cultivation. The Konda Reddis, for example, were conspicuous by their use of the digging - stick while sowing. The hoe or any other instrument for turning over the soil was unknown to them.¹⁴ The Khonds on the other hand were well acquainted with the plough, and in

11. *Ibid.*

12. Bhupinder Singh, *The Saora Highlander*, Bombay, 1984, p.13.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, 'Primitive Aboriginal Cultures in the Deccan', *Man In India*, Vol.XXIV, No.2, 1944, pp.123-128.

many areas took to settled agriculture over time. Where they had come into contact with the settled agrarian communities of the plains, the Khonds tended to call themselves 'prajas'.¹⁵

The cultivation practices of these communities were imbued with a thorough knowledge of the local ecological context. The clearing and burning of shrubs was completed before the rains, so that the ashes could mix properly with the soil and enhance its fertility.¹⁶ Similarly, fixed timings were followed for hoeing the fields, planting the crops and weeding them. In all these matters these communities were guided by an intuitive understanding of their environment, shaped out of centuries of experience.

In recent times, agronomistic studies have confirmed the rationality of shifting cultivation. It has been shown that shifting cultivation is a universal feature in virtually all tropical countries with humid and sub-humid climates. Slashing and burning followed by fallow, it has been argued, is a strategy for fertilizing and controlling weeds and diseases. Where adequate fallows occur, it results in ecosystem maintenance. It also favours high

15. *Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1913, p.66.

16. Bhupinder Singh, *op.cit.*, p.14.

species diversity which, in addition to food products, provides construction material for housing.¹⁷

Shifting cultivation was not just a means of subsistence for these communities. It was also vested with a deep cultural significance, often relating to the origin myths of these communities. Ritual performances were an integral part of the rhythms of shifting cultivation. Among the Saoras, for instance, before any clearing was made, the religious head, Buyya, was called in for offering a pig or a fowl to the earth-god, Labosum, and to the gods of the hills in June when the sowing time was near.¹⁸ When the crop had attained a certain height, sacrifices were performed in honour of Gungi Devata, the goddess of agriculture, for a plentiful harvest. Finally, after harvesting was completed, offerings were made to the ancestors of the community for their blessings.¹⁹

Similarly, among the Koyas of the Godavari region, it was common to hold a festival to mark the different stages of the agricultural season. The Rev. Cain noted that, " they

17. Daniel M. Robinson and Sheila J. McKean, *Shifting Cultivation and Alternatives: An Annotated Bibliography 1972-1989*, C.A.B International in association with CIAT, 1992, p.1.

18. Bhupinder Singh, *op.cit.*, p.14.

19. *Ibid.*

had one not only for every grain crop, but one when the ippa flowers were to be gathered, another when the pumpkins were ripe, at the first tapping of the palm tree for toddy, etc."²⁰

Many communities supplemented shifting cultivation by collecting fruits, nuts, roots and honey, as well as by tapping toddy from palmyra and sago palms. Some communities, like the Koyas were also actively involved in the trade in forest products with the plains. The hills have traditionally furnished a number of articles widely sought after in the plains. According to the 1869 *Manual of the Vizagapatam District*, the products of the hills included items like iron, buffaloes, elk and other deer horns, bees-wax, honey, hill brooms, stick lac, dammer, arrow-root, turmeric, ginger, soap-nuts, sweet oranges, jack-fruit, mangoes, tamarinds, plantains, guavas, hill brinjal, garlic and a variety of drugs and dyes.²¹ The hill communities usually collected these forest products and bartered them to the traders from the lowlands, who in turn sold them at markets in the plains. In the late nineteenth century some of these forest products found their way to distant markets at Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, London and Hamburg.²²

20. Thurston, *op.cit.*, p.65.

21. D.F. Carmichael, (ed.), *A Manual of the District of Vizagapatam In the Presidency of Madras, Madras, 1869*, pp.157-158.

22. Hemingway, *op.cit.*, p.96.

Religion also provided a strong undercurrent of unity among the hill communities inhabiting different tracts. Most of these communities worshipped the same local deities such as Mutielamma, who was believed to ward off diseases such as cholera and small-pox. Rev. Cain noted that in 1878 Koya villages on the left bank of the Godavari river in the Bhadrachalam region were visited by men from a nearby village who brought along twenty fowls. The visitors asked the fowls to be passed on to the next village south of Dummagudem. According to the men, the cholera goddess was selecting her victims in the villages further north, and the fowls were being offered in the hope of inducing her to leave those parts. It was believed that if the fowls were passed on as far away as possible from the cholera affected villages before being slain, then the cholera goddess would "follow in anticipation of the feast, and so might be tempted quite out of these regions."²³

The speed with which rumours spread in the hills is a testimony to the shared life-world of the communities inhabiting these tracts. To quote the Rev. Cain again,

About two years ago, a rumour rapidly spread in some of the villages that an iron cock was abroad very early in the morning, and upon the first village in which it heard one or more cocks begin to crow it would send a grievous pestilence,

23. Thurston, *op.cit.*, p.67.

and decimate the village. In one instance atleast, this led to the immediate extermination of all the unfortunate cocks in that village.²⁴

This is not to suggest that these communities were egalitarian, or devoid of any internal social differentiation. In these hill tracts, there existed local elites known as 'muttadars' who were hereditary chiefs.²⁵ These muttadars exerted dominance over the poorer hill people, extracting both taxes as well as deference in return for ensuring the protection of the community. The muttadari system prevailed all over the Eastern Ghats. The muttadars (also known as 'Patros' in the northern areas) were often the only means through which outside powers could establish contact with the hills.²⁶

The size of a 'mutta' varied from three to thirty villages, but the average size was about eight to twelve villages.²⁷ Villages in the hills, however, were not static entities. The rhythms of shifting cultivation necessitated a constant movement of settlements. The core of a mutta, the muttadar's home village, was its most stable part.

24. *Ibid.*

25. David Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem-Rampa Risings 1839-1924', Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I*, New Delhi, 1982, pp.98-101.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

Muttadars usually collected their revenues in kind, grain and jungle produce being the normal measures of payment. In addition, they were entitled to customary unpaid labour known as 'vetti'.²⁸ This often involved working on the fields of the muttadar. A whole range of special fees and gifts were also extracted from the poorer members of the community. The traditional authority of the muttadars, however, is believed to have waned by the end of the nineteenth century.²⁹

Early Company officials were oblivious to the enormous diversity of the hill tracts. Their accounts unanimously tended to perceive the hills as a zone of poverty. James Grant referred to the hill region as "mountainous, poor, ill-watered, unhealthy, and thinly peopled."³⁰ The Circuit Committee Report on the Vishakapatnam and Srikakulam districts remarked of the hill tracts that "the savageness of the people, wildness of the country, inclemency of the climate are insurmountable obstacles to their being rendered to any advantage."³¹ In the early nineteenth century, the

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. Grant, *op.cit*, p.110.

31. *Proceedings of the Committee of Circuit In the Vizagapatam and Chicacole Districts*, (hereafter CCR: Vizag and Chicacole), 12th September 1784, Madras, 1915, p.4.

topographical surveyor of the Vishakapatnam and Rajahmundry districts noted that the hill tracts were "in a very savage state, being composed of hills and impenetrable Jungles and pervaded by a pestilential atmosphere."³² A view echoed by William Thackeray in his 1819 *Report on Ganjam and Goomsur*, wherein he wrote of the hills that,

their climate and their poverty have secured them from conquest, no great Native Government. seems to have thought this tract worth conquering, it has been left as a waste corner of the earth to wild beasts and conds. Nobody seems even to know the boundary, this tract has never been even explored, there is a blank here left on the maps.³³

The character of the hill communities was seen to reflect the "savage" nature of the terrain. Thus, the Rampa hills were described as being "extremely mountainous and full of jungle, the natives rude and uncultivated, frequently making incursions on the adjacent countries plundering the villages during the harvest and driving off the cattle."³⁴ Similarly the *Circuit Committee Report on Vishakapatnam and Srikakulam* noted that the ways of life of

32. Capt. C. Snell, *Memoir of the Vizagapatam District*, (hereafter Memoir: Vizag.) 1825, p.6.

33. William Thackeray, *Report on Ganjam and Goomsur*, February 1819, Board of Revenue (Miscellaneous), Vol.93, p.1.

34. *Circuit Committee Report of the State of the Zemindaris Dependent on Masulipatam*, (hereafter CCR: Masulipatam), 15 February 1787, Selections from the Records of the Late Masulipatam Zillah, Masulipatam, 1905, p.3.

the hill people were "extremely savage dwelling amidst impenetrable wood and mountains, and subsisting upon plunder from the lowlands."³⁵ 'Raiding' and 'plunder' were thus seen as a natural attribute of the hill communities.

However, the 'difficult' nature of the hill terrain was perceived as an obstacle in controlling the hills. Complained one official in 1775, "our troops cannot live in many parts during half the year. It is surrounded with extensive hills whose inhabitants can commit devastations with impunity in the night and return by day when our people follow them, on account of the unwholesome air and water which are fatal to all but natives..."³⁶ According to William Thackeray, controlling the hill communities was rendered difficult by the "Hill and Frontier country, and a worse climate in their favour, which have hitherto enabled them to maintain so much barbarous independence, and with their poverty may enable them to maintain the struggle until the Govt. give it up as not worth supporting...."³⁷ Military operations in the hills were especially hazardous during the rains. When the Madras Government moved to

35. *CCR: Vizag. and Chicacole*, p.24.

36. *Revenue Consultations*, 6 February, 1775, Fort St.George, Vol.2, p.10.

37. *Thackeray, op.cit.*, para.12.

suppress the 1845-48 *fituri* in the Gudem area, the Agent for Vishakapatnam, P.B.Smolett and his advisers were forced to admit the resilience of their opponents who were aided by the 'mountainous' terrain and 'rainy' climate.³⁸ During the rains the villages were virtually isolated and malaria and hill fevers plagued the troops, unused to fighting in such conditions. Lieutenant-Colonel J.Campbell of the Madras Army ruefully reported in June 1846 that "severe sickness paralyses every effort, disheartens the men, and fosters the preconceived belief of the superiority and valour of the insurgents."³⁹

Colonial perceptions of the climate of the hills were not entirely unfounded. The hills usually received more annual rainfall than the plains. The following table, based on rainfall statistics for the period 1870-1894 is indicative of this.

TH- 7200

38. Arnold, *op.cit.*, p.103.

39. *Ibid.*



V, 44, 176

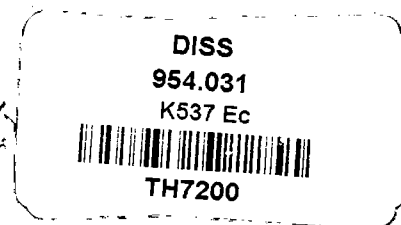


Table 1 : Annual Rainfall In The Plains And Agency Tracts Of The Northern Sricars, 1870-94.*

District	Section of the Dist.	S.W.Monsoon June-Sept	N.E.Monsoon Oct-Dec	Annual Total
Ganjam	Inland-	34.11	11.08	51.95
	Littoral North	26.18	14.89	45.06
	South	22.50	13.50	39.55
Vishakapatnam	Agency-Jeypore Ghats	58.00 39.42	5.22 9.94	66.56 57.03
	Littoral-Submontane	27.31	11.75	44.43
	Coast	21.16	14.47	39.56
Godavari	Bhadrachalam	33.13	4.11	40.67
	West	25.99	8.00	37.49
	North	21.88	10.50	35.62
	Eastern Delta	23.13	16.06	41.77
	Western Delta	22.79	10.82	36.05

*Source - *The Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency, Madras, 1895.*

It will be seen that the rainfall during the south-west monsoon decreased from inland to the coast, while the conditions were reversed at the time of the north-east monsoon. Orographic precipitation was possibly the prime reason for the disparity in rainfall during the south west monsoon. Captain Snell alluded to it when he attributed the lower rainfall on the coast during the south west monsoon to the presence of the "high range of mountains, bordering the north western portion....which attract the principal masses of clouds from the vallies and low ground."⁴⁰ During the

40. Snell, *Memoir: Vizag.*, pp.5-6.

north east monsoon the moisture-laden winds ran parallel to the Eastern Ghats thereby giving the coastal plains more rainfall than the hill tracts.

The colonial perceptions of the hill tracts, however, began to change in the decades following the transfer of power to the Crown. It has been shown in recent times that this period marked the beginning of colonial forestry, designed to tap the commercial potential of forests on a systematic basis.⁴¹ The burgeoning demand of the railways and imperial shipbuilding activities in the late nineteenth century necessitated a steady supply of timber on a large scale - a demand that made hill tracts 'valuable'.

Colonial Forest Policy In The Northern Sircars

In the Northern Sircars, surveys of the hill tracts were undertaken, to identify forests to be marked out for reservation. Officials touring the hill tracts were quick to note the value for the colonial state of the sal and teak forests of the Northern Sircars. By the mid 1870s efforts were underway to exploit these forests for commercial purposes.

Colonial forestry, from its inception came into conflict with the modes of resource use followed by the hill communities. Shifting cultivation became the main bone of

41. See Ramachandra Guha, 'Forestry in British and Post-British India: A Historical Analysis', Economic and Political Weekly, 29 October, 1983.

contention. Forest department officials, saw 'podu' as a destructive practice, threatening the very existence of forests. Those who surveyed the hill tracts were horrified by what they perceived to be irremediable damage caused to forests by 'podu'. Col.Beddome who was deputed to survey these tracts in the 1870s, deplored the practice. The forests in the region, he observed,

are fast disappearing owing to the ruinous system of hill cultivation. Numerous hills have already been turned into rocky waste, or are only clothed with a few date bushes of the poorest descriptions of stunted growth, and if the present system of cultivation is allowed to go on unrestricted, the entire disappearance of all woodlands is only a question of time...⁴²

Col. Beddome went on to add that he had

nowhere in India seen this hill cultivation so systematically carried out. Directly all the forests within a certain radius has been felled and cultivated, the village is deserted and the cultivators move off to other tracts to carry out the same ruinous system...⁴³

Similarly, according to the Overseer of Forests for Goomsur, Mr.T.G.Freeman Macally,

many valuable sal and other reserved and unreserved kinds of wood had been destroyed by this kind of cultivation...From personal observation, I should say that one half of these valuable forests have underwent this sort of cultivation....⁴⁴

42. W.Francis, *Vizagapatam District Gazetteer*, Madras, 1907, p.117.

43. *Ibid.*, p.119.

44. Letter from Mr. T.G.Freeman Macally, Overseer of Forests, Goomsur, to C.G.Master, Esq. Collector and Conservator of Forests, Madras Presidency, *Annual Administration Report of Forest Dept. 1872-73*, p.42.

Many officials stressed the destructive ecological effects of shifting cultivation. According to Col. Beddome:

The South-West monsoon is very heavy on these hills, and when a tract of forest on the slopes of the hills, which rise all over the plateau, is felled and under cultivation and before the forest again begins to grow the denudation of soil is very great.⁴⁵

Other officials saw the system as basically unproductive, the result of the 'primitiveness' of the hill communities who practised it. Thus, in 1890, the acting Collector of Vishakapatnam, W.A. Willock in a letter to the Secretary, Land Revenue, wrote:

The destruction going on in the sal country...at present is most lamentable. Wherever one goes one sees huge areas, hundreds of acres in extent covered with the remains of fine forests, ringed a year or two back, to afford a site for two or three seasons mixed cultivation of ragi, millet, niger and weeds, but chiefly the latter. The people gain little by this system as with a trifle more trouble they could grow endless quantities of rice instead on this lower portion of the undulating tracts in which the forest exists, which are already free of jungle, while the prospective loss to the estate owing to the destruction of such fine timber in sites from which it is now beginning to be possible to extract is very great indeed.⁴⁶

45. Francis, *op.cit.*, p.118.

46. Letter from W.A. Willock, Esq. Acting Collector of Vizagapatam to the Secretary to the Commissioners of Land Revenue, Madras, No.507, dated Vizagapatam, 15th February, 1890, File No.10, Serial Nos. 182, Revenue and Agriculture Department, May 1891, Forests, Progs. No.6-7.

In 1882, the Inspector General of Forests, Dietrich Brandis reporting on the state of these forests, stated that it was the unanimous opinion of the local officers that grazing, fires, indiscriminate cutting and the clearings made by the hill communities for shifting cultivation were 'ruining' the forests.⁴⁷

However, there were a few officials who perceived the rationality of shifting cultivation. J.S.Gamble, the Conservator of the Northern Circle who was directed to make a report on Brandis' proposals was one such official. His report on the state of the Bhadrachalam and Rekapalle forests questioned the dominant stereotypes of shifting cultivation as a 'destructive' practice.

The Conservator of the Northern Circle, disputed Brandis' views on the state of the Bhadrachalam and Rekapalle forests. Gamble was of the opinion that 'podu', far from causing damage to the forests, had on the contrary, been beneficial in its effects.

The effects of 'podu' cultivation in forests like those of Bhadrachalam are often misunderstood and misrepresented. At the risk of appearing to propound a new theory, I would say that I think that 'podu' as practised by the Koyas and unaccompanied by heavy grazing during the first three years of abandonment, is useful rather than

47. Diary No.862, from the Govt. of Madras, No.1062, dated 18 September, 1885, Home Dept., Forests (A), December 1885, Nos.1-4.

the reverse in forest tracts which are not under permanent systematic management.⁴⁸

He likened 'podu' to the practise known as 'sartage' practised in the Ardennes.

In both the coppice is cut, in 'sartage' the big wood is moved, in 'podu' it is left and burnt, in both one or more crops are gathered off the land and the field is then given up, and in both the result is a fresh crop of coppice, which if not grazed down, comes up in good straight uniform poles.⁴⁹

In the initial years, however, the administration proceeded with caution regarding the extension of forest reservation in the hill tracts. A number of constraints impinged upon the process of forest reservation.

In the Vishakapatnam region, differences of opinion between the collector and the new Forest Department, and doubts as to whether the Forest Act could be extended to the forests in the Golgonda and Palkonda Agencies slowed down the whole process of forest conservation.⁵⁰ In 1886, it was ordered that on the hills in the Golgonda taluk, blocks should be selected in which unauthorised

48. Letter from J.S. Gamble, Esq. Conservator of Forests, Northern Division, to the Collector of the Godavari District, dated 22 March 1885, No.195, Enclosure No.2, para. 13, 18 September, 1885, No.1061, Revenue Dept., Government of Madras, Home Dept., Forests (A), December 1885, Nos.1-4.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Francis, *op.cit.*, p.112.

felling was to be prohibited, and that in the rest of the Agency, valuable timber could be only felled under license. Similarly in the Palkonda Agency, blocks were to be selected and defined in which 'podu' was to be banned. In Sarvasiddhi taluk, areas not exceeding 5,000 acres were ordered to be selected for reservation. However, it was not until 1903 that reservation in these taluks was actually completed. The provisions of the Forest Act were also introduced in the Jeypore and Vizianagram principalities with the consent of their respective rulers. The Jeypore forests, in particular were seen to contain forests of great commercial value and the British were quick to introduce the Forest Act in the area when the old ruler died.⁵¹ However, reservation in this area began in real earnest only from 1900 onwards.

In the Rampa region, forest administration and the task of setting up new forest reserves proceeded just as slowly. Here, the note of caution was introduced by the rebellion of 1879-80. In a minute on the Rampa rebellion, the Special Commissioner for the hill tracts of the Northern Circars, Mr. Carmichael, drew attention to the unusually harsh restrictions pressing on the hill people, and suggested that the Forest Department should confine its

51. File No. 106, Serial Nos. 1&2, Revenue and Agriculture Dept., May 1891, Forests, Progs. Nos. 6-7.

operations to marking off a reasonable area for its reserves, which should be strictly conserved, leaving the rest of the district open for 'podu', cultivation, subject only to mild restrictions in respect of felling teak trees.⁵² The Government of Madras concurred with these views. Consequently, the methods adopted in Rampa were quite distinct from other areas. The region was exempted from the operation of all but Section 26 of Chapters III, V, VII, IX and X of the Forest Act of 1882. Those rendered it possible to regulate the cutting and transit of timber, and special rules were drawn up regarding these matters. For their own use the people were allowed to cut timber except tamarind, jack, ippa, soap-nut, gall-nut and mango trees; but any one desirous of exporting any wood had to take a special permit before doing so. The administration maintained a strict monopoly on the commercial use of forests. The hill communities of the area were also allowed to practise shifting cultivation under certain restrictions in order to minimise grievances on this score.

