CHAPTER VII

EPILOGUE

Section 1: Evolution of Taxation in Karnataka

The success of governments and the glory of kings, prosperity of kingdoms and the happiness of people depended to a large extent on the taxation system in ancient times as at present. An estimate of the Taxation System in Karnataka, therefore, is expected to reflect upon the functioning of governments and the lifestyle of the people.

Originated in the form of voluntary contributions along with the institution of Kingship, the taxation system had already evolved into a compulsory obligation by the time historical period dawned in Karnataka. But during the early centuries of the Christian era the government machinery engaged in the assessment and collection of taxes was rather simple. It appears as though that income from taxes proper did not constitute the major source of state income. The epigraphs did not bother to enumerate the taxes while making grants
of villages. Stray references to land taxes no doubt occur in epigraphs but details regarding the official staff in charge of any of these taxes are few and far between. Probably the provincial governors managed the land revenue. There were no separate departments of Records, Accounts and Treasury during this early phase of Karnataka history.

The early Chālukya-Ganga period however witnessed a transition in the Taxation System of Karnataka. The empire was divided into a number of graded administrative circles for the purpose of revenue administration. References to śulka indicating the progress of commercial activities begin to occur though with rare frequency. Specific branches of taxation like bhūtavatapratvāya and vaddarāvula figure for the first time in the records of the Chālukyas of Bāḍāmi. An independent department in charge of all types of taxes, accounts, records and treasury started to function during this period.

The Rāṣṭrakūṭa period, however, witnessed the next stage in the development of taxation system in Karnataka. Records of this period give details of
taxes and the official staff including ministers in charge of revenue and other matters. This only indicates that the government by this time had already realised the importance of taxes as an indispensable source of state income.

But, however, during the later Chālukya and Hoysala, epoch of the Karnataka history, taxation had evolved into a well defined and well-organised system. The elaborate and careful arrangements made by the government to administer taxes at various levels very well reveal the recognition of taxation as a valuable source of state income. There was a well defined hierarchy of officials starting from the ministers at the top to the village headman and the accountant at the bottom. There were more than one ministers in the Centre supervising various departments like the Departments of Revenue, Commercial Taxes etc. The Revenue Department was further divided into independent sections like the Department of Records, Accounts and the Treasury each under an independent officer and sometimes a minister. Commercial taxes in their turn were administered by two independent departments, one in charge of vaddarāvula and another achchupannāya.
Whereas land revenue was administered through provincial governors and intermediaries between the king and the village headman, the commercial taxes were administered directly by the officials appointed by the king specifically for that purpose. There were supervisors over and above these officers who were known as melalkeya prabhus. Sometimes one wonders if the income from all the taxes put together was sufficient enough to pay the salaries of the officials engaged in the administration. But it undoubtedly implies that the taxation system had developed into a complicated structure and that government was very keen on securing the last pana of tax for the state Treasury.

The complexities of this administrative machinery were efficiently managed by a well defined system of jurisdiction — territorial as well as tax-wise which may be described as horizontal jurisdiction and vertical jurisdiction respectively. The administrative divisions — big and small were created for the convenience of land revenue administration with well defined administrative jurisdiction over each one of them. Sometimes the vertical jurisdictions were superimposed on the horizontal jurisdictions in such a way
as to bring about organic relations between the two. These were undoubtedly some of the highly advanced features of the taxation system in ancient times. Perhaps even the most modern taxation systems cannot boast of any improvement over the ancient and mediaeval systems, particularly in this respect.

Section 2: Principles in Practice

The problem as to what extent the principles of taxation were followed in actual practice may be examined here while evaluating the whole system. The principles of taxation were undoubtedly evolved to restrain the rulers from oppressing the people. But at the same time the interests of the rulers were not neglected. The idea that the enhanced productive capacity yielded more revenue to the state was framed to safeguard the interests of the rulers as well as the tax-payers. In other words, the principles of taxation were framed neither solely in the interests of the people nor those of the rulers but really they were aimed at enhancing the prosperity of the kingdom of which both the king and the people constituted the integral and organic elements. As such there is no
reason as to why the rulers should not have respected the time honoured precepts of ancient sages and thinkers.

But some western minded Orientalists have often criticised the taxation system in India on the ground that the idealism of the principles was far removed from what was in practice. J.S. Mill for example says "that the first of these rules (i.e., the rule regarding the sixth, eighth or twelfth share of the land produce) offends the canon of certainty to a high-degree. The amount varies as one to one-half and variation is made to depend upon circumstances the uncertainty of which opens boundless field to all the wretched arts of chicanery and fraud on the part of the people and all the evils of oppression on the part of the collectors ..."

