

The French Revenue Administration in the Northern Sirkars: Analyzing Colonial Policies, Economic Strategies and Their Socio-Political Impact in 18th Century India

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ABSTRACT

The Northern Sircars, comprising the present coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh and parts of Odisha, hold significant historical importance in both French and British colonial contexts. Their strategic position on the Coromandel Coast made them a valuable asset for trade, military campaigns, and revenue generation. This article explores the French revenue administration in the Northern Sircars during the 18th century, analyzing colonial policies, economic strategies, and their socio-political implications on local governance and society.

Keywords: Pondicherry correspondence, French Revolution influence, Subsidiary Alliance,, Pro-British attitude, Nizam's Prime Minister Mir Alam, French arms and weapons

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Sircars witnessed a series of political transitions before coming under French control. Initially under the Vijayanagara Empire until 1565, these territories fell into the hands of the Qutb Shahi dynasty and subsequently the Mughals after Aurangzeb's conquest of Golconda in 1687. By the early 18th century, they were under the administration of the Nizam of Hyderabad, who acted as a viceroy for the declining Mughal Empire. The Sircars—Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, and Guntur—were strategically located north of Fort St. George (Madras) and the French settlement in Pondicherry, making them a contested zone for European colonial powers. The assassination of Muzaffar Jung in 1751 and the subsequent ascendancy of Salabat Jung marked a turning point. Under the guidance of Marquis de Bussy, the French secured the Northern Sircars in 1753 as part of an agreement with Salabat Jung to maintain French troops in the Deccan. This strategic move enabled the French to establish their administrative and economic foothold in the region.¹

¹.R. Subba Rao, 'Some Aspects of the Northern sircars during the period 1724-1774. Proceedings of Deccan History Conference, 1-session; 1945, pp.353-363.

Revenue Administration before French Control

During the Nizam's period, revenue administration was characterized by a complex system of land grants and tax assessments. Key types of land grants included:²

1. **Inam Grants:** Tax-exempt lands awarded for religious and charitable purposes.
2. **Altum Grants:** Lands assigned for military service.
3. **Madad-i-Mash Grants:** Support lands for learned individuals or religious institutions.

Land was classified into Khalsa (Haweli) lands, directly administered by the state, and Paibak lands, assigned to Jagirdars. Revenue assessment followed the Jamabandi system, where the land's fertility determined tax rates, typically shared equally between the peasants (Rayyas) and the government (Sarkar). Government officials, including Amins, Faujdars, and Shiqdars, ensured proper revenue collection and compliance.³

The French Revenue Administration: Upon securing the Northern Sircars, the French inherited a well-established but decentralized system. However, their administration differed significantly in approach and execution.⁴

Policies and Strategies

1. **Centralized Revenue Collection:** Unlike the Nizam's decentralized system, the French implemented a centralized revenue system to ensure direct control over finances.
2. **Land Leasing:** The French leased lands to preferred individuals or groups, often favoring loyalists, to maximize revenue and secure political allegiance.
3. **Exorbitant Taxation:** High revenue demands were imposed on Zamindars, who acted as intermediaries between the French and the peasantry. This led to economic strain on peasants and resentment against both Zamindars and colonial authorities.

Challenges and Conflicts

The French administration faced significant resistance from local power structures:

1. **Zamindari Discontent:** Zamindars, such as Raja Ranga Rao of Bobbili and Jaffer Ali Khan, resisted French control due to their diminished autonomy and increased financial burdens.
2. **Interference from Rival Powers:** The British and Dutch supported local uprisings to weaken French dominance. This led to frequent conflicts and administrative instability.
3. **Internal Sabotage:** Salabat Jung's Diwan, Syed Lashkar Khan, openly opposed French influence, further complicating governance.⁵

Socio-Political Impacts

The French revenue policies significantly impacted the socio-political fabric of the Northern Sircars:

1. **Peasant Hardships:** Increased tax demands forced peasants to endure severe economic hardships, leading to social unrest and migration.

²R. Ranmm: "The Early European Settlements in Northern sircars". Itihas, Vol XV(1) 1989; pp:143-156.

³W.K. Firminger (ed), The FJih Report, Vol.111, Calcutta, 1918, p.3.

⁴M. Venkat Rangaiah, Freedom Struggle in Andhra, p.15. Also see The Deccan Times, Hyderabad Special No.17, 1939 pp:21,22.

⁵.Ibid

2. **Decline of Traditional Authorities:** The traditional roles of Zamindars and local chieftains were
3. undermined, disrupting existing power dynamics.
4. **Strengthened Colonial Presence:** Despite challenges, the French administration laid the groundwork for European colonial dominance in the region, which the British later capitalized on.