Despite official pronouncements that the rights of the hill communities would be taken care of, the increasing reservation of new areas as 'Reserved Forests' led to

52. Cited in Diary No.862, from Govt. of Madras No.1062, dated 18th Sept. 1885, Home Dept., Forests (A), Dec. 1885, nos. 1-4.

discontent among these communities. The Government of Madras noted in 1885 that "the main cause of discontent appeared to be the changes made in the regulation of podu cultivation - a system of jungle clearing practised by hill tribes throughout India until they have become acquainted with more scientific means of cultivation."⁵³

In many cases, it was discovered by investigating officers that the habits of these hill communities had not received enough consideration from the Forest Department. In some cases, not enough land had been left for the rotation of 'podu' cultivation. In other cases impositions of restrictions on podu was often overdone by zealous forest officials. A Government memorandum of 23 July, 1923 noted that "as regards podu it is noticed that Mr.Cotterell as Agency Commissioner in June 1922 gave it as his opinion that the country had suffered from too severe restrictions on jungle clearance, that various restrictions had been overdone and much population and food grains lost for the sake of forests of doubtful value."⁵⁴ In 1924,

53. Diary No.862, from the Govt. of Madras No.1062, dated 18th Sept. 1885, Home Dept. Forests (A) Dec. 1885, nos. 1-4.

54. Quoted in GOM, Pub.Dept G.O. No.108 (Confid.) dated 2.2.1925, p.7, cited in Atluri Murali, 'Forest Conservation Policies and Peasant/Tribal Life-World: Andhra 1880s to 1940s' (unpublished paper), p.19.

C.A.Henderson, Agent to the Governor observed that "the repression of podu has been going pretty steadily since 1910 and there has been some discontentment about it from time to time..."⁵⁵

The colonial administration, while active in banning 'podu' from most areas of the hill tracts, did not make any attempt to provide a viable alternative. Shifting cultivation was sought to be replaced by commercial forestry, as well as the expansion of settled agriculture into the hills.⁵⁶ Both systems forced hill people into subordinate positions vis-a-vis the commercial interests of the plains. They were either reduced to the status of poor tenants and sharecroppers for landlords from the plains (usually moneylenders who usurped their lands) or became a landless rural proletariat, felling timber and bamboo for contractors.⁵⁷ In attempting to integrate the hill economy into the broader framework of the colonial economy during the late nineteenth century, the forest department completely usurped the right of collecting forest products,

55. From C.A.Henderson, I.C.S., Agent to the Governor, Vizagapatam, to the Secretary to Govt., Rev. Dept., Madras R.Dis. (Confid.) 423, dated Vizagapatam, 11 April 1924, cited Atluri Muruli, *op.cit.*, p.31.

56. Arnold, *op.cit.*, p.116.

57. *Ibid.*

further affecting the subsistence needs of the hill communities. The collection of what came to be called 'minor forest produce', consisting in the main of tamarind and gallnuts was handed over to private contractors under the supervision of the forest department.⁵⁸

The influx of commercial interests in the late nineteenth century which accompanied the opening of the hill tracts made inroads into the traditional ways of life of the hill communities. The traders of the plains, especially the Komatis, exploited the hill people.⁵⁹ Traders and moneylenders operating in the hills, often advanced sums of money to the hill people in return for contracts specifying a quantity of tamarinds or gall-nuts to be delivered at the next harvest. The hill people were almost invariably induced to promise more than they could deliver, and received threats of being taken to court for breach of contract. Since many hill communities feared courts, these traders soon obtained court decrees for the confiscation of their possessions. Thus, for a small debt of a few rupees a hill dweller stood in danger of losing his entire cattle and produce to the rapacious trader-moneylender. A colonial official, Mr.H.D. Turner stated in 1892 that

58. 'Vizagapatam Agency Administration Report', in GOM, G.O No.2403, Rev. dt. 21, Nov. 1934; No.1869, Pub (Pol.) 14 Nov. 1938; No.1880, Pub. (Pol.) 20 Sept. 1940, cited in Atluri Murali *op.cit.*, p.20.

59. Arnold, *op.cit.*, p.109.

The rate of interest on loans extorted by these Sondis is 100 percent, and if this is not cleared off in the first year, compound interest at 100 percent is charged on the balance. The result is that in many instances the cultivators are unable to pay in cash or kind and become the gotis or serfs of the Sowcars, for whom they have to work in return for mere batta, whilst the latter take care to manipulate their accounts in such a manner that the debt is never paid off.⁶⁰

One result of commercial penetration, therefore, was that the material conditions of these communities deteriorated steadily. Many hung on to their older way of life, and it was reported as late as the 1930s and 1940s, that 'podu' was still being practised inspite of fines and punishments being imposed.⁶¹ However, many of these communities were pushed into 'vetti' or customary unpaid labour. The Forest Department, in fact, used many of these communities in various forest operations. Even here the exploitation of these communities continued. They were often not paid for their labour, or were paid rates lower than the prevailing local market rates.⁶²

The discontent among the hill communities over curtailment of 'podu', as well as the encroachment on their right to collect forest produce manifested itself in various

60. Francis, *op.cit.*, p.109.

61. Madras Legislative Council Proceedings, 3rd February to 6th March, 1925, Vol.XXII, Nos 1-9, p.686 cited in Atluri Murali, *op.cit.*, p.19.

62. Aiyappan, *op.cit.*, pp.18-20.

ways. This discontent, it must be emphasised, cannot be seen as a mere economic grievance. 'Podu', as we have seen earlier, was related to the cultural life-world of the hill communities. Its curtailment caused a profound sense of loss of community identity among the hill people.

The Rampa rebellions of 1879 and 1886 were the most explosive examples of resistance, and have been discussed by recent historians.⁶³ The hill communities also resorted to other forms of protest. In 1927, for instance, the entire male population of Turaba, a village in Ganjam Agency, converged on the Vellada reserved blocks and cleared the forest for cultivation.⁶⁴ A decade later in 1937, the act was repeated by the Karmatal and Munnisingi Saoras who cleared the nearby forest blocks marked for reservation.⁶⁵

To summarize, this section has attempted to show how the 'value' of a zone, came to be redefined over time. From being viewed initially as 'wasteful jungle', the hill tracts came to be seen as commercially 'valuable' in the

63. See, in this context, Arnold, *op.cit.*, pp.88-142.

64. Verrier Elwin, 'Saora Futuris', *Man in India*, Vol.XXV, Ranchi, 1945, pp.64-68.

65. *Ibid.*

second half of the nineteenth century. This change in perception manifested itself in measures to take control of the hills and preserve its 'value'. The result was a conflict between colonial forestry and the ways of life of the communities inhabiting these tracts.

The Coastal Plains: A Zone Of Possibilities?

The plains of the Northern Sircars, marked by deltas and lower courses of mature rivers forming broad shallow valleys, slope gently eastwards from the foot of the Dandakaranya Ghats towards the coast⁶⁶ (See Map 2). Two major rivers of South India flow through these plains. The Godavari, the largest perennial river of peninsular India, crosses the Eastern Ghats through the picturesque gorge at Papi Konda and emerges on to the coastal plains. Below Rajahmundry it split into the Gautami, Vasishta and Vainataya branches which formed the delta. The three branches join the sea near Yanam, Narasapuram and Razole respectively.⁶⁷ The other important river is the Krishna, which flows into two branches near Pangadda in Krishna district, enclosing the island of Divi, and sixteen kilometres downstream, splits into three branches.⁶⁸ The

66. R.L.Singh, *op.cit.*, p.936.

67. *Ibid.*, p.938.

68. *Ibid.*

plains, with their undulating topography, are wider in the deltaic zones and narrower between the deltas.

Along the coast, the soil is chiefly sandy, and in the words of Captain Snell, who conducted the first topographical survey in these parts, "unfit for the purpose of cultivation, without much labour and expence to the cultivators."⁶⁹ The quality of the soil, however, improves as one moves inland. The zone is rich in alluvial soils, which are to be found both in the river valleys and deltaic tracts, as well as at a distance of ten to twenty kilometers from the coast.⁷⁰ These soils are exceptionally fertile and highly conducive to the growth of agriculture, especially paddy. This is not to suggest, however, that riverine tracts do not suffer from any drawbacks. On the contrary, the ecology of riverine tracts gives rise to its own set of problems such as water-logging and salinity.

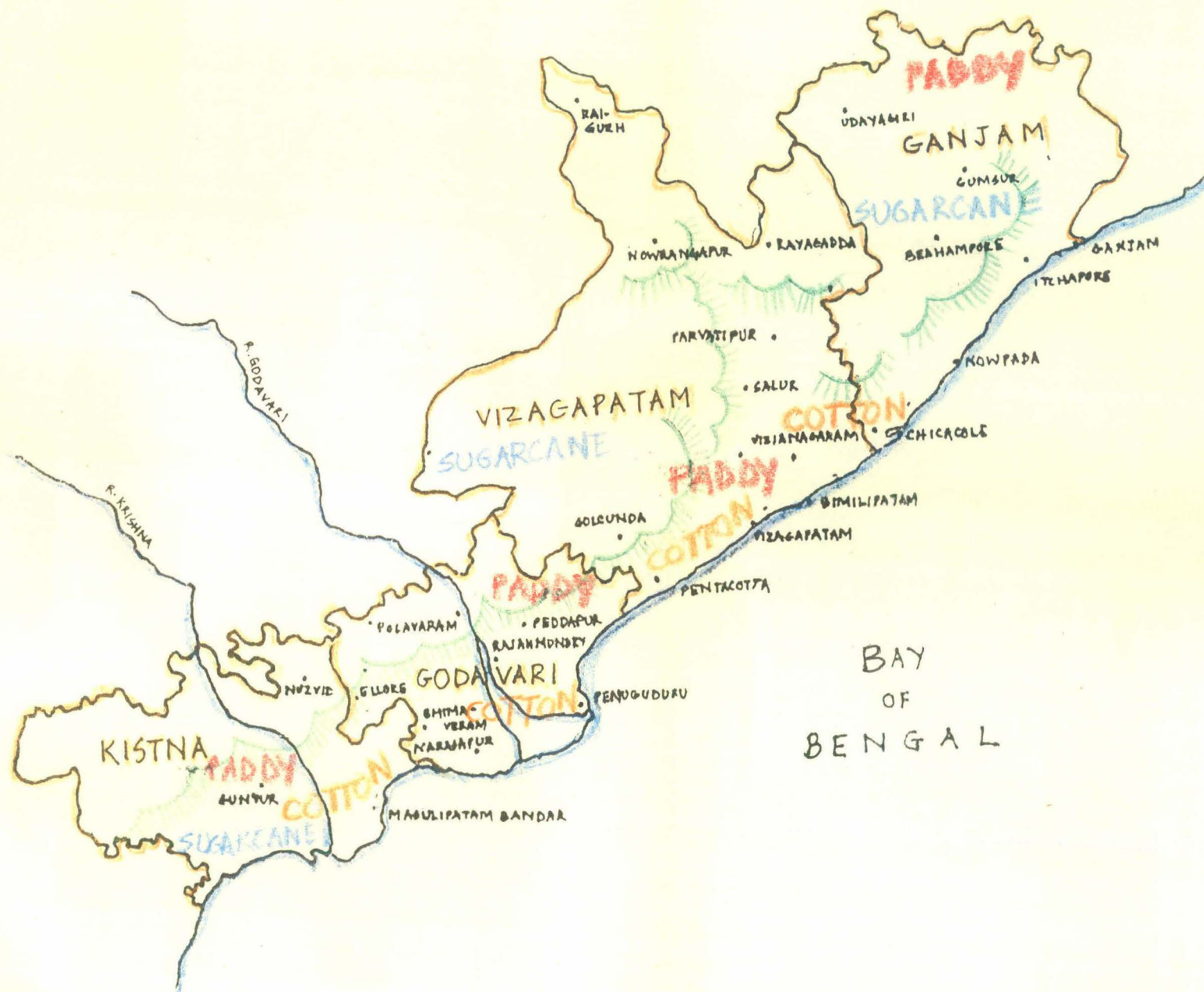
Red soils, black soils and laterites are also found in the coastal plains.⁷¹ Red soils occupy a large part of the Srikakulam, Vishakapatnam and East Godavari districts as well as some parts of the Guntur area.⁷² Black soils or

69. Capt. C. Snell, *Geographical and Statistical Memoir of the Rajahmundry District* (hereafter Memoir: Rajahmundry), 1821-23, p.6.

70. R.L. Singh, *op.cit.*, p.939.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*



MAP 3: Northern Sircars: Agrarian Production Zones

regur, are found near the Chilka lake, and parts of West Godavari and Guntur districts adjoining coastal alluvial tracts.⁷³ The black soils of the Eastern coastal plains are, however, not as thick and moisture-retentive as in the Deccan Trap. Laterite soils are for the most part encountered in parts of the Godavari district.⁷⁴

The lands in the plains were usually classified by cultivators into three broad categories: 'pallam' or wet, 'mettu' or dry, and 'tota' or garden lands.⁷⁵ Among the wet crops the most important were rice and sugar-cane. Dry crops like ragi, cholam, cambu and indigo were cultivated on lands where irrigation facilities were poor. Garden lands which were both rain dependent and artificially irrigated were productive of a number of items like betel-nut and leaf, tobacco, plantain, chillies and onions. This classification was only a broad one. Not infrequently dry grains were cultivated on irrigated lands and wet crops grew on rainfed lands. Paddy, for instance, was cultivated on rainfed lands in many parts of northern Ganjam⁷⁶ (See Map 3). Indigo,

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*

75. A Sarada Raju, *Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency 1800-1850*, Madras, 1941, p.65.

76. *Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1895, p.20.

similarly, was a dry crop but in Vishakapatnam was cultivated on wet lands using artificial irrigation.⁷⁷

At first sight, the agrarian landscape of the coastal plains presented a picture of prosperity and abundance, prompting James Grant to refer to them as 'the granary of the Carnatic'.⁷⁸ Thomas Bowrey, an English private trader of the seventeenth century, who moved about in these parts observed that in the plains there could be found

very delicate good land the affordinge the greatest plenty of Grain vizt. Wheat, Barley, Rice, several sorts of gramme with much more plenty of cattle as beeffs, sheeps, goats, &c. than any part (of Asia) besides affordeth.⁷⁹

The deltaic tracts of the Krishna and Godavari rivers in particular, were noted by one early seventeenth century observer to be

exceedingly productive of rice and products of many kinds, while there are very many cattle of all sorts. Butter and cheese too are made there. Good wheat is produced in the interior.... for supplies of all commodities are ample as also oranges, lemons, and various other fruits as well as fish.⁸⁰

An eighteenth century writer remarked that the Godavari delta was "of greater value, in proportion to its

77. Carmichael, *op.cit.*, p.145.

78. Grant, *op.cit.*, p.7.

79. Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round of the Bay of Bengal 1669-1679*, Hakluyt Society, London, p.120.

80. W.H. Moreland (ed.), *Relations of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century*, London, 1931, p.63.

extent, than any other spot in the east, without excepting the famous Delta of Egypt."⁸¹ He went on to add that "this, and the Delta of the Kistna, are like those of the Nile, of vast fertility, enriched by the soil brought down by the annual inundations."⁸² A view confirmed by Captain Snell, who noted that the plains were "highly fertile and richly cultivated especially in the vicinity of the Godavery and the delta."⁸³

The dominant crop of the region was paddy, which was cultivated in all parts of the coastal plains. (See Map 3) In the deltaic tracts especially, the fertile soils and availability of plentiful water created the right conditions for the cultivation of this crop. In these nodal areas, irrigated rice culture had made for a high degree of routinization of agrarian rhythms: inputs were relatively invariant, the timing of agricultural operations fixed and the returns on labour more or less certain. Population densities in these tracts were high, the division of labour relatively elaborate and agrarian stratification pronounced. A class of dominant land holders and rich Brahmins commanded

81. Thomas Pennant, *The View of Hindoostan*, Vol.II, London, 1798, p.120.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmundry*, p.2.

the labour and allegiance of a large force of agrestic labour.

Paddy, an intensive crop requiring large inputs of labour, was raised by transplantation from June to September.⁸⁴ It was harvested in November and December. In the first instance, nursery beds were prepared by ploughing them seven or eight times and the seed sown thickly and ploughed in twice. Next, the surface was smoothed by driving brushwood over it. After about four weeks when the young plants had attained a certain growth, fresh beds which were separated from each other by low embankments of earth were prepared. This was done by letting a supply of water into them, one at a time, ploughing them a couple of times, and then smoothing the surface by means of a plank drawn by a pair of bullocks, in the same way as a plough. As soon as a number of such beds were ready, the young seedlings in the nursery were pulled up, tied into small bundles and distributed over the prepared ground. The plants were arranged at a distance of two inches or so from each other depending on the quality of the soil. The beds were kept full of water for a fortnight after transplantation. As soon as the paddy ripened, it was cut down with a short sickle close to the ground, and immediately carried off the fields

84. *Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency, 1895, p.*

and stocked for a few days.⁸⁵ After the grain was threshed out, either by manual labour, or by treading it out with cattle driven over the threshing floor, it was winnowed by being tossed in the air in flat baskets. The grain was usually stored in large wicker baskets which were covered with cowdung to make them impervious to moisture.⁸⁶

Paddy was also broadcast on rainfed lands in northern Ganjam, and parts of the Guntur, Godavari and Vishakapatnam districts⁸⁷ (See Map 3) In the Godavari district, for instance in the first crop season, certain varieties of paddy known by the names of 'yaradam', 'budama' and 'jilama' were broadcast on rainfed lands.⁸⁸ However, the economic resources of cultivators were an important determinant of whether paddy was sown broadcast or transplanted. The 1913 *Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency* noted that in Ganjam, "rich ryots transplant paddy on rain fed lands and poor ryots sow paddy broadcast on wet land."⁸⁹ In the Godavari region certain varieties of wet crop paddy such as

85. Carmichel, *op.cit.*, p.134.

86. *Ibid.*, p.135.

87. *Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency*, 1913.

88. *Ibid.*, p.99.

89. *Ibid.*, p.3

'rasangi' were sown broadcast.⁹⁰ Consumed by the lower classes, it was widely cultivated. Being an early crop it allowed raiyats to pay their first kist on demand.⁹¹

A number of varieties of paddy were grown in the coastal plains. In Rajahmundry it is said that no less than thirty different kinds of rice were raised.⁹² Similarly, the 1869 Manual of Vizagapatnam listed 60 varieties of paddy. A majority of these were specific to this district alone, while a few were imported from Ganjam.⁹³

Dry grains were also extensively cultivated in all parts of the coastal plains, ragi, cambu and cholam being the most prominent. These grains were the staple diet of most of the poorer classes. Ragi and cambu were raised chiefly on red ferruginous or white and gray calcareous soils.⁹⁴ These millets flourished on light soils from which water readily flowed after the rains. They were first raised in nursery beds and then transplanted out on wet lands, in furrows. The crops were generally sown in July and reaped in

90. Ibid, p.99.

91. Ibid.

92. Sarada Raju, *op.cit.*, p.68.

93. Carmichael, *op.cit.*, pp.135-136.

94. Ibid., p.138.

October, and cut and threshed like paddy.⁹⁵ In Ganjam, ragi was practically the only dry grain, being cultivated three times a year, and in many areas it was raised as a second crop after paddy was harvested.⁹⁶ Ragi was also sometimes used as a mixed crop with cotton.

Cholam or 'jonnalalu' was also a staple second crop after paddy. It was sown broadcast in October mainly on red ferruginous soils, and reaped about the end of December.⁹⁷ Cholam was also grown as a mixed crop with other grains, pulses and sometimes cotton or indigo. The seasonal rains were usually sufficient for their cultivation, for they did not require excessive water. Among non-food crops, oil seeds such as gingelly and castor were cultivated in many areas of the plains.

The coastal plains suggested possibilities for the cultivation of a variety of other crops, whose commercial potential attracted the attention of early Company officials. C.N.White, a member of the Board of Revenue in the late eighteenth century, observed that in the plains of the Northern Sircars, cotton, indigo, sugarcane, and other

95. *Ibid.*

96. Sarada Raju, *op.cit.*, p.71.

97. Carmichael, *op.cit.*, p.238.

crops could be raised to any extent.⁹⁸ Similarly, Dr. Roxburgh, a Company botanist who conducted an experimental farm at Rajahmundry, noted that the lands there were some of the finest in India, fit for the cultivation of a large number of crops ranging from sugarcane to mulberry trees.⁹⁹

Sugarcane was chiefly cultivated in the Ganjam, Vishakapatnam and Machilipatanam areas in the eighteenth century¹⁰⁰ (See Map 3). An inquiry of 1797 revealed that the first two districts produced the largest quantities.¹⁰¹ The collector of Ganjam stated in 1815, that the "quantity of sugar could be extended to almost any number of Maunds annually."¹⁰² Dr. Roxburgh too repeatedly asserted that the area available in the Northern Sircars for sugarcane cultivation was almost unlimited.¹⁰³ However, the actual extent of cultivation in terms of acreage at the end of the eighteenth century was limited. Sugarcane was an expensive crop to cultivate, requiring as it did more capital, water

98. Sarada Raju, *op.cit.*, p.62.

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Ibid.*, p.81.