Mill's criticism is not merely with regard to the difference between the theory and practice but it actually questions the rationality of the theory itself. In reply to this criticism, therefore, Buch has proposed quite a convincing argument. The learned scholar argues thus: "... what Mill thinks to be a defect of the system was in fact, its great recommendation. In an industry
like agriculture, in which there is so much uncertainty as regards the out turn owing to differences of soils, difference in methods of cultivation, and above all to the precarious character of the monsoons, it was clearly absurd to apply one law and one standard to all cases without discrimination. Elasticity in fact is one of the strongest points of ancient finance. 

The idea of elasticity however should not be mistaken for the provision to interpret the law to ones own advantage. Elasticity of the theory of taxation was to be applied under peculiar circumstances in the interest of the whole community and not in the interest of any individual. Further, it would be wrong to assume that the rulers interpreted such provisions to their own advantage and exploited the people. Because, these principles were least of all the powerful forces which restrained the rulers from being oppressive. The ideas of Dharma and Maryāda laid express limitations to the wild powers which otherwise would have been freely exercised by the rulers. The imprecatory verses of the records registering grants of villages often restrain the kings from deviating from what was agreed upon at the time of making such
grants. Panjim plates of Jayakesi I for instance, state that "If any king, owing to excessive greed, gives trouble to this village by raising the accepted fixed revenue, he, the false one will become fit for hell."5

The concept of dharma particularly with regard to taxation cannot be better explained than Vijnānēśvara who says that "a king who increases his treasury by unjust means ruins himself along with his kinsmen within no time."6 Similarly, Krishnadeva Raya advised kings thus: "A crowned king should always rule with an eye towards dharma."7

As has been pointed out by G.M. Moreas "an unrestrained king who sought only his selfish ends was censured by the tribunal of the public opinion."8

The emphasis on the counsel from ministers and elders was also sought to check the tendency of the kings to rule despotically. Halsi inscription of Kadamba King Harivarman, for instance, states that the king made a grant of a village to the Kuruchakas on the advice of his father's brother.9 Similarly, the
records of Kadamba king Śivachitta state that he made the grants mentioned therein to Miraśimha temple "at the direction of his mother and with the consent of his Prime Ministers and Councillors." 10

On the basis of the foregoing discussion it may be concluded that the principles of taxation had all the force of law and the kings were obliged to follow them in practice. Apart from these theoretical considerations, a survey of epigraphical records, which has preceded this account undoubtedly brings forth the fact that the rulers of Karnataka followed the principles of taxation. The principle of convenience, for example, was followed by allowing people to pay taxes in a number of instalments and also either in cash or in kind according to their convenience. The practice of graded assessment was in accordance with the ordinance of the ancient law-givers. The canon of certainty was present in the nature of the definite rate of levy of various taxes. But, however, some scholars have expressed doubt with regard to the reasonableness and the simplicity of taxation system in ancient India. Therefore these aspects may be independently discussed.
Section 3: Burden of Taxation

Some scholars carry the impression that the principles of taxation envisaged by the ancient Hindu law-givers particularly in respect of rate of land-revenue assessment were not strictly followed by the rulers of India, and have concluded that there was a tendency to exploit and oppress the people and that the taxes were very heavy. Burnell, for instance, thinks that in South India, the King's dues seem however to have been often a half.\footnote{Referring to the nature of the taxation system during the early period in the history of South India, Sir Thomas Munro in one of his letters remarks: "However light Indian revenue may be in the books of their sages, only sixth or a fifth, in practice it has always been heavy .... No person who knows anything of Indian revenue can believe that the ryot, if his fixed assessment were only a fifth or a fourth of the gross produce would not every year, whether good or bad, pay it without difficulty, and not only do this, and prosper under it beyond what he has ever done at any former period .... I never could discover the least foundation for the assumption that the Hindu assessment had been raised}
by the Mahomedan conquest or for believing that the assessment which we find did not exist before that period. 12

In reply to these criticisms the learned scholar Mahalingam observes that "... the taxation system was at times found in actual practice to have been oppressive during certain periods of the Chōla and Vijayanagara rule due largely to the different methods adopted by the tax collecting agencies which in many cases inevitably resulted in the interference of the government to set matters right. 13"

Whereas it cannot be denied that taxation to some extent and at times was burdensome in the Vijayanagara times, during the period of the early dynasties of Karnataka in general, the taxation seems to have been moderate and to have conformed to the principle of proportionate exaction of the land revenue.