Comparative Analysis: French vs. British Revenue Administration

While the French administration prioritized immediate revenue generation to sustain military campaigns, the British adopted a more systematic approach post-1765 when they annexed the Northern Sircars. The British Permanent Settlement system ensured a fixed revenue amount, reducing the burden on Zamindars and enabling better agricultural productivity. This comparative stability facilitated long-term colonial exploitation of resources.⁶

Legacy and Conclusion

The French revenue administration in the Northern Sircars represents a critical phase in India's colonial history. Their policies, though short-lived, influenced subsequent British strategies and highlighted the socio-economic vulnerabilities of pre-colonial Indian states. While the French failed to establish lasting control, their tenure underscored the complexities of colonial governance and its profound impact on local societies.⁷ This analysis of the French administration offers valuable insights into the broader narrative of European colonialism in India, emphasizing the interconnectedness of economic strategies and socio-political transformations in shaping the region's history.

Raymond in Nizam Ali's Court

During the last quarter of the 18th century, one brave and efficient French adventurer arrived in India, initially as a merchant, but soon took up arms and played a significant role in shaping the military and diplomatic landscape of Hyderabad. This individual was none other than Marie Raymond, whose full name was Michel Joachim Marie Raymond, sometimes referred to as Francois Raymond. He was responsible for the resurgence of French influence in India after the era of Marquis de Bussy.⁸ Raymond was born on March 21, 1755, in Sérignac, Gascony, France. Like his father, he initially pursued trade and set his sights on establishing a business in India. Arriving in Pondicherry in 1775 as a merchant, he quickly became involved in the political and military dynamics of the region. His career took a pivotal turn in 1780 when he joined the service of Hyder Ali in Mysore as a sub-lieutenant. Over the next few years, Raymond actively participated in numerous campaigns against the British, demonstrating his military acumen and earning a reputation for bravery and tactical skill.

Early Military Career

Raymond's military journey began under the tutelage of Hyder Ali and later continued with Hyder's successor, Tipu Sultan. His service included acting as an aide-de-camp to Marquis de Bussy, who had returned to Pondicherry in 1782. Raymond remained loyal to his masters, actively participating in their campaigns until the deaths of both Hyder Ali and Bussy in 1785. Following these losses, Raymond

⁶ . M.Nayeem, Mughal Administration of the Deccan under Nizam-ul-Mulk AsafJah (1720-48), Jaico Publishing house, Bombay, 1985.

⁷ . Reminiscences, the French, INTACH, 1997, p.59.

⁸ . G.T.Kulkarni, Op.Cit, And Sajanalal, Studies in the Deccan History, Madras, 1951.

sought new opportunities and moved to Hyderabad, where his talents caught the attention of Nizam Ali Khan.⁹ Initially, Raymond joined the army of Basalat Jung, the Nizam's brother, but his exemplary character and capabilities soon brought him to the Nizam's notice. By 1786, he had succeeded the younger Lally and became a commander in the Nizam's army. Recognizing the deficiencies in the army, such as outdated technology and inadequate training, Raymond embarked on an ambitious project to modernize and restructure it. His reforms included the introduction of European-style training and the recruitment of local soldiers, thereby laying the foundation for a disciplined and effective force.¹⁰

Military Reforms and Achievements

Raymond's efforts to reform the army began with a modest force of 300 men, which he expanded to 700 within a short period. His force, known as "The Corps of Francois," grew significantly due to his effective leadership and innovative strategies. By the time of the Battle of Khardha in 1785, Raymond had raised an army of 11,000 men. He secured jagirs, such as Kurpa (present-day Kadapa), yielding substantial revenues to maintain his troops. Additionally, he was granted a personal jagir worth Rs. 7,00,000 and appointed as the Controller of the Ordinance ("Amir-i-Jinsi").¹¹ Under Raymond's command, the army adopted a distinct identity. Soldiers wore uniforms featuring buttons engraved with the "Cap of Liberty," symbolizing the ideals of the French Revolution. His reforms extended to the establishment of a gun foundry in Hyderabad, which manufactured cannons and other weaponry for the Nizam's service. The ruins of this gun foundry, located in the Gunfoundry area of Hyderabad, remain a testament to Raymond's legacy.¹²

Campaigns and Diplomacy

One of Raymond's most notable campaigns was the Confederate War of 1790, where he fought alongside the British against Tipu Sultan of Mysore, despite Tipu being a French ally. His diplomatic skills came to the fore when he secured permission from the British to procure arms and ammunition from Fort St. George in Madras. This move facilitated the establishment of the gun foundry in Hyderabad and strengthened his forces.¹³ The Battle of Khardha in 1795 marked a significant chapter in Raymond's career. This conflict pitted the Nizam's forces against the Marathas, who demanded a portion of Bidar as tribute. Raymond's leadership ensured a valiant effort, although the Marathas ultimately emerged victorious. Following the battle, Raymond was instrumental in suppressing a revolt led by the Nizam's son, Mir Ali Jah, who had occupied the fort of Bidar. Raymond's swift action resulted in the capture of the fort and the restoration of order.