101. *Ibid.*

102. *Ibid.*, p.82.

and labour than any other crop including wet paddy. Further, it took ten to fourteen months to be ready for cutting and the poorer cultivators could not afford to wait that long.¹⁰⁴

The East India Company became interested in the commercial prospects of sugar cultivation towards the end of the eighteenth century. In 1794, the Board of Revenue was authorised to encourage sugar manufacture.¹⁰⁵ Samples of Ganjam and Machilipatnam sugar were sent to England and were highly commended by the Court of Directors and the commercial resident was asked to buy any amount that was offered.¹⁰⁶ However, it was not until the end of the next century when an integrated commodity market was in place that sugarcane cultivation commenced on a large-scale. Cotton too was initially cultivated only in small quantities in parts of the Guntur region as well as in the Ganjam, Vishakapatnam, Machilipatnam and Rajahmundry districts¹⁰⁷ (See Map 3). William Oram, one of the members of the circuit committee which reported on the state of the Vishakapatnam and Srikakulam districts in 1784, wrote that

not more than 1/4th of the cotton used in the manufactures is the produce of the country, owing

104. *Ibid.*, pp.82-83.

105. *Ibid.*, p.85.

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*, p.88.

as much to the necessity the people are under of cultivating dry grains for their subsistence, as to unfitness in the soil and want of inhabitants, the necessary supplies are therefore brought from within land...".¹⁰⁸

Environmental conditions in the coastal plains of the Northern Sircars were not very conducive for the large-scale growth of cotton. The excessive humidity and frequent flooding of the lowlands was a major deterrent. An eighteenth century observer of local cultivation practices noted that in the Godavari delta, "scarcely any cotton crop is gathered if the season is favorable for paddy by the freshes rising in July or the rains, being seasonable which are both totally destructive to cotton."¹⁰⁹

According to a report of 1796, two varieties of cotton were grown in these parts, namely white and brown cotton.¹¹⁰ White cotton "is never sown apart but is ever of mixt cultivation with condooloo and vahdah paddy and with condooloo and auroogallo and is sown broadcast on grounds where the waters do not lay..."¹¹¹ Brown cotton on the

108. *CCR: Vizag. and Chicacole*, p.7.

109. Letter from Joseph Revell to Anthony Sadlier Esq., Chief in Council, Masulipatam, dated 16 December 1789, Proceedings of the Board of Revenue (hereafter BOR), Vol.86, 1793, p.9135.

110. *Report by Mr. Snodgrass Relative to the Affairs of the Zemindaries of Pittapore and Peddapore*, Selections from the Records of Godavari District, Godavari Collectorate Press, 1900, p.2.

111. *Ibid.*

other hand

engrosses the land that is appropriated to it no other crop being extracted from it for the whole year nor does the same field produce good harvest of Brown cotton two succeeding years. The husbandry of this division allots to the black soil which crumbles and cracks in the dry and becomes clammy and adhesive in the wet season an annual alteration of crops and brown cotton is succeeded by Jonaloo, Salagaloo, Annoomooloo and Oil seeds.¹¹²

Unlike the white cotton, instead of being broadcast it was sown in drills and the whole cultivation process was quite laborious. The report observed that "the preparation of the land before the seed is committed to it is extremely operose while when the plant has shot up it requires weeding, raking and ploughing between the drills with sedulous and laborious attention."¹¹³

In general, the cotton grown was inadequate for local consumption. There was, however, scope for the extension of cotton cultivation in many areas through the introduction of new varieties as the inquiry of 1812 revealed.¹¹⁴ By the mid-nineteenth century, with the Company taking an active interest, cotton cultivation had expanded in many areas of the Sircars. The increase in demand for raw cotton in

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*, p.3.

114. Sarada Raju, *op.cit.*, p.89.

England and China has been cited as a reason for this increase.¹¹⁵

The plains also offered favourable conditions for the cultivation of crops like tobacco, jute and indigo. The agrarian expansion from the late nineteenth century saw the increase in cultivation of these crops, especially tobacco.¹¹⁶ Accounts of the second half of the nineteenth century testify to the growing diversification in the agrarian landscape. D.F.Carmichael, wrote in his *Manual of the District of Vizagapatam* (1869) that, "the whole plain to the foot of the Ghats is one sheet of cultivation; not only paddy-fields but considerable gardens of sugar-cane and tobacco."¹¹⁷ Similarly, Henry Morris in his account of the Godavari district observed that "green fields of paddy extend in every direction, diversified by gardens of plantains, betel-nut, and cocoa-nut, and innumerable palmyras are dotted over the surface of the country, particularly near the coast."¹¹⁸

115. *Ibid.*, p.90.

116. Satyanarayana, *op.cit.*, pp.20-21.

117. Carmichael, *op.cit.*, p.3.

118. Henry Morris, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Godavery District in the Presidency of Madras*, London, 1878, pp.1-2.

My account of the plains until now has tended to reaffirm the dominant stereotype of plains as zones of fertility and abundance. Yet, there is another side to life in the plains that we need to consider. This suggests that for all the possibilities offered by the plains, it was also a zone constrained by a constant cycle of bad seasons, famines and floods, especially until the mid-nineteenth century.

Events labelled 'famines', for instance, were a regular feature of life in the coastal plains in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dutch and English sources of the seventeenth century referred to the recurrence of famines in these parts.¹¹⁹ For the eighteenth century, we have John Sullivan's testimony that famines had affected the Sircars in 1764, 1765 and 1766, "and had been attended with consequences equally destructive. The melancholy effects of it were still visible in the year 1774...".¹²⁰

Similarly, the Committee of Circuit's report on the Vishakapatnam and Srikakulam districts in 1784 observed that "regarding the increase or decrease of population we are

119. Brenig, *op.cit.*, p.341.

120. John Sullivan, *Tracts Upon India*, London, 1794, pp.xiii-xiv.

sorry that it has been so frequently confirmed to us that the number has decreased very considerably owing to a dreadful famine in the year 1776 and other years less calamitous..."¹²¹ Of this famine, the Committee of Circuit's report on the Machilipatanam district noted that "in 1776... many of the wretched inhabitants perished from want..."¹²²

In the years 1790-92, there occurred a famine of devastating magnitude which is believed to have swept away more than half of the population of the Northern Sircars. This famine, affected all parts of the region. The Provincial Council of Machilipatanam reported that such a calamity was "altogether unknown in this country".¹²³ The mortality among inhabitants as well as cattle was very high. In the Peddapuram zamindari, for instance, three-fourths of the agricultural population and cattle perished.¹²⁴ The following abstract, forwarded by the Collector of the northern and central divisions of the Machilipatanam haveli to the Council at Madras in December 1792, is indicative of the magnitude of the calamity. The figures relate to the number of inhabitants who died or emigrated, pargana-wise.

121. *CCR: Vizag. and Chicacole*, p.26.

122. *CCR: Masulipatam*, p.13.

123. Sarada Raju, *op.cit.*, p.284.

124. *Ibid.*

**Table 2: Pargana-wise figures of deaths and emigrations in the northern and central divisions of the Machilipatnam hav
1790-92***

Pergunnahs	Deaths			Emigrations			Remaining		
	Husband men	Plough men	Brahmins & manufacturers	Husband men	Plough men	Brahmins & manufacturers	Husband men	Plough men	Brahmins manufactur
1. Ellore Havelly	1548	2950	4952	398	966	2995	2535	1113	9538
2. Condapilly-Do-	569	285	3087			266	1018	171	3394
3. Goodoore	1834	1063	2793				645	365	1441
4. Anclamannar	90	90	1085	20	5	76	168	136	1040
5. Ennegodroo	1233	782	1611			688	1681	564	3045
6. Coortevennoo	15	87	226			39	94	68	381
7. Toomey	322	377	414	15		65	424	151	776
8. Padanah	1811	1492		37		93	894	122	1691
9. Tondoaroo	955	1155	234	40	30	127	600	190	280
10. Bondarah	595	956	343	50		233	562	88	349
11. Beemavaram	128	268	816			100	85	7	136
12. Narasapuram	1397	1080	3439	168	40	1112	1927	414	4955
13. Bendarmalunkah	499	364	527	102	83	322	827	311	1647
14. Vulloore Samootoo	410	1000	790	200	400	880	3000	1000	2050
15. Duvah	771	274	1652			179	673	35	935
16. Antravady	141	149	147	31	17	78	193	122	378
17. Neelapilly	273	160	1259	9		202	1938	207	8822
18. Rajahundry	217	200	2158	37		1036	195	30	3396
19. Vellampollam	520	1276	1641	76	37	452	1372	814	3633
20. Pulli Condah	15	20	4				117	25	61
Total :	13343	14029	26578	1183	1578	8903	18948	5943	48548

*Source: Board of Revenue, Vol.65, 14 Jan.1793, p.120.

The figures given in the abstract above are not very precise in terms of the various categories used. It is also not clear whether they pertain to a single year or the entire period of the famine from 1790 to 1792. Nevertheless, they give us some idea of the scope of the disaster. Of an estimated total population of 1,39,053 in this division, 39 per cent perished while 8 per cent emigrated. In absolute terms, there was a 42 per cent decline in the category of brahmins and manufacturers a 43 per cent decline in the number of husbandmen and a decline of 72 per cent in the category of ploughmen. However, as already mentioned, these figures highlight patterns rather than actual losses.

The poorest sections of society seem to have had the worst of it. The Collector of Vishakapatnam noted that "the usual rains having been deficient during these last years, a great scarcity of grain ensued and thousands perished by famine particularly among the class of cultivators."¹²⁵ Weavers and other manufacturing classes also seem to have suffered greatly. The high prices of grain and a lack of demand for their manufactures were important factors in exacerbating the distress of the weavers. Many weavers were forced to turn to the land and

125. BOR., Vol.59 'A', 11 June 1792, p.2505.

work as landless labourers. The Collector of the northern and central division of Machilipatanam, Mathew Tudor, wrote that the 'pariahs' (the local term for weavers) were the principal sufferers due to their "inability to obtain any work or employment and consequently no means of subsistence".¹²⁶ Emigrations among this class were also common. According to the official at Vishakapatnam, "the Death or Emigration of many weavers and spinners, and the extreme weakness and Misery of a great portion of those who survived were a most discouraging circumstance".¹²⁷

Most company officials pointed to the failure of rains in successive seasons and ensuing drought as the main causes, of famine. According to John Sullivan, " the failure of the periodical rains occasioned a scarcity, which the continued droughts of 1791 and 1792 increased to such an extent that it has been computed one half of the inhabitants, or near five hundred thousand people were carried off."¹²⁸ The collector of the Northern and Central Divisions of Machilipatanam similarly remarked that

126. Letter from Mathew Tudor to the Chief and Council at Masulipatam dated 28 December 1792, BOR., Vol.65, 14 January, 1793, p.120-121.

127. BOR., Vol.59 'A', 11 June 1792, p.2505.

128. Sullivan, *op.cit.*, p.xiii.

from the first rains having fallen so late as the end of October and none to speak of since that period there certainly is too great reason to apprehend those centers, who have made large advances on the cultivation will be disappointed in the produce of the lowlands, and it is consequently difficult to say how for the Honble Company's may be affected by such extraordinary and successive droughts.¹²⁹

The problems posed by variability of rainfall in the plains were compounded by the poor condition of traditional irrigation works. It has been noted that at the close of the eighteenth century, the conditions of tanks, reservoirs and channels were in a bad state.¹³⁰ Repairs, where they were attempted, were rather superficial and more in the nature of temporary expedients.¹³¹ When the Circuit Committee touring the Machilipatanam zamindaris in the late eighteenth century sought to ascertain the reason for this, they were told by villagers that, "the seasons rendered them unnecessary, the rains commencing in June and lasting with intervals to the middle of November." The failure of the rains no doubt rendered these tracts vulnerable to drought.¹³²

Areas of predominantly dry grain cultivation however, seemed to have suffered less than areas of wet crop

129. BOR., Vol.65, 14 January 1793, pp.120-121.

130. Sarada Raju, *op.cit.*, p.121.

131. *Ibid.*

132. CCR: Masulipatam, p.13.

cultivation. The same official noted that the villages of the Valloor Samootoo pargana,

being situated high and consequently favourable for the cultivation of Jonnaloo which requires but little water in cultivation was carried on by the exertions of the security in making the most liberal advances of Teckavy &c. to an extent never known before which together for the high price for which Jonnaloo sold produced a Jammabundy of more than 20,000 MPs.¹³³

'Jonnaloo' or cholam, was usually sown in October and hence the late rains, which was fatal for the paddy crop, aided their growth. In times of famine their value increased and made them an attractive proposition to cultivators.

The rapacity of the Company was also a key factor in aggravating the distress caused by drought. Every effort was made to collect revenues despite the magnitude of the disaster. As one Company official noted, "this year's cultivation has also been greatly prejudiced from so little rain having fallen... The Companies Revenue will however doubtless be collected from the responsibility of the security."¹³⁴

The close of the century was marked by another scarcity which prevailed in the Northern Sircars. Its effects were so severe in Ganjam that according to Mr. Brown's Settlement

133. BOR., Vol.65, 14 January 1793, p.129.

134. *Ibid.* p.125.

Report for Fasli 1211 (1801-2) the district was reduced to "nearly the last ebb of a frightful and depopulated waste."¹³⁵ The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a continuation of the same trend. G.N. Rao's study of canal irrigation in the Rajahmundry/Godavari tract notes that in the three and a half decades between 1820-21 and 1853-54, seasons were favourable only in seven years.¹³⁶ Nine years were ordinary and the rest were either years of deficit rainfall or famines.

This period saw the occurrence of the 'Great Famine' of 1833, which was characterised as "the most calamitous season, perhaps that has been experienced in the Northern Sircars."¹³⁷ Walter Campbell, a Lieutenant on His Majesty's 62nd Regiment stationed at Machilipatanam in 1834, wrote:

the surrounding country is in a state of famine in consequence of the crops having failed last year for want of rain, and the scenes of misery we are daily forced to witness are too dreadful for description. No one unless he has seen a country in an absolute state of famine, can conceive the horrors occasioned by such a state of things.¹³⁸

135. Sarada Raju, *op.cit.*, p.284.

136. G.N.Rao, 'Canal Irrigation and Agrarian Change in Colonial Andhra: A Study of Godavari District c.1850-1890', *IESHR*, 25, 1, 1988, p.26.

137. Morris, *op.cit.*, p.288.

138. Gordon MacKenzie, *A Manual of the Kistna District in the Presidency of Madras*, Madras, 1883, p.116.

The famine was more severe in the Guntur and Machilipatanam areas, than in the districts further to the north.¹³⁹ There had been a devastating hurricane the previous year which had destroyed the paddy crop. This was followed by a poor monsoon in 1833.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, food prices shot up to high levels, precipitating the crisis. Vast numbers perished and equally large numbers emigrated to the south, mostly to the regions around Madras, and "the great northern road soon became one long graveyard."¹⁴¹ Village life was badly affected by the deaths and emigrations.

During the day men could be seen prowling about the streets, picking up anything edible, even from the most defiled sources, and at night women would go to the village well, and watch the water drop slowly into their brazen vessels, every drop being carefully prized and cherished.¹⁴²

Famines in the plains in these years showed certain recurring patterns. The most important precipitating factor seems to have been drought. The plains were prone to drought mainly as a result of the precariousness of rains in this zone. The timely arrival of the South-West monsoon was especially crucial to the success of the paddy crop in the

139. Morris, *op.cit.*, p.289.

140. *Ibid.*

141. *Ibid.*

142. *Ibid.*, pp.289-290.

plains and the failure of early rains affected the harvest badly. The poor state of irrigation works until the mid-nineteenth century increased the dependence of cultivators on the monsoons. However, the failure of rains in a single year did not normally lead to famine. Most of the better off cultivators, atleast, had in reserve stocks of grain from the previous year which helped them tide over a poor season. It was the threat of failure of rains for a second successive season which created conditions of scarcity leading to famine. The onset of drought around early July immediately triggered off a rise in food prices. This, together with the loss of farm employment resulting from very low agricultural production, contributed to a drastic entitlement failure for a majority of the rural population living on the margins of subsistence. Migration in search of food or employment was a common response.

Life in the deltaic tracts were rendered even more hazardous by the recurrence of inundations which devastated life and property in the region. In the the early years of the seventeenth century, an observer wrote that, "in the rainy season the land along the coast is usually flooded with water flowing from the mountains, the river cannot discharge the water, and consequently spreads over the country, sometimes causing great damage."¹⁴³ Similarly, a

143. Moreland, *op.cit.*, p.68.

Dutchman named Peter Williamson Floris, has left an account of one such inundation in the year 1613.

In August there happened in Narasapur Peta and thereabouts a greater overflowing than had been seen in twenty-nine years. The whole salt hills, Towns, and Rice were drove away, and many Thousand Men and Cattle were drowned, the water rising three yards above the Highway...¹⁴⁴

Inundations in deltaic tracts far from being an aberration, were part of a natural process of land formation. The *Report of the Orissa Flood Committee* (1928) noted, for instance, that:

It must be clearly grasped that, in a deltaic area there must be flooding; it is nature's method of land formation, and any efforts to prevent it are doomed to failure from the outset.¹⁴⁵

A river in its descent from the hills carries with it heavy loads of silt and other sediments. On debouching on to the deltaic plains, its currents are weakened. Consequently, it deposits its silt and other sedimentary load, thereby raising the river bed. This leads to the river overflowing its banks and inundating the surrounding areas. Usually, the weaker the current or more gentle the overflow, the finer is the silt deposit in the surrounding areas.

However, there was another type of inundation which was a result of tidal waves coming in from the sea, usually

144. Morris, *op.cit.*, p.179.

145. *Report of the Orissa Flood Committee*, Patna, 1929, p.8. I am grateful to Rohan D'Souza for providing me with this report and clarifying my ideas on this issue.

during cyclonic storms. Michael Topping in his Survey of the Bay of Coringa in 1787, recorded the testimony of an old native informant on one such inundation caused by the sea which the latter had witnessed in his youth. Topping reproduced it in his report.

That the former inundation happened in the month of December, eighty-three years ago (i.e. in 1706. That the easterly wind had blown very hard all that night and the preceding day. That the water came in the night.... That people were lost.... that innumerable trees were thrown down.... the Paddy fields ruined... and great quantities of Salt left upon the ground...¹⁴⁶

In the violent inundation of October 1779, it is reported that "the sea flowed twelve feet deep in the Dutch factory and destroyed all their goods and their houses to the value of 80,000 pagodas; the sea was also knee-deep in the English factory, where great loss was sustained in pepper and other spices."¹⁴⁷ Several ships and boats were also blown away. In Machilipatanam and adjacent villages, at least 20,000 men, women and children were drowned and lay unburied in the streets, 'which occasioned a great stench'.¹⁴⁸ Nearly a century later, in 1864 the Machilipatanam area experienced another disastrous inundation.

146. M.Topping, *On the Harbours and Ports of the Northern Circars*, Madras, 1855, Appendix, p.24, para 9.

147. MacKenzie, *op.cit.*, p.98.

148. *Ibid.*, p.99.

The extent of the inundation was along 80 miles of coast and on an average about 9 miles inland. The farthest point reached by the wave was 17 miles inland and the surface inundated must have been not less than 780 square miles. The loss of life was estimated at 30,000 and there was of course much destruction of cattle, while the salt water rendered a considerable extent of land unfit for cultivation.¹⁴⁹

Inundations of the sea caused large-scale salinity in the deltaic tracts, affecting the fertility of the soil. An account of the inundation of May 1787, in the Rajahmundry districts noted that the "husbandsmen were of opinion that the Earth is so impregnated with Salt as it required many months and much rain to become fit for cultivation."¹⁵⁰

The following figures (Table 3) from the first half of the 19th century provide an interesting example of how the recurring cycle of bad seasons, famines and inundations affected the deltaic region. The evidence comes from the Rajahmundry District.

149. *Ibid.*, p.127.

150. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmundry*, p.11.

Table 3: Nature of Agricultural Seasons In Rajahmundry District, 1820-1853*

YEAR	NATURE OF THE SEASON
1820-21	Ordinary year
1821-22	Ordinary year
1822-23	Ordinary year
1823-24	Famine
1824-25	Good year, crops abundant
1825-26	Ordinary year
1826-27	Produce abundant
1827-28	Ordinary year
1828-29	Seasonable rains
1829-30	Insufficient rain
1830-31	Favourable year. Produce large
1831-32	Abundant rain and hurricane
1832-33	Famines and high floods and storm
1833-34	Famines and high floods and storm
1834-35	Ordinary year
1835-36	Insufficient rain
1836-37	Unseasonable rain
1837-38	Hurricane and inundation
1838-39	Extreme distress
1839-40	Scanty rain
1840-41	Abundant crop but large imports of Arracan rice depress foodgrain prices
1841-42	Abundant crop but large imports of Arracan rice depress foodgrain prices
1842-43	Ordinary season
1843-44	Ordinary season
1844-45	High floods and consequent destruction
1845-46	Favourable year
1846-47	Scanty rain
1847-48	Indifferent year
1848-49	Indifferent year
1849-50	Heavy floods and inundation
1850-51	High floods
1851-52	Ordinary year
1852-53	High floods. Damage to the crops
1853-54	Drought

* Source: G.N. Rao, 'Stagnation and Decay of the Agricultural Economy of Coastal Andhra', *Artha Vijnana*, September 1978, Volume 20, No.4, p.227.

Consequently, in these years both land revenues as well as population declined substantially in this district. Land revenue decreased from Rs.18.6 lakhs in 1821 to Rs.15.1 lakhs in 1842, while the estimated population figures dipped from 7.38 lakhs to 5.61 lakhs in the same period.¹⁵¹ The situation was more or less the same in the Krishna delta.

Company officials perceived this decline in the prosperity of the plains as an aberration and argued vociferously for measures to realise its 'natural' potential. Arthur Cotton felt that "such a thing as a famine in any one of these districts near the Godavery should ever take place, is, indeed the deepest reproach to us."¹⁵² The construction of anicuts across the Krishna and Godavari rivers was seen as the solution to the problem of famine. Arthur Cotton who surveyed the deltaic tracts noted that there was a vast extent of fertile soil, not less than 820,000 acres within the District of Rajahmundry, and nearly as much in Machilipatanam, to which irrigation might be applied with benefit.¹⁵³ He concluded his report by observing,

151. G.N.Rao, *op.cit.*, p.26.

152. Morris, *op.cit.*, p.114.

153. *Ibid.*, p.112.

We may consider the Annicut as laying the foundation for the complete irrigation, for a rice crop, of the whole Delta of the Godavery, and part of that of the Kistna, in all 3000 square miles, or nearly 2,000,000 acres; and providing for leading out on the land every drop of what is now lost. Thus the produce of this tract, which at present probably does not exceed 30 lacs, would, when full advantage is taken of that water thus distributed over it, be increased to at least 200 lacs.¹⁵⁴

The possibilities for development Cotton suggested were endless.

What this District may become, if this matter be taken in hand with only a small part of the energy it deserves, it is not easy to conceive. The unfailing river, an immense expanse of the richest soil, a safe and accessible port, a complete internal water communication with teak forests, and abundance of labour at 1¹/₂ d. a day, form such a combination of advantages as I suppose, cannot be found in the world, and certainly not under such a Government as ours.¹⁵⁵

The construction of the Godavari Anicut commenced in 1846-47 and was more or less complete by 1852. In the immediate post-Anicut phase, however, the expected expansion in wet cultivation did not occur. In the initial years, a number of factors such as a high water tax, ecological problems caused by salinity and water-logging, and the lack of sufficient incentive to grow for a wider market in the absence of a well-integrated

154. *Ibid.*, p.114.

155. *Ibid.*, p.115.

transport system constrained the expansion of wet cultivation.¹⁵⁶

Nevertheless the construction of the anicuts was seen as a turning point in the agrarian economy of the region. It was estimated that between 1895-99 and 1919-24 the total irrigated area in the deltas was increased by 36 per cent.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, the total cultivated area also went up by 22 per cent in the Kistna district and West Godavari districts, and 21 per cent in the East Godavari district.¹⁵⁸ In the Kistna district by the end of the 1920s nearly one lakh acres of land were brought under wet cultivation for the first time.¹⁵⁹

Paddy cultivation spearheaded the expansion. Henry Morris in his *Descriptive and Statistical Memoir of the Godavari District*, noted:

the extent of ground taken up by the cultivation of paddy has most considerably increased of late years. It may roughly be stated at five times larger than it formerly was. The quality of this cereal cannot be said to have improved in itself, but very much more of it is grown. A great proportion of dryland has been converted into wet, and paddy is now produced on it instead of the former dry crops.¹⁶⁰

156. G.N.Rao, *op.cit.*, pp.40-42.

157. Satyanarayana, *op.cit.*, p.18.

158. *Ibid.*

159. *Ibid.*

160. Morris, *op.cit.*, p.68.

The cultivation of a second paddy crop resulted in an increase in the area under rice, at the expense of cereals such as cholam and other coarse grains. According to one estimate, in the Godavari district, the share of rice in the total cereal area increased from 77.6 per cent in the late 1870s to 80.6 per cent in the late 1880s.¹⁶¹ Between 1899 and 1923, in the Kistna and West Godavari districts the fall from 9 to 5 per cent of the total sown area under oil seeds, (which were grown as a second crop in the deltas) was mainly due to the increase in the area under second crop paddy.¹⁶² Thus, in coastal Andhra, the area under rice had increased from 12.5 lakh acres in 1891-92 to 33.9 lakh acres in 1910-11.¹⁶³ Oil seeds cultivation also received a fillip during the agrarian expansion of the 1880s, and in fact, grew more consistently than paddy at this point in time. According to G.N. Rao, it was oil seeds which registered the highest growth rate in the decades following the provision of canal irrigation.¹⁶⁴

161. G.N.Rao, *op.cit.*, p.44.

162. Satyanarayana, *op.cit.*, p.48.

163. G.N.Rao and D.Rajshekhar, *Irrigation and Agrarian Expansion In Andhra: A long-term Overview (Mimeo)*, pp.6-7, cited in Satyanaraya, *op.cit.*, p.19.

164. G.N.Rao, *op.cit.*, p.44.

The construction of the anicuts had other effects too. For example, agrarian rhythms changed following the provision of large-scale canal irrigation. Henry Morris referred to the fact that in the Godavari district, the cultivation of the wet crop began to commence much earlier than was the case previously, when farmers were obliged to wait for the commencement of the rains.

This rarely occurred before the middle of June. Now the seed-beds, being watered from the channels, are often prepared in May, and the young shoots are ready for transplanting by the time the freshes fill the channels, a month or so later. The harvest, is consequently, hastened....¹⁶⁵

To sum up then, once again we see the ways in which the geographical perception of a region underpinned official policy. Colonial officials vested the deltaic plains with a 'natural' prosperity that was pre-given, and perceived the recurrence of droughts and floods as an aberration. This perception was informed by the dominant stereotype of plains as zones of 'natural value'. The result was an attempt to restore the 'natural' prosperity of the deltaic tracts through the construction of large anicuts across the Krishna and Godavari rivers. While the construction of the anicuts has been seen as having paved the way for the agrarian expansion of the late nineteenth century, its ecological implications await the probing of historians.

165. Morris, *op.cit.*, p.67.

*The Politics of Land: The Company and
Zamindars in the Northern Sircars*

In the last chapter, I examined the role of the environment in constituting a region. This chapter looks at how a region is defined by its structures of power. More specifically, it will focus on the zamindari system, which represented the dominant socio-political framework through which power was exercised over the bulk of rural society within the Northern Sircars. The zamindars who constituted an important intermediary social group between state and agrarian society, played a crucial role in the incorporation of the region into wider state systems.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section delineates in very broad terms the main features of the zamindari system at the outset of English Company rule. Section two then goes on to examine Company policy towards the zamindars in the early decades of its administration. Finally, the last section analyse the role of Company policy in redefining the nature of the zamindari system. Here I look at the impact of the Permanent Settlement which in the nineteenth century, served to distinguish the Sircars from the 'raiyatwari' areas to the south.

At the outset, it may be in order to recapitulate briefly the political history of the region from the sixteenth century onwards in order to locate it within

broader political transformations. The Northern Sircars had initially been a part of the Qutb Shahi sultanate of Golconda.¹ The importance of the international trade of the region and its flourishing commercial agriculture made it a prized possession for the Golconda sultanate. Persian administrators, for instance, played a key role in the international trade of the region with West Asia.

In 1687, the region along with other provinces of the Qutb Shahi sultanate passed under the Mughal sceptre, following Aurangzeb's conquest of the Deccan.² Imperial presence in the region had barely been registered when the empire was plunged into crisis by Aurangzeb's death in 1707. During this period, centralising state authority in the region weakened, allowing local power to assert itself.³

In 1724, the Northern Sircars became a part of the newly-founded Hyderabad state.⁴ Central authority re-established itself with renewed vigour as the region once

1. Grant, *op.cit.*, pp.10-11.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

again became integrated into the Subah of Hyderabad. However, the death in 1748 of the first Nizam, Asaf Jah, was the signal for a fresh outbreak of hostilities, as a war of succession broke out among his descendants.

By this time the English and the French had become active players in regional politics and the war of succession saw them ranged on opposite sides. Both the European companies were keen to acquire possession of the Northern Sircars for commercial and strategic reasons. Commercially, whoever acquired the Sircars stood to gain access to large revenues as well as control over the lucrative export trade from the region. Strategically, command of the Sircars would enable both quick communications with other regions as well as a secure foothold to foray into both Bengal to the north and the Carnatic to the south.

The accession of Salabat Jang, the French candidate to the Hyderabad throne in 1752, resulted in their acquiring the Sircars.⁵ This success proved to be short-lived. After the departure of the French general Bussy from the Sircars, the English managed to oust them from their newly acquired possessions through a series of strategic alliances with

5. *Ibid.*, p.13.

local powers.⁶ After the English victory in 1759, the region reverted to the Nizam of Hyderabad for a few years, before an imperial farman formally ratified the English conquest in 1765.

The Zamindari System at the Outset of Company Rule

On assuming direct administration in the Sircars in 1769 the English were confronted with a set of well-entrenched rural elites who dominated agrarian society at the pargana level. These were the zamindars or hereditary local chiefs who formed the bulwark of the political system in the Northern Sircars. At the time of the company's accession to power in the region, there were broadly two types of zamindars, namely, the hill zamindars and the zamindars of the plains.⁷

The hill zamindars in the Northern Sircars were in the nature of autonomous tributary chiefs who mediated relations between the hill communities and the centralising states of the plains. According to William Oram, a member of the

6. *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

7. *The Fifth Report*, Vol.I, p.146.

Circuit Committee who toured these parts in the late eighteenth century,

The mountain zaminaries are most of them, even now of the race of ancient sovereigns and were allowed from the difficulty of subjecting them, to retain their former habits, and appropriate the produce to their own use on payment of a small Tribute and on condition of preventing the descent of Robbers, and the Incursion of enemies.⁸

This view was reiterated by William Thackeray in his *Report on Ganjam and Goomsur*.

The Rajahs whose countries lay at the foot of these hills seem rather the descendants of the ancient Lords than of the Revenue and Police officers of the great Native Governments as the Zamindars were to be considered in other countries completely subdued.⁹

He went on to add:

it is certain the Mogul Government, even when strong exercised little or no real power in their countries - they exacted only a small Peshkush and required the Rajahs to refrain themselves from plunder, and to protect the low country from the Conds.¹⁰

The origins of these hill chiefs is not clear. Company officials perceived them as descendants of Hindu warrior chiefs who had sought refuge in the hills during the Muslim invasions.¹¹ It is more likely that many of these hill

8. Extracts from the minutes of the Board of Revenue, dated 18 October 1786, Revenue Consultations, 8 October 1786, Vol.24-B.

9. Thakeray, *op.cit.*, para 4.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *The Fifth Report*, Vol.I, pp.146-147.

zamindars were the descendants of warrior chiefs who had played a key role in organising and leading peasant lineages of the same caste in a process of jungle-clearing and agrarian conquest. This process of colonization had probably been at the expense of indigenous communities practising non-sedentary forms of cultivation. These zamindars were linked together by ties of both caste and kinship.

The nature of the terrain forced most centralising states to temporise with the hill zamindars. Thackeray noted that "the few attempts in this part of the country to establish a Sircar management under an Amildar seem to have been unsuccessful".¹²

Zamindars in the plains were of varied origin. Some traced their origin to the Reddi and Velama warrior-cultivators who had held sway over the region from before the fifteenth century. Like the hill zamindars many of these chiefs were bound together by ties of caste and kinship. Other zamindars belonged to Brahmin scribal lineages who had used their hereditary administrative positions and local influence in acquiring rights to land. Many of the Deshastha Brahmins in the Northern Sircars belonged to this category. The Golconda regime had rested on the collaboration of both

12. Thackeray, *op.cit.*, para 12.

the Reddi and Velama warrior chiefs as well as Brahmin administrative lineages. Together these two groups formed a local aristocracy presiding over rural society through the two centuries leading up to British rule.¹³

Some zamindars in the plains were also migrants from the Carnatic who had come to the Sircars in the service of state officials. They used their access to these officials to gain revenue-farming rights and graduated to the status of zamindars. For example, the Bobbili zamindari was founded in 1652 by one Peddarayudu, a soldier in the service of the Faujdar of Srikakulam, Sher Muhammad Khan. According to a family legend, Peddarayudu rescued the Nawab's son from some rebels in return for which the grateful Nawab rewarded him with the lease of the Rajam pargana in the district along with the title of 'Ranga Rao'. The new zamindar built himself a fort and established a town with a market, to which he gave the name of 'Bebbuli' (the royal tiger) in honour of his patron's designation 'Sher'.¹⁴ Similarly, the Nuzvidu zamindari was founded by a 'soldier of fortune', Meka Basavanna who had come from the Carnatic and established himself on the left bank of the Krishna in the

13. Burton Stein, *Vijayanagara*, Cambridge, nd., p.81.

14. Carmichael, *op.cit.*, pp.291-292.

early part of the sixteenth century. Basavanna established a small fort in the Gollaprole pargana and rented a few villages in the area. Under his successors the zamindari grew in size and eventually became one of the most prominent in the Northern Sircars.¹⁵

From the time of the Qutb Shahi sultanate zaminars in the plains were vested with a dual role. On the one hand they were the hereditary rulers or 'rajas' of a territory in which they generally enjoyed broad autonomy. On the other hand, they were also servants of the state, pledged to keep order and promote the welfare of their subjects, and removable if they failed to pay the revenues demanded by the state.

In return for making regular monetary payments to state revenue officials and maintaining law and order, these local chiefs enjoyed a number of perquisites. They received a fixed percentage, usually ranging from five to ten per cent, of the total revenues obtained from their domains every year.¹⁶ They exercised claims to a whole series of taxes and cesses on cultivators, craftsmen and merchants within their

15. Mackenzie, *op.cit.*, pp.295-296.

16. Grant, *op.cit.*, p.23.

territories.¹⁷ A variety of market taxes, poll taxes, taxes on items of merchandise passing through their areas, swelled their coffers. Payments were received both in money and kind. These zamindars also extracted customary unpaid labour from the lower castes within their areas whom they employed in cultivating their personal lands which were exempt from any form of taxation.¹⁸

Lifetime contracts executed in writing, known as *sanads* defined the relationship between the zamindars in the plains and the state.¹⁹ Each recipient of a *sanad*, executed a written bond (*muchalka*) as a guarantee of good performance and paid a fee (*peshkash*) to secure their appointment.²⁰ On the death of a zamindar his son and heir normally obtained a new *sanad* from the ruler. The state, however, reserved the right to depose a zamindar at any time.²¹ It must be clarified here that while zamindars 'owned' a right to a share of the revenue, they did not own the land in any meaningful sense. Their control over the land was conceived of more in socio-cultural and less in physical terms. Rather

17. *Ibid.*, p.23, p.94.

18. *CCR: Vizag. and Chicacole*, p.4.

19. Grant, *op.cit.*, p.23.

20. *Ibid.*, p.94

21. *Ibid.*

than owning a physical portion of the land they held rights over most of the inhabitants of the territory assigned to their management.

In their role as state agents, zamindars facilitated the extraction of agricultural revenues from the villages over which they presided. They usually farmed out revenue-collecting rights to intermediaries or appointed subordinates who collected revenues on their behalf. The mode of collection varied from place to place. Three modes were prevalent in the Sircars when the Company began administering the region. These were the *shist*, the *baugam*, and the *bilmukta*.²² The practice known as 'shist' was prevalent in the wet lands of Ellore, Rajahmundry and Vishakapatnam.²³ It was a conditional agreement between the cultivator and the zamindar, whereby the former agreed to pay the latter a stipulated sum of revenue in return for protection. A 'cowle' or assurance of protection known as 'asara' was granted to the cultivator by the zamindar. The 'shist' was supposed to be a fixed assessment but it was a normal practice for the zamindar to add an extra assessment to the original sum known as 'mulwatti' at about harvest

22. P.K. Gnanasundara Mudaliar, *Note on the Permanent Settlement*, Madras, 1940, p.52.

23. *CCR:Masulipatam*, p.8.

time. The amount of the extra assessment was usually equivalent to the difference between the amount stated in the original agreement and the full value of the share of the produce received from land of a similar description. The extra assessments were regulated by the price of grain, or by both the price and the estimated quantity.²⁴

In many areas, the practice known as 'baugum' or a division of the crop prevailed. In this mode, both the caste of the cultivator and fertility of the soil played an important role in determining the cultivator's actual share. Half of the produce was confined to either the high caste inhabitants or to outside cultivators (Pykari) who might undertake to cultivate lands which were lying uncultivated. The lower castes usually received about one third or less of the produce.²⁵

Finally, in dry lands the mode known as 'bilmukta' generally prevailed. This was a fixed rent in money settled at the time of cultivation, which admitted of no subsequent variation. It was generally practised in lands which were not very fertile or had gone out of cultivation for a long time.²⁶

24. Carmichael, *op.cit.*, p.205.

25. Mudaliyar, *op.cit.*, p.52.

26. *Ibid.*

Revenues were collected in four monthly 'kists' or installments. The first of these was taken in June, the second in September, the third in December and the fourth in February.²⁷ The zamindars or their subordinates collected the revenues from the head inhabitant of each village and paid it to the Amildar, to whose court they travelled every year to pay outstanding balances and settle the new 'jama' or annual revenue payable for the coming year.²⁸

Zamindari revenue-extraction was characterised by enormous variability. Zamindars and their intermediaries could increase or lower the demand on any raiyat, without fear of interference from the state. This discretionary ability to alter demand was possibly induced by the variability of an agrarian landscape subject to floods, uncertain rainfall, fluctuation in crop prices and the frequent expansions and contractions of areas under cultivation. It also had to do with the nature of patrimonial authority represented by the zamindari system. The distinctive feature of a patrimonial system of

27. *CCR: Masulipatam*, p.8.

28. Extracts from the Minutes of the Board of Revenue of 19th October, 1786, Revenue Consultations, 8 December 1786, Vol.24B.

authority, as John McLane has pointed out in a recent study on zamindars in eighteenth century Bengal, was the ability 'to discriminate between one's most loyal or sanctified dependents and the rest of the subject payers.'²⁹ It is quite likely that in such a system the frequency with which additional taxes were added or subtracted, was a reflection of the ways in which patrimonial authority was kept alive, and the 'discretionary' and personal nature of power reinforced.

Zamindari authority was also characterised by a high degree of coercion. Zamindars and their intermediaries often resorted to beatings and other physical punishments to punish defaulting revenue-payers and 'recalcitrant' villagers.³⁰ The use of physical coercion by zamindars was again a vital ingredient of patrimonial authority, a means by which the personal authority of the zamindar was reaffirmed. In seeking to understand the use of coercion in revenue collection, one needs to take cognizance of the general acceptance of physical compulsion as an essential aspect of the exercise of political authority in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Physical coercion was

29. John B. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth Century Bengal*, Cambridge 1993, p.47.

30. Grant, *op.cit.*, pp.94-95.

also in the nature of a test of will for both zamindars and their subjects. As John McLane notes, "on one side willingness to suffer confinement and corporal punishment was often as much a method of avoiding increased demands as a sign of over assessment, on the other, force was applied to discover whether an assessee was sincere in claiming the demands were unpractically high."³¹

Most zamindars maintained a substantial military force. A small raja might have under his immediate command a mixed body of several armed kinsmen, slaves and paid retainers. According to the *Circuit Committee Report* on the Machilipatanam Sircar:

The armed people maintained by the zamindars are of three descriptions, the first who are the constant attendants are generally paid in ready money and are occasionally employed on revenue business. The second are maintained from grants of land from which they pay to Government. They are employed on revenue service and attend the zamindars when required. The third are called Munnovurtydars and are generally the relations and dependents of the zamindars and have under them a number of followers who may be occasionally called forth.³²

The seat of zamindari power was the zamindar's court which was located in the chief 'qasba' of the pargana. The zamindari residence was usually a mud fort inhabited

31. McLane, *op.cit.*, p.71.

33. *CCR: Masulipatam*, p.9.

chiefly by the zamindar and his immediate clansmen. The topographical survey of the Vishakapatnam District noted, for instance, of the Vizianagaram zamindar that, "the Raja has a small and neat Fort here within which he chiefly resides, his own house and some other of his immediate attendants form the only buildings in the interior of the Fort."³³ The landscape of the Northern Sircars was dotted with a number of such forts. The chief zamindari town itself was a central market place of the pargana. Like Bobbili, which was "a large and populous town, and the residence of the zamindar who lives within a square enclosure."³⁴

As hereditary local chiefs the zamindars of both the hills and the plains played out the role of "little kings" (to use Nicholas Dirks' picturesque phrase), by keeping alive the rituals, patronage and other cultural transactions requisite of normative kingship. Within their domains, zamindars preserved ritual cycles, the investiture of dependents with superior social status and the unequal distribution of rental and tax obligations. Zamindars also liberally conferred allodial rights on Brahmins, retainers, temples, village officers, priests and artisans.

33. Snell, *Memoir: Vizag.*, p.13.

34. *Ibid.*, p.14.

Rights to land were granted 'along with other rights', since landholding formed 'one element' in a whole corpus of privileges in which were included rights 'to exercise local authority, to use certain titles, to carry certain emblems and to receive temple honours'.