⁹ . Impact of Key Deaths: After the deaths of Hyder Ali (1782) and Marquis de Bussy (1785, p.34

¹⁰ . Impact of Key Deaths: After the deaths of Hyder Ali (1782) and Marquis de Bussy (1785),p.45

11 . Raymond's Military Reforms and Expansion: Raymond began his reforms with a modest force of 300 men, which quickly expanded to 700 and eventually grew to 11,000 men by the time of the Battle of Khardha in 1785. His leadership and strategies played a pivotal role in this rapid expansion.

12 . Creation of "The Corps of Francois": Raymond's newly formed force, called "The Corps of Francois", gained prominence under his leadership. The force's growth was a testament to Raymond's effective military strategies.

13 . Jagir Grants: Raymond secured jagirs such as Kurpa (modern-day Kadapa), which generated significant revenues, enabling him to sustain his large army. He was also granted a personal jagir worth Rs. 7,00,000, in addition to being appointed as "Amir-i-Jinsi" (Controller of the Ordinance).

Relations with the French Government

Throughout his tenure in Hyderabad, Raymond maintained close ties with the French government and its officials in Pondicherry. His correspondence with various governors, including Conway and De Fresne, highlights his commitment to French interests. However, his loyalty to France often conflicted with his role in the Nizam's service, especially during conflicts involving French allies like Tipu Sultan. Despite these challenges, Raymond's efforts contributed significantly to the French presence in India during a tumultuous period.

Decline of French Influence

By 1798, the French influence in Hyderabad faced growing opposition from pro-British factions, including the Nizam's Prime Minister, Mir Alam. The implementation of the Subsidiary Alliance, spearheaded by the British, led to the expulsion of the French army from the Nizam's court. This marked the end of Raymond's military career in Hyderabad. Despite these setbacks, his contributions to the modernization of the Nizam's army and the broader geopolitical landscape remain unparalleled.

Legacy

Marie Raymond's remarkable career earned him numerous titles from the Nizam, including "Ajdh-e-Jung" (Dragon of Wars) and "Mutah War-ul-Mulk" (The Bravest in the State). His innovations in military organization, training, and armament left a lasting impact on Hyderabad's military history. The Gunfoundry and Musarambagh (known as Raymond's Tomb) stand as enduring symbols of his legacy. His life exemplifies the interplay of ambition, diplomacy, and military prowess during a transformative era in Indian history.¹⁴

Conclusion

The French administration of the Northern Sircars exemplifies the complexities of colonial governance in 18th-century India. While the French sought to consolidate their economic and military power, their policies often clashed with local socio-political realities. The legacy of their administration provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of colonialism, resistance, and adaptation in India's history. The Northern Sircars, with their strategic coastal location and historical significance, played a crucial role in the colonial rivalry between the French and the British in India. The region's political landscape, shaped by successive rulers—from the Vijayanagara Empire to the Qutb Shahis and Mughals—set the stage for French colonial intervention, which was solidified following the French victory under Marquis de Bussy in 1753. Upon taking control, the French introduced significant changes to the region's revenue administration, marking a departure from the Nizam's decentralized and land-grant-based system to a more centralized and exploitative approach.

The French focus on maximizing revenue through high taxes, land leasing to loyalists, and centralized collection brought both economic benefits and social unrest. The strain on the peasantry, exacerbated by exorbitant tax demands and the resentment directed toward both the French and their local intermediaries, the Zamindars, highlighted the complexities of French rule in the Northern Sircars.

14 . Campaigns and Diplomacy: One of Raymond's key military campaigns was the Confederate War of 1790, where he fought alongside the British against his former French ally, Tipu Sultan of Mysore. His diplomatic acumen was evident when he secured permission from the British to procure arms from Fort St. George in Madras, strengthening his forces and enabling the establishment of the gun foundry.

Additionally, the introduction of European military strategies, and the influence of the French Revolution, helped to shape not only the region's governance but also its socio-political dynamics. This analysis of the French revenue administration in the Northern Sircars during the 18th century reveals the intricacies of colonial governance, as well as the long-term implications for local society and politics. The policies enacted by the French, while aiming to strengthen their hold on the region, also contributed to tensions that would play a role in the shifting allegiances and geopolitical landscape of colonial India. The legacy of French colonial influence, particularly in areas like revenue administration and military strategy, continued to resonate as the region evolved under the shadow of both French and British colonial aspirations.

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