Company officials tended to see these alienations as means of tax evasion. William Oram complained that,

they have alienated Lands without authority for the purpose of supporting a mockasaw militia for the maintenance of Idle Dependants who would be of use to the country by their exertions if obliged to Labour for their own subsistence and they sometimes feigned or resumed grants and retain a profit unaccounted for to Government.³⁵

Similarly, John Sullivan suggested that revenue free grants of land were injurious to the government, "as the proportion due to it from the income of the land is by such means lessened, for that proportion is always regulated by the nett receipts of the Zemindar."³⁶

In recent times, however, writers have suggested that gifts to land, titles, emblems and other privileges by zamindars to their subjects were a key element in the cultural constitution of political relations. These gifts have been seen as part of a system of 'patrimonial authority'

35. Extracts from the Minutes of the Board of Revenue, dated 19 October, 1786, Revenue Consultations, 8 December 1786, Vol.24B.

36. Sullivan, *op.cit.*, p.273.

which "linked individuals, and also corporations symbolically, morally and politically with the sovereignty of the king and created both a moral unity and political hierarchy."³⁷ The acceptance of gifts, it is argued, reflected a complex set of hierarchical relationships, and entailed loyalty and service on the part of those who received them.

Having discussed some of the distinctive features of the zamindari system at the outset of English Company rule, I will now turn to examine Company policy towards the zamindars in the first three decades of their administration.

Company Policy vis-a-vis Zamindars: The Changing Contours

The first half century of English Company rule in the Sircars was informed by an overarching concern with the nature of indigenous landed rights. This concern was a reflection, possibly, of both the Company's perception of landed property as the fundamental basis for ordering Indian agrarian society, and the need to establish an ideologically coherent and functionally systematic basis for revenue collection.³⁸

37. Nicholas B. Dirks, 'From Little King to Landlord Colonial Discourse and Colonial Rule', in Dirks (ed.) *Colonialism and Culture*, Michigan, 1992, p.179.

38. *Ibid.*, p.177.

Company officials in their examination of land tenures seemed to operate with the notion that there existed juridically defined rights of individual ownership. The owner of the soil, in their view, either had to be the ruler or the cultivator. The indigenous agrarian order, characterised by a corporate reciprocity in which many individuals and groups had complementary rights to the same piece of ground, and an absence of written codes defining rights of the layered interests to specific plots of land, baffled Company administrators.

In the initial years, all zamindars in the Northern Sircars were perceived as the hereditary 'owners' of the land who paid a fixed tribute to the state. The dominant consensus of the period was expressed by the Provincial Council at Machilipatanam, in 1771.

Zemindarries were no other than feudal districts, for which the rajas, who were the proprietors of them paid a fixed tribute to government in proportion to their value and if called upon ought to attend in time of war with a certain number of troops.³⁹

Accordingly, arrangements were entered into with the zamindars for the payment of an annual tribute. This policy was avowedly based on pragmatic considerations. Since the

39. *The Fifth Report*, Vol.1, pp.149-150.

position of the Company was less than secure, and its authority still to be acknowledged over all parts of the Sircars, it was thought fit to make such agreements with the zamindars,

as might secure a reasonable tribute and yet leave them in an honourable situation by confirming them in the rights and privileges as they had enjoyed and allowed to them a competent maintenance out of the produce of these countries.⁴⁰

In the following years the Company set about consolidating its authority over the zamindars. In attempting to achieve its objective the Company pursued two different sets of strategies vis-a-vis the zamindars. With the hill zamindars, the Company adopted a cautious policy, tempering intervention with the desire to maintain the status quo. With the zamindars of the plains on the other hand, the Company was quick to compel obedience through the use of overt force or through veiled threats. The Company's authority was acknowledged by almost all zamindars in the plains in the space of a few years.

It was the hill zamindars, however, who posed a threat to Company authority. A number of these zamindars were constantly engaged in internecine warfare both against other zamindars or against rebellious former dependents. For instance, between 1785 and 1790 there were a series of

41. Revenue Consultations, 31 August, 1774, Vol.1.

'disturbances' in the Polavaram and Kothapalli zamindaris usually over disputed successions.⁴¹

Company authority was never really acknowledged in the hill tracts. The ecological context impinged crucially on Company policy towards the hill zamindars. The Company was severely constrained in its actions by the difficulties posed by the hills. C.N. White attributed the Company's reluctance to take on the hill zamindars to "the want of a sufficient force in the Circars, and the danger to be apprehended to the health of the troops in pursuing refractory dependents among the hills..."⁴²

We have seen in the first chapter that Company officials perceived the hills as a 'dangerous' zone. For much the same reason it was wary of being drawn into military engagements with the hill zamindars. Even when it did intervene, the Company tended to suffer both in terms of men and money. An official account of the hill zamindars written in 1774 noted that,

the rebellious disposition of these people, favoured and encouraged by the natural strength of the country hath kept our troops almost constantly employed and rendered it impossible to make any regular settlement of the Tribute or to collect the arrears.⁴³

41. Morris, *op.cit.*, p.249.

42. *The Fifth Report*, Vol.III, p.127.

43. Revenue Consultations, 31 August 1774, Vol.1.

Writing almost half a century later, in 1819, William Thackeray was more explicit.

The Company have been sovereigns of the Sirkars for about fifty years and it may be said but little has been comparatively done towards establishing the authority of the Sirkar, some Rajah or other has almost always been in rebellion or there has been some disturbance somewhere arising from disputes among the Rajahs themselves, or intrigues among their own people against them, these disturbances altogether have cost more trouble, lives and expense, than any of those foreign wars, by which the Company have gained so much.⁴⁴

If coping with 'refractory' hill chiefs taxed the Company in one way, the appropriate revenue arrangements to be entered into with the zamindars in general posed other kinds of problems which vexed Company officials no end. Till 1778, the Company stuck to annual agreements for tribute with the zamindars.⁴⁵ In that year, perturbed by the increasing balances due from the zamindars, Sir Thomas Rumbold, the Governor of the Presidency summoned most of them to Madras and forced them to agree to a five-year settlement, which raised the revenue demand by 12.5 per cent subject to a Circuit Committee assessing the ability of the zamindars to pay the increased amount.⁴⁶

44. Thackeray, *op.cit.*, para.10.

45. *The Fifth Report*, p.171.

46. *Ibid.*

The experiment of a five-year settlement proved to be a failure from the Company's point of view. By the time the settlements lapsed in 1783, considerable balances were still due from the zamindars.⁴⁷ The increase in balances due from the zamindars were possibly a result of both the high assessment as well as the recurrence of bad seasons which assailed the agrarian economy of the plains in the last decades of the eighteenth century. With many areas being continuously depopulated, it was very difficult for most zamindars to extract revenues at the levels demanded by the Company. With the hill chiefs on the other hand, it was probably the Company's tenuous authority which accounted for the large balances.

From 1783 to 1786 the Company reverted to the practice of making annual settlements with the zamindars.⁴⁸ In September 1786, the newly formed Board of Revenue recommended the introduction of a three-year settlement with the zamindars. In consequence, agreements were drawn up with them, whereby they had to pay revenues at the level fixed in 1778, with the rider that they clear all outstanding balances.⁴⁹ The triennial settlement was reviewed in 1789

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*, p.172.

for another three years, with the zamindars now being assessed at two-thirds of the gross collectors of their respective areas as per the recommendation of the Circuit Committee reports.⁵⁰

The 1794, the Provincial Councils were abolished and instead, collectors were appointed to take charge of revenue affairs. These collectors were expected to furnish a variety of information regarding the state of the zamindaris.⁵¹ Once again the Company reverted to the expedient of making temporary settlements with the zamindars.

The fiscally extractive policy of the Company in these years, forced many zamindars to borrow heavily from the 'soucars' or moneylenders. In fact in 1778, on the eve of the five-year settlement, Sir Thomas Rumbold had already noted that:

It is to be wished, and I think should in the strongest Manner be recommended... to endeavour to secure the Company's Revenue without the assistance or Interference of the soucars, who from the high Interest and other Advantages they receive acquire a very considerable Profit on the Revenues of the country, oppressive to the Zamindar and Landholder, who by this mode is constantly burdened with Debts which from a Failure of crop or bad season he can hardly ever relieve himself from and is left at the mercy of the Soucars to satisfy the Government.⁵²

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, pp.180-182.

52. *Second Report from the Committee of Secrecy Appointed to Enquire into the Causes of the War in the Carnatic and of the Condition of the British Possessions in those Parts*, London, 1782, Appendix 49.

In his letter to the Court of Directors in the following year John Sullivan also referred to this and averred that it was necessary for the Company's administration

to adopt some expedient by which the zamindars might be free in time from the heavy load of Debt in which they are now involved, the mere interest of which now keeps them in poverty and by restraining their industry must ever retard the progress of improvement.⁵³

A slow process of transformation was underway in the nature of the zamindari system in these years. The new bureaucratic regime inaugurated by the Company began to impinge on relations between zamindars and their subjects. As the Company's demand for revenue grew, the zamindars in turn were forced to shed some of the customary aspects of their authority and become more extractive towards their subjects. From being a patrimonial system in which authority was exercised through customary, informal channels the zamindari system was gradually tending to become more formal, characterised by greater rigidity in the revenue valuation and collection mechanisms. Infact, it is very likely that the 'oppression' which Company officials perceived as an inherent feature of the zamindari system was an outgrowth of th Company's own fiscal policies.

The move to a Permanent Settlement at the turn of the century set the seal on this process of transformation of

53. Sullivan, *op.cit.*, p.212.

the traditional order by attempting to introduce fixity in a system previously characterised by flexibility. The Permanent Settlement sought to redefine the nature of customary local authority within the region. I shall now turn to the role of Company policy in engineering this redefinition.

The Permanent Settlement: From Custom to Contract

The Permanent Settlement was not introduced suddenly in the Northern Sircars. The two decades leading up to its introduction were marked by constant debates between Company officials on the best ways to ensure stability in revenue. A number of Company officials felt that a permanent assessment was the best means of stabilising revenue collections. The successive experiments the Company had resorted to, in order to maximise revenue-collections, convinced these officials that only a permanent revenue demand could rectify the problems created by annual and temporary settlements with zamindars. Many Company officials equated impermanence and variability with disorder and looked for the solution in its exact opposite, namely, a permanent settlement. John Sullivan, stationed at Machilipatanam was perhaps the first to articulate this. In a letter to the Court of Directors in 1779 he wrote to say:

the measure from which the most extensive influence might be expected in thee provinces, and that which would most favourably proclaim the

intention of government, would be to convert the PRECARIOUS AND DISCOURAGING TENURE, under which the zamindars now hold their lands, into one ABSOLUTE AND DEFINED ASSERTING THE INCREASE which should be made with renewing the lease at stated periods.⁵⁴

The point was reiterated by the Committee of Circuit who toured the Machilipatanam district in 1787. The Committee pointed out the necessity of settling

a permanent jumma upon equitable principles with the several tributaries dependent on the Company. We are persuaded, if this measure was adopted and the zemindars had the positive assurance of their Saneds or cowles that the increasing their incomes by paying attention to improvements would not subject them to further increase of tribute, it would in the end be attended with much benefit to the country and the inhabitants.⁵⁵

On the other hand, a number of Company officials and other writers were in favour of altogether dispensing with the zamindars. By the 1780s, a school of thought had developed which not only saw zamindars as 'indolent' and 'avaricious', but also as 'unlawful proprietors' of the soil who had usurped privileges during periods of weakened state authority. In this view, if any one owned a legal proprietary right in the soil, it was the state and not the zamindars. James Grant summed up this position when he declared in his political survey (1784) that:

54. *Ibid.*, p.209.

55. *CCR: Masulipatam*, p.13.

there is not throughout the Northern Sircers... a single individual or a set of men among the native Hindoos, calling themselves or acknowledged rajas and zemindars, who have the smallest pretensions in form, right or fact to an inch of territorial property beyond the extent of their nancars or saverums or who can be considered in any light than as mere renters.⁵⁶

Similarly, William Oram in a Note on the abuses in the revenue administration of the Northern Sircars in 1786, argued that,

Zemindars who pretend to an inherent right in the soil to a feudal authority over the lives of and property of people; and to Hereditary succession by families, who keep on foot an independent military and are no further responsible to the Circar than for a certain annual payment in manner of a Tribute and much short of its due, are an encumbrance to Government, and not only bosom Traitors, ripe and ready for revolt, and the cause of the greater loss in withholding Revenues for their pleasure or Intrigues which would otherwise be paid into the Treasury.⁵⁷

In a Minute to the Circuit Committee which reported on the Vishakapatnam and Srikakulam districts, Oram called for the outright abolition of the zamindari system observing that

if the Revenue was brought back to the first principles and the system of zamindars altogether abolished, that the Northern Sircars would to yield a crore of rupees to the Company.⁵⁸

56. Grant, *op.cit.*, p.24.

57. Extracts from the Minutes of the Board of Revenue of 19th October, 1786, Revenue Consultations, 8 December 1786, Vol.24 B.

58. CCR: Vizag. and Chicacole, p.9.

However, proponents of continuity like John Sullivan doubted,

whether the expulsion of the zemindars might not be productive of consequences, more prejudicial to the public interest than those abuse, which it is proposed to correct, are found to occasion; and whether, instead of bringing an increase to the treasury, it might be the means of hazarding, for some years, the loss of that which is now collected.⁵⁹

According to Sullivan, the zamindars were hereditary local rulers who were bound to their subjects by close ties. Any effort to dislodge them would arouse the anger of their subjects and create conditions of strife. It would be better he argued, for the Company to follow a cautious approach in the matter since the zamindars wielded considerable local influence. Moreover, it was likely that if they were replaced,

their followers... would infest the country and disturb the industrious husbandmen, destroying their cattle and their crops, and that all the vigilance of government, or the activity of Sepoys, would be insufficient to protect a country of four hundred miles in length, and of difficult access in many parts, from their depredations.⁶⁰

Ultimately, it was the views of Sullivan and his ilk which prevailed. The Court of Directors had also been pushing in the same direction since 1793 and ultimately a Permanent Settlement on the Bengal model was introduced in the

59. Sullivan, *op.cit.*, pp.202-203.

60. *Ibid.*

Northern Sircars in 1802. Regulation XXV of the Permanent Settlement of 1802 resolved:

to grant to Zamindars and other heirs and successors, a permanent property in their land in all time to come, and fix forever a moderate assessment of public revenue on such lands, the amount of which shall never be liable to be increased.⁶¹

However this proprietary right was not to be construed as absolute. First, it was dependent on the proper and punctual payment of the revenue. Section VI of the Regulation enjoined landholders to regularly pay the amount of the permanent assessment fixed on their lands, without any remission, their property being answerable in case of late payment of revenues.⁶² Second, the proprietary rights granted to zamindars were not to infringe upon the customary rights of cultivators, though what these rights were and how they were to be safeguarded were never spelt out clearly. Zamindars in their new role as proprietors were to grant 'pattas' to their cultivators, but the exact terms of these were left undefined.⁶³ Third, the proprietary rights of zamindars were circumscribed by the government's control over many sources of revenue, including all *inam* lands.

61. Mudaliyar, *op.cit.*, p.38.

62. *Ibid.*, p.39.

63. *Ibid.*, pp.39, 80.

However, zamindars had the right to alienate lands. According to the seventh article of the sanad granted to them, they could alienate lands to whomsoever they wished but such alienations would not alter the overall revenue assessment.⁶⁴

The revenue assessment on each zamindari was fixed exclusive of the revenue derived from all extra sources, such as the abkari, salt and sayer, etc. The general standard by which the land revenue to be paid by the zamindars was to be two-thirds of the average gross collections of preceding years. The statements of the Committee of Circuit were taken as the general standard of reference in making the assessments.

The Permanent Settlement sought to disband the military establishment of the zamindars in order to establish effective control over the region. Even supporters of the zamindari system like John Sullivan had earlier averred that

great inconveniences may be expected, while they are suffered to retain the idea of their having a right to assemble their people on any occasion, or even while they are suffered to consider any part of their people so dependent upon them, as that they must obey their summons whenever they shall think proper to call them together.⁶⁵

64. *Ibid.*, p.195.

65. Sullivan, *op.cit.*, pp.272-273.

The Court of Directors who had been keen to see this measure introduced in the region emphasised that the dismantling of the armed militias was a necessary corollary in attempting to introduce a 'regular' system of revenue collection. It noted that,

It is of the first importance... that all subordinate military establishment should be annihilated within the limits then subject to the dominion of the Company, and that the countries to which this observation applied must be brought to such a state of subjection as to acknowledge and submit to the principle that as they must be indebted to the beneficence and wisdom of the British Government for every advantage they were to receive so, in like manner, they must feel indebted solely to its protection for the continuance and enjoyment of them."⁶⁶

The Permanent Settlement attempted to rechannel political relations in the Northern Sircars into a new domain of 'proprietary law'. The variety and multiplicity characterising zamindari tenures was sought to be replaced by a uniform and homogenous system in which all zamindars, irrespective of their origins were deemed 'proprietors' of their lands. Zamindars, both in the hills and the plains, now became the legal owners of the lands they controlled, subject to the regular payment of revenue. The Permanent Settlement, thus, attempted to substitute the customary character of zamindari rights to land with a new language of legal proprietary rights. Similarly, relations between

66. Morris, *op.cit.*, p.278.

zamindars and cultivators which had been mediated by tradition and ritual obligations were now couched in the terminology of 'tenancy rights'.

A new judicial system was also proposed which would henceforth consider all cases relating to revenue affairs. A judge who was also to be a magistrate was to be appointed in each district. He was subordinated to a Provincial Court of Appeal and Circuit, from whom an appeal would lie to a Sadr Court at the Presidency.⁶⁷

The drafters of the Permanent Settlement were convinced of the beneficial outcome of their handiwork. It was believed that zamindars would be redirected from warfare and intrigues to increasing agrarian productivity. The zamindars, it was felt, would coalesce into a profit-oriented rural gentry and become in time a potential source of stability and increased revenues for the Company.

However, the expectations of the Company were belied. In the immediate aftermath of the Permanent Settlement, a number of estates were put up for arrears.⁶⁸ In many cases, the high revenue demand proved to be an important reason for

67. Carmichael, *op.cit.*, p.226.

68. Morris, *op.cit.*, pp.281-282.

the rapid turnover of estates. In a minute dated 5th January, 1818, the Board of Revenue admitted that, "the universal cause of these failures has been ascertained to have been over-assessment at the period of fixing the amount permanent jumma."⁶⁹ In many cases, the Company was forced to intervene and save estates from extinction. An official in the Rajahmundry District noted:

The measure of resorting to a sale of defaulters' lands as regards this District, failed in a great degree to secure the objects intended. A reference to the list will show that estates once exposed to public auction seldom remain any length of time in the possession of the first purchaser. After repeated changes many of them lapse to Government with large outstanding balances for want of bidders....⁷⁰

The following table shows the increasing number of villages in the zamindari and other newly created proprietary estates in the Rajahmundry district taken over by Government in the years after the Permanent Settlement.

69. Mudaliyar, *op.cit.*, p.76.

70. Morris, *op.cit.*, p.282.

Table 4: Number of villages taken over by Government after the Permanent Settlement in the Rajahamundry District

Year	No. of villages under Government
1813	10
1817	59
1820	133
1832	150
1840	381
1844	580
1851	876

* Source: Henry Morris, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Godavery District*, London, 1878, p.283.

The Permanent Settlement drew flak from a number of colonial officials. Sir Thomas Munro who toured the Northern Sircars in 1822 was extremely critical of the effects of the Permanent Settlement. He lamented that

It is a dangerous system of Government in a country of which our knowledge is very imperfect to be constantly urged by the desire of setting everything permanently, to do everything in a hurry, and in consequence wrong, and in our zeal permanency to put the remedy out of our reach.⁷¹

A.D. Campbell, secretary to the Board of Revenue provided an even more trenchant critique of the Permanent Settlement which

confounding the Land Revenue with the land itself... gives to the hereditary contract for the Land Revenue the name of an 'estate', consequently terms enquiry as to its just amount an investigation into the 'actual' produce of this 'estate', and by this strange verbiage transforms the hereditary holder of that revenue contract into the 'actual proprietor of' all the 'land' throughout the lands of his zemindary.⁷²

The Permanent Settlement produced many anomalies. On the one hand, zamindars far from playing the role of a capitalist gentry spent their time and energies in local intrigue and running up debts, litigating in courts over succession and other issues relating to property. Many of them also tried to keep up their traditional practises, especially, in alienating lands and bestowing other gifts which eroded their local tax base. On the other hand the zamindars were also taking on the features of a rentier class in their interaction with subjects. The extractiveness of zamindars seems to have become even more marked as the revenue demand grew rigid at the top of the revenue-collection pyramid. Zamindari survival necessitated a curtailment of the special privileges of favoured dependents and village headmen

71. Mudaliyar, *op.cit.*, p.82.

72. *Ibid.*, p.78.

who collected revenues for the zamindars. The informality which had characterised relations between zamindars and their cultivators had already been affected by the Company's fiscal policies in the years leading up to the Permanent Settlement. Under the new rules, zamindars were under constant pressure to pay revenues promptly. In these circumstances they could ill-afford to indulge defaulting revenue payers among their subjects. After the settlement, therefore, zamindari revenue-collection tended to become even more inflexible, as they tried to squeeze as much as they could out of the cultivators in an effort to buttress their own resources.

Mechanisms of revenue collection also changed significantly. The introduction of an expanded judicial system thrust the government into the role of arbitrating disputes over rents and coercing revenue defaulters. From this period an attempt was made to curtail private coercion and infliction of physical punishment and to introduce state judicial processes accompanied by detention and distraint of property.⁷³ The courts also became a new battle ground for zamindari disputes over property. Traditionally, warfare had provided the means for the resolution of these disputes. In the demilitarized nineteenth century law came to constitute the terrain on which these battles were fought.

73. *Ibid.*, pp.37-38.

The Permanent Settlement was, possibly, a bigger failure in the hill tracts where Company authority had never even been properly established. The zamindars in the hill tracts were in a constant state of rebellion against Company authority in the years following the Permanent Settlement. It was noted that in 1834, when a Special Commissioner was appointed to control the region, "there was hardly an estate which was not two or three years in arrears with its peshcush."⁷⁴

William Thackeray reporting on the disaffected tracts of Ganjam and Goomsur noted that,

The judicial system and the permanent settlement were suddenly introduced among these hill chiefs... but it was forgot that they had never been subdued, and that a complicated system put an ignorant nobility, still more in the hands of cunning dependents of Europeans, who could take advantage of it.⁷⁵

Similarly George Russell, who was appointed as Special Commissioner in order to investigate and quell the rebellions in the hill tracts of the Vishakapatnam district in the 1830s, criticised Company policy for introducing the Permanent Settlement in "these mountanious tracts, where, up to the present period, after a lapse of more than thirty years, we, in truth, possess no police and no power."⁷⁶

74. Carmichael, *op.cit.*, p.229.

75. Thackeray, *op.cit.*, para. 20.

76. Carmichael, *op.cit.*, p.230.

What was worse, according to William Thackeray was that,

Our Government... converted offices into lots of land, they treated tributary Rajahs and great Revenue and police officers as mere landholders, this was perhaps one of the greatest innovations ever introduced into any country.⁷⁷

Thackeray proceeded to severely indict the framers of the Permanent Settlement for depriving the hill Rajahs of their traditional means of authority, especially, in divesting them of their police powers. In his report he made a strong plea for restoring the police powers of the zamindars in order to reinstate their authority in the hill tracts.⁷⁸

George Russel also suggested that the best way of restoring peace in the hill tracts lay in conciliating the zamindars. He proposed that they be exempted from the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts and placed exclusively under the Collector of the district in whom would be vested the entire administration of civil and criminal justice. The proposal was quickly approved by the Government in 1839. Once again ecology had impinged on Company policy.

The effects of the Permanent Settlement, thus, proved to be paradoxical in many ways. A measure which was intended to secure permanence and ensure continuity in the

77. Thackeray, *op.cit.*, para.40.

78. *Ibid.*, para. 50.

traditional order, produced exactly the opposite consequences. Within a few years, old zamindari estates had become divided and redivided in to a number of smaller lots. Zamindars were constantly embroiled in filing law suits which scarcely left them time to manage their estates. In effect then, by dismantling the traditional system of authority, even as it made claims for stability and continuity, the framers of the Permanent Settlement had succeeded in achieving what opponents of the zamindari system like William Oram and James Grant had demanded. By being divested of their powers and construed as mere proprietors of the soil, zamindars were transformed from 'lords of the land' to 'landlords' as custom gave way to contract.

*The Networks of Trade in
the Northern Sircars*

The preceding chapters tried to suggest some of the ways in which a region may come to be constituted. In the context of the Northern Sircars I focussed on the role of ecology and politics in defining the region. A region may also be viewed along the integrative networks which bind it together. These networks can be of different kinds, such as social networks based on alliances of caste and kinship, trading networks as well as networks of various kinds of ritual specialists, bards and religious travellers. In this chapter, I shall focus on the trading network in the Northern Sircars in the early modern period, in order to examine its role in shaping the identity of this region. The choice of trade is predicated on the fact that this area was a commercial zone of importance since the late sixteenth century.

The trading network in the Northern Sircars operated at three levels - the local, the regional and the supra regional. These levels interpenetrated each other in complex ways, and changes at one level often produced corresponding changes at others. To give one prominent example, in the seventeenth century the region's famous international textile trade was dependent to a large extent on raw cotton imported from the Deccan through networks of

regional trade. However, changes in the patterns of regional trade, occasioned by political turbulence and increase in prices of raw cotton in the early eighteenth century affected the fortunes of this flourishing export trade.

The Patterns Of Local Trade

At the lowest rung of the trading hierarchy was local trade. This encompassed a relatively narrow circuit of exchange linking town and countryside within the region. Local trade was carried on between villages along 'communications from village to village' which were merely footpaths, the directions of which are often altered at the will of the cultivator'.¹ Large villages were also linked to towns along 'bye-roads intersecting the country in different directions leading to and from the most considerable places'.² Settlements along the banks of rivers were also linked by water transport, consisting usually of small boats.

On these routes moved petty peddlers and hawkers, who travelled from village to village and village to town,

1. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmundry*, p.33.

2. J.Summers, *Topographical Account of the Sircar of Condapilly Dependent on the Collectorate of Masulipatam* (hereafter *Topographical Account: Condapilly*), 1818, p.99.

carrying small loads on their heads. Moving with the rhythms of the agricultural seasons, they appeared in small groups at weekly markets, fairs and festivals. They carried all the little necessities of rural life, getting both goods and money in exchange for their wares. These petty peddlers and hawkers often managed to penetrate the most isolated villages, where no other traffic could reach.

Most villagers and petty urban centres had periodic markets which reflected the most basic organisation of trade at the local level. The *Memoir of the Vizagapatam District* compiled by Captain Snell in 1825, tells us that in this district weekly markets were held at 'Vizianagrums' (Vizianagaram), 'Boobily' (Bobbili), Bimlipatam, 'Pallconda' (Palkonda), Madagole, Vadathe, Sauloor, 'Parvatipooram' (Parvatipuram), Conada, Chodavaram, Andra, 'Rajum' (Rajam), 'Jeyapoor' (Jeypore), 'Narainporam' (Narayanapuram), 'Goonoopur' (Gumpur), 'Nudapoor' (Nandapur).³

According to the *Geographical and Statistical Memoir of the Rajahmundry District*, which was also compiled by Captain Snell, weekly markets were held at Woopadah, Mogultoor, Bendamoorlunka, Nellapilly, 'Drachrum' (Dracharam),

3. Snell, *Memoir: Vizag.*

'Peddapoor' (Peddapuram), 'Pittapoor' (Pittapuram), Polavaram, 'Toonee' (Tuni), 'Kuddalee' (Cudali), 'Panoogoda' (Penugonda), Kothapalli, 'Juggumpett' (Jaggampeta) 'Ramachandrapooram' (Ramachandrapuram), and Gollaprole.⁴

Villagers from neighbouring areas came to these rural markets to both buy and sell goods. At the village of Ramachandrapuram near Rajahmundry there was " a weekly market to which the surrounding people bring all the necessaries of life."⁵ Similarly, at Goorra in the Kondapalli sircar, "a market is held weekly on Wednesday and is numerously attended, all kinds of goods being brought to it from the neighboring capital places."⁶ Likewise, at the village of Kyakalur, " a market is kept on Tuesdays and is resorted to by the surrounding villagers, where their wants are supplied."⁷

The items brought for sale at these rural markets were usually the productions of the surrounding areas, as well as items imported from outside the region. The 1907 Vizagapatam District Gazetteer noted that the weekly markets played an important role, " in collecting produce for export and in

4. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmundry*.

5. *Ibid.*, p.29.

6. Summers, *Topographical Account: Condapilly*, p.56.

7. *Ibid.*, p.55.

distributing imports to the villages."⁸ In the weekly markets in the plains, these items included paddy, dry grains, garden vegetables, oilseeds, jaggery, fruits, fish, coarse cotton cloths, iron, glass bangles and cheap jewellery. Salt was also brought from the coast and sold at these markets. The collector of Vishakapatnam, noted in 1876 that "in the rural villages hawkers now and then sell salt, but the bulk of the supply is obtained from weekly markets."⁹

The process of convening a market was rather simple. A flag was hoisted at a convenient place, and the ground was divided into several plots, each of which was occupied by two or three salesmen.¹⁰ In the village of Caunra, the market was held "weekly on Tuesday under the spreading shade of a cluster of Mango trees, which stand at the eastern end of the village."¹¹ The weekly market of the Karlampudi village in the Rajahmundry district was held at a convenient spot four miles northeast. "This village" noted the topographical surveyor "has fourteen subordinates

8. Francis, *op.cit.*, pp.130-131.

9. *Madras Salt Commission Report*, Madras, 1876, Appendix A, p.XXIV.

10. Sarada Raju, *op.cit.*, p.195.

11. Summers, *Topographical Account: Condapilly*, p.62.

depending upon it, and as the market appertaining to it takes place at Durmavaram, all the inhabitants assemble at that place."¹² Bargains at these markets were usually made without the intervention of intermediaries, producers bringing their wares in person and exchanging them for other products. Apart from the petty peddler, village-based traders and the agents of the town-based big merchant also played crucial roles at these rural markets. These local merchants "collect grain from the ryots and either export it themselves or sell it to other and larger merchants."¹³ Many money lenders were also grain dealers as their loans are often paid in kind.¹⁴

Weekly markets within a given area were spaced out over different days of the week, possibly, to enable travelling peddlers and other petty traders to move from one market to another. In the Kondapalli sircar, for instance, the market at Kyakalur was held on Tuesday, while the markets in the nearby villages of Goorra and Vamavaram were held on Wednesday and Thursday respectively.¹⁵

12. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmundry*, p.30.

13. Hemingway, *op.cit.*, p.112.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Summers, *Topographical Account: Condapilly*, pp.55-56.

Many of the rural markets in the Krishna-Godavari delta zone facilitated the supply of raw materials to the textile industry. At the village market of Ramachandrapuram, for example, raw cotton was "in much request, in consequence of the number of inhabitants being weavers."¹⁶ Similarly, at Gollaprole, "a weekly market assembles... where cotton is the principal commodity."¹⁷ Likewise at Sullapilly too, a market was "held weekly on Tuesday, where thread and cotton form the principal articles of sale."¹⁸ The Banjaras were the principal distributors of raw cotton which they brought down from the Deccan and sold at periodic markets. The topographical survey of the Vishakapatnam district noted in 1825 that "this country is traversed in the dry season by Brinjaries, who bring down cotton, wheat and return with large quantities of salt which yield a great profit".¹⁹

Finished cloth was also sold at these markets. At Woopadah in the Rajahmundry district, there was a weekly market since "great quantities of cloth are manufactured at this place, coarse punjams as well as fine sorts."²⁰ Again at Achempetta in the Guntur sircar, there was a

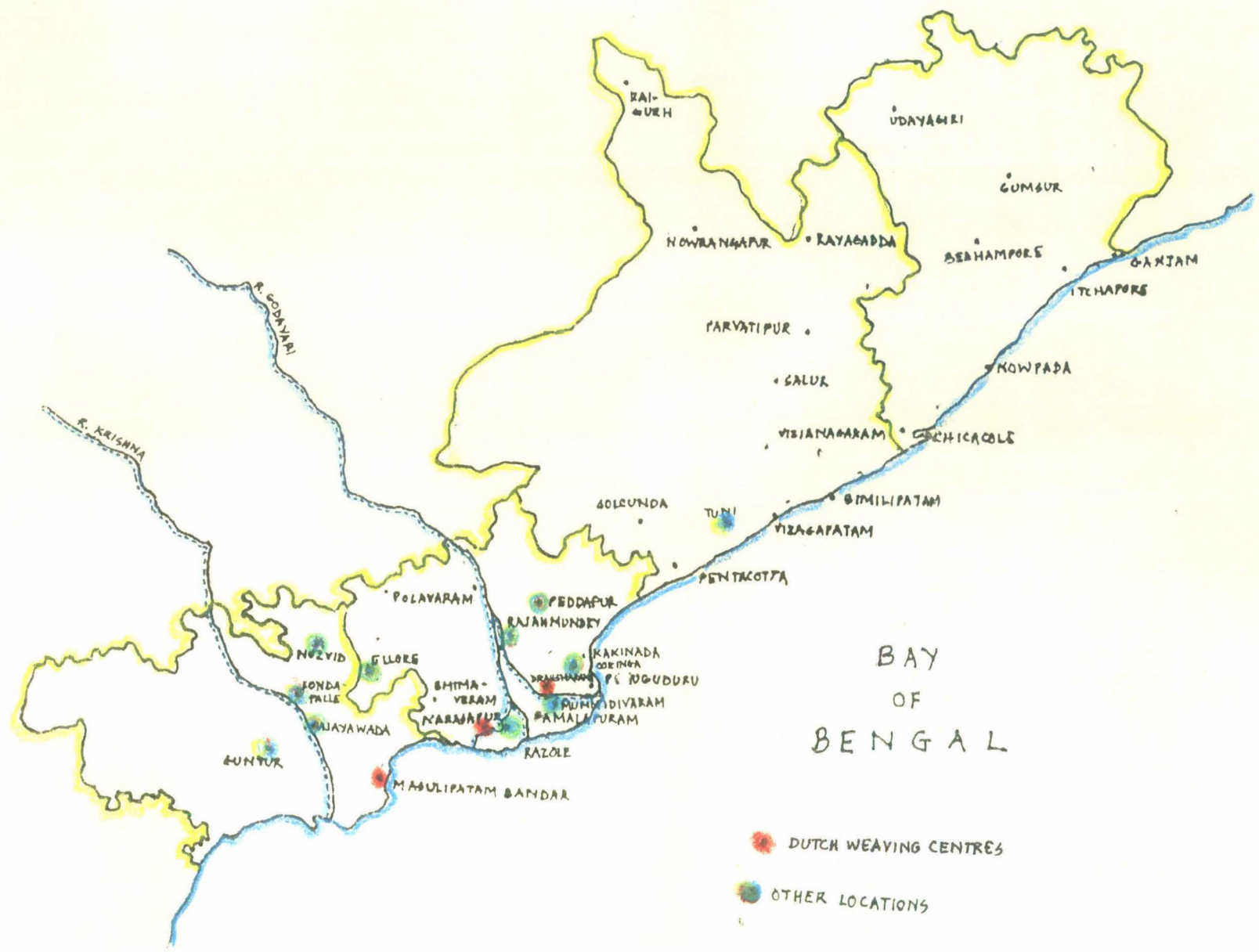
16. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmundry*, p.29.

17. *Ibid.*, p.30.

18. Summer, *Topographical Account: Condapilly*, p.61.

19. Snell, *Memoir: Vizag.*, p.7.

20. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmundry*, p.7.



MAP 4: Northern Sircars: Weaving Centres in the Seventeenth Century

Source: Joseph J. Brenning, "Textile Producers and Production in Late Seventeenth Century, Coromandel", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, xxiii, 1986.

"considerable trade particularly in the cloth of various descriptions, though none of a very fine texture are manufactured and find a ready sale."²¹

The spatial density of rural periodic markets was particularly marked in the Krishna-Godavari deltaic tracts. In the seventeenth century, this area was the nerve center of the rural textile industry. The eastern Godavari delta held the greatest number of petty market centres, many of which had large concentrations of weavers²² (See Map 4). The weavers of this region largely produced the coarse plain cloth known as calicoes which was exported to the European market.²³ The Krishna delta also contained weaving villages, but these were less in number than in the eastern Godavari delta.²⁴ The weavers of this area produced the finer grades of cloth, which were traditionally exported to the Malay Archipelago.²⁵

The greater concentration of settlements in the eastern Godavari delta was possibly due to the nature of the export trade. The Eastern Godavari delta produced calicoes on a

21. F. Mountford, *Memoir of a Survey of the Moortezenuggur or Guntoor Sirkar* (hereafter *Memoir: Guntoor*), 1817, p.19.

22. Brenning, *op.cit.*, pp.340-341.

23. *Ibid.*, p.341.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

large scale, whereas the Krishna delta did not really cater to such a large market.²⁶ Ecology also played a part in the differences in settlement patterns. The Krishna delta was far more drought prone than the Godavari delta, and this seems to have had some bearing on the settlement patterns in the region.²⁷

The trading stations of the European companies in the seventeenth century were located mostly in the delta tracts (See Map 4). The VOC, for instance, placed resident Dutch factors at its head trading station at Machilipatnam and other subordinate trading stations at Draksharama and Pallakollu in this area.²⁸ These rural 'industrial villages' were markets at which European factors met twice a year with Telugu merchants of the Komati caste. From June to August, they placed cash advances with these middlemen who then executed their contracts with head weavers. Between September and November the prime sailing season, the Dutch factors received delivery of the woven pieces which had to be checked for quantity and standardized dimensions.²⁹ English settlements at Peddapalli and Madapalem, which were

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, Cambridge, 1993, p.201.

29. *Ibid.*

also located in the delta region, performed similar functions. The commodities produced in the neighbourhood of these areas were brought to these centres, from where they travelled to distant markets.

Further inland to the north-west of the deltaic tracts the settlements grew more dispersed. The lower valley of the Krishna however, contained a few important centres such as Nagulvancha, where the Dutch had a factory. The region between the Krishna and Godavari river valleys were notable for the production of indigo and was referred to by Dutch merchants as "het land van den indigo".³⁰ Indigo, as a source of dyestuff was closely associated with the textile industry, being a crucial input into the production process. The principal markets where indigo was sold, were Nagulvancha, Palvancha and Gollapudi.³¹ "The best indigo", according to one seventeenth century account, "is made inland at a place called Nagelwaensa. It is sold there by the littel, each littel being 12 Masulipatam Maunds (each of 24 Holland pounds), the price is from 28 to 39 pagodas the littel."³² These marts were frequented from November to February by merchants from Bezwada and other centers, including some situated as far west as Bijapur.³³

30. Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry', p.87.

31. *Ibid.*, p.88

32. Moreland, *op.cit.*, p.61.

33. Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry', p.88.

Local trade played a crucial role in integrating the two distinctive ecological zones within the Northern Sircars. Rural markets were important sites of interaction between the hills and the plains, attracting both the hill communities as well low country traders. The topographical surveys of the Northern Sircars in the early nineteenth century noted several such periodic markets close to the hills. At Kothapilly for instance, "a Suntah or market is held... every week, which is fully attended by the Koyers or mountain tribe, who bring large quantities of tamarind, green ginger, honey, bees-wax, dholl &c., the produce of the hills & a species of medicinal drug called Pipplee, which are bartered for the following commodities vizt. - coarse cloths, brown sugar, tobacco, salt and other ingredients of curry stuff."³⁴ Likewise at Polavaram, there was a weekly market and "being situated near the hills, there is a considerable trade carried on in Bamboo and wood of different descriptions chiefly small trees which are floated down the river to Rajahmundry and different parts of the district."³⁵ Another weekly market was held at Juggumpett, "being the resort of a large proportion of Banians, a brisk traffic is carried on with the hill people who as before

34. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmundry*, p.27.

35. *Ibid.*, p.14.

noticed, attend on the market days with such commodities as the tract they inhabit produce, which from their usefulness and their unremitting demand for them are sure to obtain ready disposal."³⁶

The Madras Salt Commission Report of 1876 noted that, "most of the retail salt procured by the hillmen is obtained at the weekly markets above and below the ghauts. Above the ghats the custom of obtaining salt by barter largely prevails."³⁷ Salt was usually obtained "from wholesale dealers in exchange for tamarinds, honey, horns, myrabolams, &c."³⁸ These markets existed in the eighteenth century too. The *Circuit Committee Reports* of the 1780s mention some weekly markets, such as the one at Corconda for example, in the Machilipatanam Sircar, where pepper produced in the hill tracts of Rampa was brought.³⁹

The latter half of the nineteenth century possibly saw a proliferation of these weekly markets, in tune with the gradual opening up of the hills through road constructions. The 1907 Vizagapatam District Gazetteer observed that,

36. *Ibid.*, p.27.

37. *Madras Salt Commission Report*, Appendix A, p.xxiv.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *CCR: Masulipatam*, p.3.

All along the foot of the hills from Krishnaderipet and Kondassanta in the South to Palkonda in the north is a line of markets at which hill-produce is exchanged for the goods of civilization. On the hills themselves are many markets on the main lines of communication... In these and the numerous other markets (almost every important village has its own and the people date all events from them) barter is still the rule rather than the exception...⁴⁰

These periodic markets linking the hills and plains, were frequented by both the nomadic Banjaras, as well as the Komati traders of the plains. The *Circuit Committee Report* on the Vishakhapatnam and Srikakulam Districts in the late eighteenth century noted, for instance, that Rayagadda was,

the principal resort of lambardies and Merchants from within land where they are sometimes met by others from the low countries. The former bring wheat, wax, jaggery, dammer, gingelly seed, coarse painted cloths, cumbalies, opium and medicines, which were exchanged for salt, a little money and some cloths...⁴¹

According to D.F. Carmichael, "there is a market held in almost every village once a week at which you find the Brinjarries and low-country traders making their bargains."⁴²

40. Francis, *op.cit.*, p.131.

41. CCR: Vizag. and Chicacole, p.19.

42. Carmichael, *op.cit.*, pp.110-111.

The Komatis of the coastal plains established a strong foothold in the trade with the hills from the second half of the nineteenth century. These men penetrated the grain producing centres such as Kotapad and Naurangpur, and supervised the loading and despatch of the carts carrying grain from the hills to the plains.⁴³ They employed Banjaras to drive pack-bullocks between this district and the Central Provinces, furnishing them at convenient centres with loads of salt, etc. to take them to the hinterland, and giving them commissions for the purchase of grain and so on to be made in return.⁴⁴ They also distributed the products of the plains to retailers who had set up shops in the hills.

Fairs held on the occasion of religious festivals also oiled the wheels of local trade. Every village and town had its temple where annual festivals in honour of the local deity were held. These festivals draw a large number of people from near and far. Like the temple at Arvinnagudda, which "being held sacred and consecrated to worship is the occasion of a Fair being celebrated here annually in honor of the deity enshrined within its walls, and thereby drawing a concourse of people from the surrounding villages..."⁴⁵

43. Francis, *op.cit.*, p.131

44. *Ibid.*

45. Summers, *Descriptive Memoirs of the Masulipatam Circar*, (hereafter Memoir: Masulipatam), 1818, p.17.

or the temple at Culdindy which is "attended to and visited by a numerous congregation at the period of the fair, held in March annually...".⁴⁶ At the 'cluster of Pagodas' at Anteravady, "a teertum or fair takes place... in the month of January every year, which lasts 5 days..."⁴⁷ In the Rajahmundry district, "Dracharam, Kota, Purapurwarum, Pittapoor, Koikonda, Beemavaram, Pattisheem, Sumulkota & Paulkole, each possesses pagodas of great antiquity as well as sanctity, and where annually assemble immense crowds of the people to celebrate the feast..."⁴⁸

The fairs which were held on these occasions attracted traders, peddlers and hawkers who were drawn by the prospects of a quick sale of goods. Articles of every description such as cotton and silk goods, shawls, carpets, grain and other provisions, iron, knives and glassware could be procured at these fairs.⁴⁹

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The Networks Of Regional Trade

Regional trade networks, both overland as well as coastal, connected the Northern Sircars to other provinces. The most prominent land route of the region was the one

46. Summers, *Topographical Account: Condapilly*, pp.50-51.

47. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmundry*, pp.33-34.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Sarada Raju, *op.cit.*, p.196.

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linking Machilipatanam and Hyderabad (See Map 5). The early nineteenth century topographical survey of the region noted that this route was both a great military road as well as a commercial line of importance.⁵⁰ The route ran in a north-westerly direction touching the Krishna at Bezwada and Ebrahimpatam, traversing across the Muniair river,

then by Nundigamah, Nabobbpett, Gowrarum and by the foot of Congrahmalla hill, to Sheer Mahomedpett and Gurukapaud, near the Pall-air, where it quits the Circar, passes over a strip of the Nizam's country before it enters and runs thro' the small insulated district of Moonigaulah. Except a trifling distance between Sheer Mahomedpett and Congramally where the track is stony, and near the vicinity of some Nullahs, the road throughout is good and will admit of any description of wheel carriages being conducted over it, which is very frequently the case...⁵¹

In the seventeenth century a flourishing trade had existed on this route.

From Masulipatam went both Raw wrought silk, kincobs, Gold Thread, looking glasses, carpets, Rosewater and the finest sort of Gentoo cloths, and the returns it may be presumed were made chiefly in money, since the articles of wheat, cotton and wax were mostly brought by the Bunjaries who invested a part of the produce thereof in salt purchase in the vicinity of Masulipatam carrying back the overplus in money.⁵²

Dutch merchants were also involved in the trade of this route, sending spices and goods across to Hyderabad.⁵³

50. Summers, *Topographical Account: Condapilly*, p.97.

51. *Ibid.*, pp.97-98.

52. Letter from the Collector in the second Division of the Vizagaptam District to the Board of Revenue, dated 3 December 1799, BOR., Vol. 241, p.10308.

53. A.V. Raman Rao, *Economic Development of Modern Andhra Pradesh 1766-1957*, Bombay, 1958, p.44.

In turn merchants from Hyderabad used to purchase articles like copper tentage, cloves, nutmegs, maize, cardamom and sugar at the Dutch factories of Jagganaikapuram, Palakollu and Bimlipatanam.⁵⁴

Elite consumption at the Hyderabad court, provided a major source of the demand for the trade with Masulipatam. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the volume of trade on this route had contracted from its previous high levels, a Company official wrote that

As the area at which this trade principally flourished was that in which the Hyderabad Government asserted a supremacy over the Sircars and maintained a more splendid court than at present, there was in consequence a much greater demand for these articles formerly than now, and this I imagine may be considered as the principal cause of the decline that has taken place.⁵⁵

The Northern Sircars were also connected to the Deccan via the Godavari valley. It was along this route that the large-scale trading caravans of pack-bullocks organised by the nomadic Banjara community usually travelled⁵⁶ (See Map 5). They brought down raw cotton and wheat from the Deccan, and returned with grain and salt. Their route along the

54. *Ibid.*, p.45.

55. Letter from the Collector in the Second Division of the Vizagapatam District to the Board of Revenue, dated 3 December, 1799, BOR., Vol.241, p.10307.

56. Brenning, *op.cit.*, p.336.

Godavari valley not only connected them with the cotton tracts of Khandesh and Berar in the Deccan, but also provided them with assured supplies of fodder and water.⁵⁷ They probably arrived first in the environs of Rajahmundry, which was a great market for cotton, before moving south-east to the Krishna delta.⁵⁸ The topographical surveyor of the Rajahmundry district noted that, "there is a considerable trade carried on with the Hyderabad country, the Brinjaries importing cotton, wheat, silk cloths, white Kumblies etc. and receiving in return Long Cloths, paddy, salt etc., the latter in great quantities."⁵⁹

The raw cotton that was brought down from the Deccan had, initially, (till about the first quarter of the seventeenth century) been transported from the interior by boats on the Godavari river.⁶⁰ However, from about 1630, the Banjaras took to participating in this trade. These carriers were given tax-free passage by the Qutub Shahi rulers of Golconda as well as by the later Mughals.⁶¹ A Banjara caravan usually contained about 10,000 bullocks but at times

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

59. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmendry*, p.10

60. Brennig, *op.cit.*, p.336.

61. *Ibid.*, pp.336-337.

this figure could go up to as high as 40,000.⁶² They were not merely transporters but also independent petty traders. According to some writers, they owned the cotton which they carried.⁶³

The Banjaras usually travelled at fixed times in the year, on routes which furnished adequate supplies of fodder and water for their bullocks. According to Captain Snell, they used "a small but hardy description of Bullocks to carry their loads."⁶⁴ The bullocks of the Banjaras were "ornamented with peacock feathers and cowry shells, and generally a small mirror on the forehead."⁶⁵ On the march, the men usually had their mouths covered, to avoid the dust raised by the cattle.⁶⁶ During their journey when they halted for the night, they cleared a level piece of land and set up camp with fires lighted all round them.⁶⁷

The Banjaras also travelled between the Central Provinces and Vishakapatnam district (See Map 5). According

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

64. Snell, *Memoir: Vizagapatam*, p.7.

65. Thurston, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, pp.215-216.

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*

to the topographical survey of the Vishakapatnam district there were two passes through which the Banjaras moved between the two regions.

The first enters the hills at Sungumvalsa (76 miles, North of Vizagapatam), through a stony and difficult ghaut, and after passing numerous rivers, Mountains streams, and Ghauts, leads thro' Jayapoor, computed to be seventy five miles from Sungumvalsa. The second Route is through the Sauloor Zemindary, and enters the hilly region at Pauchipenta, and follows an equally wild and savage country to Jeyapoor and equidistant.⁶⁸

The topographical surveyor went on to add that the trade in this tract consisted of, "honey, iron, wax, dammer &c. which are brought into the adjacent Districts, and bartered for grain, salt, cloth's &c."⁶⁹

In the late eighteenth century the Banjara trade in raw cotton seems to have been affected by various factors. Political instability, occasioned by endemic warfare among local powers and exacerbated by the Maratha raids was one major factor affecting Banjara movements. However, it is also possible that during such periods there was a greater demand for the services of the Banjaras in provisioning armies. Even the Company utilised their services during the war with

68. Snell, *Memoir: Vizag.*, p.8.

69. *Ibid.*

Mysore. According to one Company official the falling

off in the Banjara trade in the Northern Sircars may be ascribed to the encouragement so properly given them to supply the army with the necessary articles of grain, by which some of those people who used to frequent this District, may be supposed to have been drawn off...⁷⁰

The devastating famines which plagued this region constantly towards the end of the eighteenth century may also have had an impact on Banjara movements. According to the same Company official,

the reason that none of those People have appeared since the termination of the war, may reasonably we think, be ascribed to the impossibility of procuring subsistence, not only on the sea coast, but in the Districts, which they must pass to reach it, the Native Inhabitants of which are said to have perished in prodigious number.⁷¹

Most Company officials however, blamed the local zamindars for having discouraged Banjara trade, by levying excessive inland duties. According to C.N.White,

The article of cotton being so heavily burdened, must of course enhance the prices of those manufactures, which from the principal branch of the commerce, as well as the company's investment, on this coast.... Cotton thread brought by the Benjaries, should likewise be exempted from the present heavy duties.⁷²

The contraction in Banjara trade in raw cotton with the Deccan resulted in the decaying of once flourishing

70. Letter from the Chief and Council at Masulipatam to the Board of Revenue, dated 30 August 1792, BOR., Vol.61, p.3558.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *The Fifth Report*, Vol.III, p.137.

market centres on their route. A Company official, for instance noted that,

"Yernagoodam, a village belonging to the Polavaram or Gootalah District, was formerly a considerable mart for cotton...from the Nagpore country. This market has long been on the decay, the cause of which I am not able to specify, but have heard that the zemindars on the frontiers, increase the Duties in proportion to the Demand, and by that means both lessen the traffic, and keep up the price."⁷³

Salt complemented cotton in the Banjara trade. A Company official noted at the beginning of the nineteenth century that,

The Brinjaree Trade is a Trade of Barter and the various hordes of them who frequent the different places where salt is manufactured know from long experience the average demand in these places for the goods which they import... Salt is the principal return they take for their goods, and is as necessary to them as Merchants as it is to the Inhabitants of those countries into which they import it.⁷⁴

The Banjaras usually purchased their salt at wholesale markets. This trade, in fact, was the subject of much debate among early Company officials. In the late eighteenth century, the Company tried to abolish the monopoly of the zamindars in the trade with the Banjaras, by arguing for

73. Letter from Chief and Council at Masulipatam to the Board of Revenue, dated 7 November 1793, BOR., Vol.86, p.9130.

74. Letter from C.H. Churchill to the Board of Revenue, dated 9 June 1803, Vol.350 'B', p.6878.

free trade. The zamindars, as noted earlier, were held responsible for the excessive duties imposed on the Banjara trade, which was believed to have have fallen off in consequence. The dominant view was expressed by C.N. White, in a Minute of 25 March, 1793 :

The heavy and increased duties collected at the different chokies on salt manufactured in the Circars, have materially affected the trade in the article, carried on by the Benjaries and other merchants. The revenue as well as the inland trade with the neighbouring countries, has suffered in consequence; and while the embargo on coast salt is continued at Bengal, there appears a greater necessity for some early relief, by abolishing or reducing the number of such exactions.⁷⁵

Other officials, however, doubted the wisdom of forcing zamindars to abolish inland duties on this trade. According to the Council at Machilipatanam,

Many of the old Institutions in this part of the country tho' the reasons that originally gave rise to them may be entirely forgot, will be found on enquiry to have had their foundation in sound Policy and to have been well adapted to local situations.⁷⁶

In the case of the duties imposed by the zamindars, the Masulipatam officials pointed out that

altho' a particular Purgannah may be benefited by abolishing the Monopolies of the ancient Salt Farms, yet that the Revenue may upon the whole suffer by it, as these Monopolies might perhaps be considered us a Tax raised upon the consumption of

75. *The Fifth Report*, Vol.III, p.137

76. Letter from Chief and Council at Masulipatam to the Board of Revenue, dated 12 February 1792, BOR., Vol.54 'A', p.671.

Salt in the interior parts of the Peninsula, the inhabitants of which can only obtain this necessary article on the sea coast, and which is the only one this country has to offer in Exchange for the commodities brought by the Lombardies and others from those countries.⁷⁷

They went on to add that, while duties paid by the Banjaras were no doubt in need of regulation,

this Duty is not so much to be considered as a Tax levied for permission to pass thro' this country, as an Expencc which they incur for feeding their cattle, and the Tresspasses which they are liable to incur for feeding their cattle, and the Tresspasses which they are liable to commit. The abolishing of this Duty entirely might not threfore be found beneficial, as none of the zemindars in the interior parts of the country might be unwilling in that use to afford them a Passage.⁷⁸

In 1805, however the company contradicted its own rhetoric of free trade in salt by imposing a monopoly on the sale of salt. In the following decades there was an almost uninterrupted enhancement in the price of salt. The 1876 *Madras Salt Commission Report* noted that,

a rate once raised was never again lowered. The rates have been most largely increased in the northern districts. At Nowpada the increase has been over 200 per cent.... at Ganjam and Womeravilli the increase is not far from 100 per cent. In Vizagapatam it is 50 per cent, and in Godavary, Krishna and Nellore about 30 per cent...⁷⁹

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Madras Salt Commission Report*, p.26.

This must have affected the Banjara trade, though we do not have adequate figures to go by. A hint of things to come had already appeared in 1803, when C.H.Churchill, a Company official in charge of the Nellapilly salt farm argued for raising the price of salt sold to the Banjaras. According to Churchill, it was feasible to do so since

they have only then the alternative of taking it at such Price as Government may think fit to put upon it or to return empty handed, a measure which I think they will hardly adopt, more especially as they have it in their power to raise the Price of the salt in these countries into which they import it.⁸⁰

The importance of salt in regional trade, however, was such that even in the late nineteenth century, the Banjaras were frequenting the wholesale salt markets near the coast. The Collector of Godavari noted in 1876 that, "salt is carried to a great extent to the Central Provinces and to the territories of the Nizam and the Rajah of Bustar, via Bhadrachallam and Dummagudiem."⁸¹ The *Salt Commission Report* of 1876 listed a number of such wholesale markets in the Vizagapatam and Godavari as the following tables show.

80. Letter from C.H. Churchill to the Board of Revenue, 9 June 1802, BOR., Vol.250 'B', p.6878.

81. *Madras Salt Commission Report*, Appendix A, p.xx.

Table 5 : List of principal salt markets in the Vishakapatanam district, 1876.* .cw10

Taluks	Places	Sources of Supply	Prices
Gunupur	Gunupur Chillakarlsa Ukkamba Bamani Godairy	From Nowpada	A bag of 2 Candies sell at Rs.6-8.
Parvatipur	Parvatipur Kottavalsa Sivini Venkampetta Mrityanjayanagram	From Nowpada and Oomaravilli	A palla of 2 Candies, weighing about 5,120 tolahs each, sells at from 7 Rupees (the cheapest rate), to Rupees 8, (the dearest rate).
Salur	Salur Pachipenta Tonaum Kottakki	From Nowpada, Oomaravilli, Kuppili, Konada and Bimlipatam.	Nowpada salt sells at 9 Rupees per bag containing about 10,400 tolahs. Other kinds of salt, 8 ¹ / ₂ Rupees per bag of salt.
Golgonda Taluk	Narsipatam	From Balachuravu	
Viravilli Taluk	Chodavaram Madgol Vaddadi Devarapalli	From Balachuravu -do- -do- From Kararsa	
Srungavarapukota Taluk	Srungavarapukota Kasipatnam Vizianagaram Gajapatinagram Bobbili	From Kararsa -do- From Konda & Bimlipatam -do- From Kuppili, Konada and Bimlipatam	
Rayagadah Taluk	Chesikallu Jumidipita Rayagadah Kometlapetah Dodabada Singhapuram Gudiechesikallu Majiguda	From Nowpada & Oomaravilli.	

*Source : Appendix pp.xv, Madras Salt Commission Report, Madras, 1876.

Table 6: List of principal salt markets in the Godavari district, 1876.*

Taluks	Principal Markets	The Sources from which each market draws its supply.	Average whole-sale prices per	
			Rs.	A.
1. Ramachendrapur	1. Draksharuma 2. Dwarapudy 3. Mandapeta	Salt stores of Penuguduru	2	8
2. Amalapur	1. Ambajipeta 2. Kottapeta 3. Amalapur 4. Jagannadhagiri	Salt stores of Penuguduru and Mogulturu	2	8
3. Peddapur	1. Eleswaram 2. Juggampetta 3. Peddapur	Salt stores of Penuguduru and from the salt store house belonging to the merchants at Peddapur during the rainy season.	2	5 ² / ₃
4. Cocanada	1. Cocanada 2. Samulcotta	Salt stores of Penuguduru		
5. Coringa	1. Coringa	Salt stores of Penuguduru		
6. Pittapur	1. Pittapur	Salt stores of Penuguduru		
7. Tuny	1. Tinny 2. Nellipudy 3. Iyyaparaz Kottapally	Salt stores of Penuguduru Division in the Godavery District and those of Pentakota in the Vizagapatnam District.		
8. Narsapur	1. Palcole 2. Achanta 3. Sivakodu 4. Najaram	Salt stores of Mogulturu Division	2	5 ² / ₃

Table contd...

Taluks	Principal Markets	The Sources from which each market draws its supply.	Average whole-sale prices per	
			Rs.	A.
9. Bhimavaram	1. Veeravasaram 2. Akeed	Salt stores of Mogulturu Division		
10. Ellore	1. Chintalapudy 2. Senvarapetta 3. Kamaparapukota	Salt stores of Mogulturu in the Godavari District and Manginapudy in the Krishna District.	2	8
11. Rajahmundry	1. Gokaram 2. Dowlaishweram	1. From the store-house or centre at Rajahmundry 2. From the salt stores at Penuguduru.	2	4 ³ / ₄
12. Tanuku	1. Attili 2. Relangy 3. Penugonda 4. Pentapudu 5. Nidathonole	From the stores of Mogulturu and Penuguduru	2	13 ² / ₃
13. Yernagudem	1. Palaveram 2. Tallapudy 3. Potavaram 4. Lakkavaram	From the store-house at Tallapudy Do. salt heaps at Penuguduru. Do. store house at Tallapudy. Do. stores of Penuguduru (Salt Division.)	2	8
14. Bhadrachelam	1. Dummagudiem 2. Bhadrachelam	From the stores of Penuguduru	2	10 ² / ₃

*Source: Appendix pp.xx, Madras Salt Commission Report, Madras, 1876.

The Northern Sircars were also linked to Bengal and the South Coromandel via coastal trade routes. Large quantities of grain were imported from Bengal in return for exports of salt.⁸² In the seventeenth century, this imported grain was of some consequence in feeding the large urban population of Machilipatanam.⁸³ Apart from rice, other articles imported from Bengal included pepper, ginger, cominseed, sugar, silk, piecegoods, and tea. Some of these imports were also reshipped for sale in South east Asia. The decline of Machilipatanam possibly led to the diversion of the grain trade to the ports of south Coromandel.⁸⁴

The coastal traffic in salt and grain, was of importance to the seafaring population along the coast. Native cargo vessels from the seaports of Ganjam, Vishakapatnam, Guntur, Nellore, Machilipatanam, Nizampatanam, Chinna Ganjam, Mootapalli and Coringa carried salt to Calcutta.⁸⁵ The Board of Revenue noted that, "for the owners of the native craft... conveyance of salt and foodgrains were not a mere advantage but was their absolute existence."⁸⁶

82. Raman Rao, *op.cit.*, pp.36-119.

83. Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry', p.86.

84. S. Arasaratnam, 'The Rice Trade in Eastern India 1650-1740', *MAS*, 22,3,1988, pp.540-541.

85. Raman Rao, *op.cit.*, pp.119-120.

86. *Ibid.*

The coastal trade with the ports of south Coromandel rose to prominence in the first half of the eighteenth century, when grain began to be exported to Madras on a large scale.⁸⁷ In the months of January and February, immediately after the major harvest, hundreds of boats sailed from the north Coromandel ports to Madras, San Thome and Paleacat.⁸⁸ The export then lessened till May. There was a revival in import in August and September during the minor harvest. The bulk of this trade was in the hands of the Komatis, the one exception to this being the Zamindars of Vijayanagaram, who were sellers of paddy in the north Coromandel ports.⁸⁹ Once the trade to Madras started booming, this powerful zamindar family began to organize the export of rice, through the agency of a Telugu merchant named Visenna based at that port.⁹⁰

Regional trade centred mostly in intermediate urban centres occupying the interstices between rural villages on the one hand, and the big cities on the other. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the most prominent

87. Arasaratnam, *op.cit.*, p.542.

88. *Ibid.*, p.543.

89. *Ibid.*, p.546.

90. *Ibid.*

among these were Ellore, Guntur, Kondapally, Nizamapatnam, Rajahmundry, Narasapuram, Peddapuram, Vishakapatnam, Bimilipatanam and Srikakulam. Most of these medium-sized towns were located either in the Krishna-Godavari deltaic zone or on the coast and owed their rise to the expansion of the rural textile industry in the seventeenth century. Some towns also developed on the major overland trade routes. Like Narayanapuram, on the Machilipatanam-Hyderabad route, which was a great emporium of trade and had several warehouses and godowns for storing goods in transit.⁹¹

In these towns, the level of market organization was of a higher order than in the villages with rural periodic markets. Most towns had wholesale markets or 'mandis' as well as daily bazars. These were important centres for the marketing of agricultural produce, with all kinds of export and import commodities being brought for sale. These towns were inhabited by the local merchants (bania and Marwari) and moneylenders, agents of big European exporting agencies, who collected food grains and other exportable commodities, as well as small shop keepers. The topographical surveys of the early nineteenth century contain numerous descriptions of such towns. For instance, the town of Gudur, was "intersected, with several streets, the principal of which

91. Raman Rao, *op.cit.*, p.44.

is wide and clean, lined with tiled buildings, the whole forming an extensive range of bazars and the dwellings of the mercantile commodity, who are supposed to be wealthy and trade with remote places...".⁹² Most of these towns also performed administrative functions, being either centres of civil administration or the seat of zamindari power.

The World of Long-Distance Trade

The international trade of this region has been the most prominent in the historical record. In the late sixteenth century, the textiles of this area were exported on a large scale to western Indonesia, the Malay Peninsula and Burma.⁹³ By the early seventeenth century new markets for these textiles also developed in western Asia. This trade was carried through in two ways : either overland from Machilipatanam to Dabhol and Surat, and from there via sea to the ports of Persia, or alternatively via the Machilipatanam-Red Sea route, with goods being transshipped for Persia at the Red Sea ports.⁹⁴ A third, less prominent

92. Summers, *Topographical Account: Condapally*, p.64.

93. Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry', p.81.

94. Subrahmanyam, 'Persians, Pilgrims and Portuguese: The Travails of Masulipatam Shipping in the Western Indian Ocean, 1590-1665, *MAS*, 22, 3, 1988, p.510.

route also existed, namely that of the Coromandel qafila to Goa and thence to Ormuz. The prospects for trade attracted European companies and by the mid-seventeenth century, a strong Dutch and English trading presence had established itself in the region. The Dutch, stationed at Machilipatanam, exported both the traditional patterned cloth of the area, as well as created a new market for plain white cloth known as calicoes.⁹⁵ In the early 1680's, the Dutch East India company purchased 4 or 5 million yards of calicoes each year. Half of these pieces were shipped directly to Holland, half consigned to Batavia for resale in South - east Asia.⁹⁶

The English East India company, also operating from Machilipatanam, competed with the Dutch for a share of the European market. By the 1680s, the English had almost caught up with the Dutch in overall volume of exports, as the following table indicates.

95. Richards, *op.cit.*, p.201.

96. *Ibid.*

Table 7 : English and Dutch Textile Exports from North Coromandel in 1682.*

English (in yards)		Dutch (in yards)	
Masulipatam	- 1,778,000	Masulipatam	- 1,054,500
Pedapalli	- 628,000	Palakollu	- 1,895,000
Madapollam	- 2,173,000	Draksharama	- 1,895,000
Total :	4,579,000	Total :	4,844,500

*Source : Joseph Brenig, "The Textile Trade of Seventeenth-Century Northern Coromandel: A Study of a Pre-Modern Asian Export Industry" (Univ. of Wisconsin Ph.D. thesis, 1975), pp.44-45, cited in Sanjay Subramanyam, "Rural Industry and Commercial Agriculture in Late Seventeenth Century, South-Eastern Indian, *Past and Present*, 126, 1990, p.84.

Asian traders too were no less active in this area. Sanjay Subrahmanyam has estimated that exports by Asian merchants in the early seventeenth century were more than that of any European company.⁹⁷ For instance, in the 1620s, trade from Machilipatanam to Burma on the part of Asian merchants was constantly estimated by Dutch observers 'between 900,000 and 1,350,000 florins'.⁹⁸ On the other hand, it was not until the 1640s that the annual Dutch export trade from the region 'exceeded 1,000,000 florins', and

97. Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry', pp.82-83.

98. *Ibid.*

English 'rarely' exceeded 250,000 florins before the mid-seventeenth century.⁹⁹

Persian warrior-administrators with shipping and trading interests were important actors in the early seventeenth century trade from Machilipatanam. Among these politico-mercantile interests were such prominent figures 'as Mir Qasim and Mir Muhammad Murad, as also Mir Kamal-al-din Haji Jamal and Mulla Muhammad Taqi Taqrishi, governor of Machilipatanam in 1627-28'.¹⁰⁰

These men were both wealthy and 'politically powerful'. Mir Kamal-al-din, for instance, was an overland trader, owned a 'substantial' shipping business and also held high administrative posts in the Krishna- Godavari region.¹⁰¹ He was also the 'first Asian merchant to send a ship from Machilipatanam to Bandar Abbas'.¹⁰² Another figure with substantial influence in both the world of trade and politics, was Mir Muhammad Sayyid Ardestani, who dominated the trading world of north Coromandel between 1640-55.¹⁰³

99. *Ibid.*

100. Subrahmanyam, 'Persians, Pilgrims', p.511.

101. *Ibid.*

102. *Ibid.*, p.514.

103. *Ibid.*, p.517.

Beginning life as a diamond merchant he rose up the political hierarchy to emerge in 1637 as 'Sar-i-khail' of the Golconda Sultanate, the 'third most powerful post' in the land. Muhammad Sayyid used his political influence to further his shipping interests, and by 1650 he had 'a fleet of ten ships the largest of which was an 800 ton 'nau' constructed at Narsapur'.¹⁰⁴ However, following the departure of Muhammad Sayyid, Persian mercantile and shipping influence declined. The decline of their political influence as well as increased dangers to shipping in the western Indian Ocean is seen to have led to waning of Persian shipping in this region from the 1670s onwards.¹⁰⁵

Commercial agriculture, especially the rice trade, had also developed in the Northern Sircars since the late sixteenth century. Apart from the fertile Krishna-Godavari deltas, the extensive paddy producing areas of Srikakulam and Ganjam were also involved in the rice trade.¹⁰⁶ The major bulking points on the coast were Machilipatanam, Bimlipatnam and Ganjam.¹⁰⁷ One early seventeenth century observer noted of the north Coromandel coast:

104. *Ibid.*, p.522.

105. *Ibid.*, p.524-529.

106. Arasaratanam, *op.cit.*, p.533.

107. *Ibid.*, p.537.

The coastal country for ten or twelve leagues inland abounds in provisions the abundance increasingly as one goes north, so that every year many sampans, carrying rice, millet, pulse and other grains, butter and oil are dispatched from the whole coast...¹⁰⁸

The West Asian ports of Mocha and Bandar Abbas imported rice from this region, a trade which operated mainly from Machilipatanam.¹⁰⁹ The South-east Asian ports of Malacca, Malassar and Acheh were also major exporters of rice, as was Ceylon.¹¹⁰ This long distance trade had established itself before the arrival of the Europeans in this area.¹¹¹ The coming of the Europeans, however, resulted in a general expansion of the rice trade in the seventeenth century. This expansion was also fuelled by the reduction in transport costs which resulted from the growth of shipping and the increase in the size and tonnage of cargo vessels.¹¹²

The nodal point of this international long-distance trade was Machilipatanam, undoubtedly one of the most opulent Indian cities of the seventeenth century. According to Fernandez Navarette, a Dominican Friar who visited Machilipatanam about 1670:

108. Moreland, *op.cit.*, p.68.

109. Arasaratnam, *op.cit.*, p.534.

110. *Ibid.*

111. *Ibid.*

112. *Ibid.*, pp.534-536.

The city Masulipatnam is famous all along the coast of Coromandal. It is situated sixty leagues north of Madarasta, a very populous place and of great trade... all the country abounds in wheat, rice, sheep, hens, geese, fish and fruit at reasonable rates....¹¹³

Machilipatanam was a major emporium for both export goods as well as for commodities imported from outside. The textiles produced in the Krishna-Godavari deltas ultimately found their way to this city, from where they were shipped to foreign markets, while commodities that came from other countries were first offloaded here before being moved to the interior.

According to a Dutch Minister of the seventeenth century,

This city is a place of great traffick where most of our commodities, as also those transported hither from the Mologues, China and c. are sold at a very good rate. Here is also found a concourse of Merchants from Cambodia, Suratte and other places under the jurisdiction of the great Mogul, as also from Goa, Urixa, Bengala and Pegu. Here is also a considerable traffick in Diamond and Rubies.¹¹⁴

The population of Machilipatanam was about 200,000 in the mid-seventeenth century according to John Fryer.¹¹⁵ The city's large urban population necessitated large-scale

113. Mackenzie, *op.cit.*, pp.90-91.

114. *Ibid.*

115. Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry', p.90.

imports of foodgrains which was brought every year in late January or early February from Orissa and Bengal to the north.¹¹⁶

The eighteenth century, however, is seen to have heralded the beginning of a long period of stagnation, followed by a decline in the international trade of the Northern Sircars. According to Sanjay Subrahmanyam, for instance, Dutch and English textile imports from the region in the period 1700-40 showed no signs of expansion, while Asian trade was clearly a shadow of its former self.¹¹⁷ James Grant, noted in the late eighteenth century that the textiles of the Northern Sircars were, "objects of curiosity and meriting encouragement than considerable in quantity and benefit."¹¹⁸

The evidence from the mid-eighteenth century reveals a perceptible shift in procurement from the north Coromandel to regions further to the south.¹¹⁹ Dutch factors at Palakollu and Draksharama in the first half of the eighteenth century complained about the scarcity of weavers and felt that in the face of the severe supply constraints, it would be better to concentrate on the area to the south of this region.¹²⁰

116. *Ibid.*, p.86.

117. *Ibid.*, p.105.

118. Grant, *op.cit.*, p.8.

119. Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry', p.105.

120. *Ibid.*

Nothing reflected the decline more starkly than the condition of Machilipatanam, which became a port of great dearth and frequent shortages and high prices, leading to a withdrawal of European personnel from the port.¹²¹ At the beginning of the nineteenth century trade from the city to the Persian Gulf was said to be worth around 50 lakhs rupees annually, but this was down to a paltry half a lakh by the mid-nineteenth century.¹²²

The weaver population in the region also showed a marked decline from the seventeenth century levels as the following table reveals.

Table 8 : Weaver Households and Looms in Andhra 1680s and 1820s*

Name of Centre	1680s		1820s	
	Households	Looms	Households	Looms
Palakollu	176	?	150	256
Peddapuram	400	500	203	238
Pithapuram/ Samalkota	600	800	97	102
Oupada	500	600	167	200
Dulla	400	500	129	130
Mandapeta	180	200	180	210
Angara	80	100	134	168
Amalapuram	900	1200	45	118

*Source : Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Rural Industry and Commercial Agriculture in Late Seventeenth Century, South-Eastern India", *Past and Present*, 1990, p.107.

121. Arasaratnam, *op.cit.*, pp.540-541.

122. Sarada Raju, *op.cit.*, p.177.

The evidence from the topographical surveys also tends to corroborate the picture of decline. For instance, the population in the Dutch settlement of Palakollu which in the seventeenth century had been over 3,000, had contracted to around 1,000 by the early nineteenth century, and the topographical surveyor commented that it was "not at all a place of importance."¹²³ Similarly, the village of Toomady in the Machilipatanam district had "dwindled considerably and at present possesses little or no attraction...".¹²⁴

Historians have located the causes for this stagnation and decline in a number of factors. Political instability during the first half of the eighteenth century, it has been argued, was one major cause. In the first three decades of the eighteenth century the officers of the Mughal successor state of Hyderabad fought local zamindars for control of the Krishna-Godavari region. By the mid-eighteenth century, a new set of actors had jumped into the fray, namely, the European companies. The consequent warfare is seen to have destabilised the overland regional trade in raw cotton with the Deccan, as well as having disrupted consumption patterns in the petty urban centres, where zamindars held court.¹²⁵

123. Snell, *Memoir: Rajahmundry*, p.13.

124. Summers, *Memoir: Masulipatam*, p.15.

125. Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry', pp.108-109.

According to some historians like Sanjay Subrahmanyam, conditions for trade also became unfavourable in the first half of the eighteenth century due to a rise in the prices of raw cotton as well as rice.¹²⁶ In the case of cotton, a rise in prices seems to have become manifest by the last decades of the seventeenth century.¹²⁷ The trend continued in the first half of the eighteenth century, with cotton prices rising steeply after 1725.¹²⁸

Table 9 : Raw cotton prices in North Coromandel 1660-1680 (in pagodas)*

Year	lbs/pagoda
1660	40
1668	40
1669	38
1670	38
1671	38
1672	32
1673	26
1674	25
1675	24.5
1676	22
1677	26
1678	26-20
1679	24-20
1680	24-22

*Source : Joseph J. Brenning, 'Textile producers and production in late seventeenth century Coromandel', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 23.4 (1986), Table 1, p339.

126. *Ibid.*

127. Brenning, *op.cit.*, pp.338-339.

128. Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry', p.109.

Rice prices also rose in the period.¹²⁹ This was possibly, due to a recurrence of poor seasons leading to famine. In the second half of the eighteenth century, as we have noted earlier, famine had become a regular feature. The famines in the 1770s and 1790s in particular led to a fall in population levels. Agricultural productivity seems to have declined as a result, affecting the export trade in rice. In this regard, it was the Krishna-Godavari deltaic tracts which seem to have suffered more than the northern regions of Ganjam and Vishakapatnam. Many market centres in the deltas were affected by the recurrence of famines. Thus, Culdindy in the Machilipatanam district, "once had a Pettah of some commercial consequence... but there is no more than a very few miserable huts remaining now on the same ground, owing to a dreadful mortality which visited its inhabitants some several years past..."¹³⁰

By the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the decline had become marked. The increasing competition from English manufactures along with a depression in agricultural prices dealt a severe blow to the export trade. In the Rajahmundry district, for instance, annual exports declined from Rs.8.68 lakhs in the

129. *Ibid.*

130. Summers, *Topographical Account: Condapilly*, p.50.

quinquennium of 1821-25, to Rs.2.01 lakhs in 1846-49.¹³¹ Similarly, in Vishakapatnam, exports declined from Rs.7 lakhs annually at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to a mere 1 lakh rupees by the mid-nineteenth century.¹³² The commercial establishments of the Company in the Northern Sircars were dissolved by 1835, a fact which caused much distress to weavers dependent on the Company's investments.¹³³ Weavers catering to the domestic market were affected by the competition from cheap machine-made English cloth. In the Machilipatanam district, a survey revealed the depressing state of poverty and misery in village after village.¹³⁴ The 'wheels of commerce', it appears, had turned a full circle.

To summarize, the picture that one gleans from the evidence suggests that after the high watermark of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries there occurred a perceptible decline in the volume of trade on these networks. The late eighteenth century saw the beginning of a downturn which coalesced into a steep decline in the early nineteenth century. This possibly had to do with the decline of the rural textile industry which had spurred the expansion of the seventeenth century. The decline in supra-regional trade was the most dramatic. However, both regional and local trade were also affected. Regional

overland trade in raw cotton in the nineteenth century declined from the high seventeenth century levels, though salt continued to attract the overland Banjara carriers. Even here Company monopoly over salt from the beginning of the nineteenth century appears to have affected the Banjara trade in the commodity, though we do not have adequate figures to go by. Coastal trade in grain was also affected in the late eighteenth century by the recurring agrarian crises which plagued the region. These crises continued to affect the region's grain trade well into the next century. Local trade seems to have suffered relatively less, though here too one could point to the evidence of the topographical surveys of the early nineteenth century which attest to the decline of once flourishing petty market centres and 'industrial' villages. The circuit of exchange between the hills and the plains however widened from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, following the influx of commercial interests from the plains into the hills.

131. G.N. Rao, *op.cit.*, p.28.

132. Rama Rao, *op.cit.*, p.130

133. *Ibid.*

134. *Ibid.*

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be in order to restate briefly some of the points made during the course of this study. The exercise has been an attempt to explore some possibilities in the making of a region. In the specific context of the Northern Sircars, an effort was made to examine aspects of ecology, politics and trade in constituting the region.

In my discussion of the ecological context in shaping the region's identity, I focussed on the distinction between the hills and the plains and tried to show the relationship between the environment and productive rhythms within these distinctive ecological zones. Further, I tried to suggest that regions are not merely given in physical terms, but are also subjectively constituted and redefined over time. In this regard I discussed the changing colonial perceptions of the region's ecology, their influence on colonial policy and the implications of these policies for the region's ecology and production patterns. For instance, early colonial perceptions of the hill tracts as a zone of 'poverty' underwent a transformation by the late nineteenth century in the face of a growing awareness of the commercial potential of forests. This prompted the colonial administration to take control of the forests through the introduction of a forest policy ostensibly designed to 'conserve' forests.

The attempt to implement this brought the colonial state into conflict with the forest communities inhabiting the hills, whose ways of life were disrupted by the new policy.

As regards the deltaic plains, the colonial stereotype vested this zone with an intrinsic 'natural' prosperity. Hence, colonial officials perceived the recurrent agrarian crises occasioned by the cycle of drought and floods as an 'aberration'. The introduction of large scale canal irrigation was a conscious attempt to control the effects of this cycle and restore the 'natural' prosperity of this zone. Large scale canal irrigation played an important part in fuelling the agrarian expansion of the late nineteenth century. The resultant growth in commercialisation of agriculture led to changes in the production profile of the region.

The second plane along which I attempted to construct a picture of the Northern Sircars was that of its structures of socio-political authority. Here, I focussed on the zamindars who constituted a key social group mediating relations between wider state systems and agrarian society at the local level. The zamindari system prior to British rule was in the nature of a patrimonial system of authority in which power was exercised primarily through customary, informal channels. My discussion tried to show how this

system of local authority was transformed in the first half century of Company rule. The Company's fiscal demands and the consolidation of the new bureaucratic regime influenced the nature of zamindari authority, making it more formal and rigid. This process culminated in the introduction of the Permanent Settlement at the turn of the century. In return for a stipulated revenue payment, zamindars were vested with legal proprietary rights in the lands they controlled. This had far reaching implications for the ways in which zamindari power came to be exercised in the region. On the one hand, zamindari interaction with their subjects tended towards greater formalization as the Settlement forced the zamindars to adopt a more inflexible posture on revenue payments. On the other hand, disputes among the zamindars tended to shift from the military to the legal terrain. In this, the zamindars belied the expectations of the framers of the Permanent Settlement. Far from playing the role of a capitalist gentry, they remained preoccupied with litigations relating to property and succession disputes.

In my discussion of the politics of land, I also tried to suggest some links between the ecological context and Company policy. Initially, colonial perceptions about the 'dangerous' hill terrain forced early Company officials to adopt a cautious policy vis-a-vis the hill zamindars. The Permanent Settlement attempted to impose a uniform system

over the whole region. However, the wave of 'disaffection' which swept through the hill tracts following the Permanent Settlement forced the Company to reconsider its policies towards the hill zamindars. In 1839, acting on the advice of the special commissioner for the hill tracts, the Government decided to remove the hill zamindars from the purview of the ordinary courts. The measure was largely intended to pacify the 'turbulent' hill chiefs. Here my account suggests that there is a need to work out the links between ecology and colonial policy in greater detail.

In the final chapter, I shifted focus to the realm of circulation in order to understand how the region came to be shaped by its networks of trade. My account delineated the trading networks in the Northern Sircars at three levels - the local, the regional and the supra - regional. I tried to show how these levels interpenetrated each other in complex ways; changes in one level often inducing changes at other levels. Local trade bound the region internally. In particular, I focused on the rural periodic markets linking the hills and the plains. These periodic markets seem to have proliferated from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, following the opening up of the hills through modern means of communication. In the plains however, periodic markets were affected by the general agrarian crises of the late eighteenth century as well as the decline of the flourishing

rural textile industry. In the seventeenth century when this rural industry was in its prime, the Krishna - Godavari deltaic tracts were dotted with petty market centres and 'industrial' villages. The downturn of the late eighteenth century which turned into a steep decline in the early nineteenth century led to the decaying of a number of these markets. Regional trade both overland and coastal also appear to have suffered. The decline of the textile industry seems to have adversely affected the trade in raw cotton with the Deccan while the Company's imposition of a monopoly over salt probably led to a fall in the Banjara trade in this item. The decline of the textile industry affected international trade from the region the most. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European companies and Asian traders exported fine and coarse cloth from the region to markets in both west Asia and South east Asia. By the early nineteenth century this trade had fallen off dramatically, a situation which became worse when English cloth began to flood Indian markets. The continued agrarian crises of the early 19th century also turned the region into a net importer of food grain. The picture then suggests an overall decline in the volume of trade at different levels of the world of exchange. It was to be a while before the networks of trade in the Northern Sircars regained some of their earlier vitality.

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