The proper evaluation of the burden of taxation can be made on the following criteria:

1. Rate of land revenue assessment in practice.
2. Number of taxes an individual was expected to pay.

3. Oppressive tendency of the tax-collecting officers.

4. Feudalisation of tax-administration.

5. Peoples' reactions to the policy of taxation.

In a section on Land Revenue Assessment, it has been clearly shown that during the time of the early dynasties of Karnataka the land revenue was normally the 6th share of the annual produce. This conclusion is based not only on the general expressions like *shadbhāga* occurring in epigraphical and literary sources, but also on the actual calculations. But this generalization cannot be applied to the Vijayanagara period. For various reasons that have been analysed below the rate of land revenue assessment seems to have had been very high during the Vijayanagara times.

As has been shown by Appadorai, the formidable list of taxes in the epigraphical sources has led scholars to conclude that the burden of taxes on the people was very heavy and that they were expected to pay a large number of taxes. But a careful and critical
examination of the records reveals that the burden of all the taxes did not fall on one and the same individual but was properly distributed among the various sections of the society. For example Kottagere inscription of A.D. 1157 gives a list of taxes like internal levies, external levies, garden tax, taxes on buffaloes, oxen, animals, servants, carts, shops, washermen, blacksmiths, carpenters, goldsmiths, potters, barbers, oil-mill, weavers, silk-weavers, manure (timne), oil brought from outside, ghee, salt, and taxes on untouchables (hole). If these taxes are carefully classified as professional taxes, and taxes on articles of trade, it would not be difficult to make out that no two taxes were imposed on one and the same individual. Nilakantha Sastri thus concludes that "most of the minor levies were not general taxes paid by all but were only sectional dues; if this fact is not firmly grasped; the large number of the taxes named may give rise to a false impression regarding the general burden of imposts." Moreover the nomenclatures of taxes varied from place to place and from time to time. Hence all the confusion. The 'formidable' list of taxes thus not only does not reflect upon the multiplicity of taxes, but really
throws light on the brighter and more progressive feature of the taxation system. It reveals that the burden of taxation was properly distributed among all sections of the society.

Another factor that might have tended taxation to be oppressive and grinding was the role of the tax collecting officers. Examples of officers harassing the people are not lacking to show that people often suffered at the hands of such officers. When Lōkamahādevī, the queen of Vikramāditya II assigned the district of NareyangaI-80 to the temple of Lokesvara constructed by her at Paṭṭadkal, she fixed a payment of two kula of millet on each mattara of land and at the same time gave a warning that its collection could not be enforced by proclamation or distraint by royal officers. 15 Perhaps there was no need of this specific statement unless there was a tendency of enforcing them on the part of the officers. 16 Similarly, the spy's report as it occurs in Yaśastilaka Chāmpū contains three charges against the king's minister. The minister was alleged to be responsible for three things namely (i) demanding unpaid labour at the time of sowing, (ii) collection of dues while the ears of corn were still
unripe, and (iii) the unbridled movement of troops at the harvesting season. 17

The Rōn inscription of the time of Rāshṭrakūṭa Krishna III, dated A.D. 942 18 records an interesting historical fact that certain Būtayya, an officer, laid seize to Rōna for collecting certain incomes such as bhättaya and perohi(?) and for establishing the right of using the village threshing floor (kana). The record further states that at the instance of the mahājanas of the place he was opposed by one Pampayya of Vāji-kula who in the tumultuous lost his life.

When in A.D. 1104, the mahājanas of the agrahāra of Gandarāditya-holal carried a complaint to the emperor against one Boppayya, the manneya of the place, that he had abused his position by attacking the village, plundering its inhabitants and robbing them of all their possessions and even killing its brahmanas; the emperor sent for him; chastised him in public and deprived him and his descendants of the manneya or feudal dues from Holalu. 18a

Besides such concrete examples, frequent warnings made by the nīti writers against the unscrupulous
officers also indicate such tendencies amongst the officers. Manasollasā for instance, asks the kings to protect the interests of the people of respective kingdoms against thieves, oppressive ministers and tax-collectors. Krishṇadēvarāya, himself a very successful ruler, asked the kings not to entrust the affairs of the kingdom to mean persons.19

From the foregoing account it becomes clear that though the rulers in general were benevolent and framed a liberal policy of taxation, occasionally the people were harassed by some unscrupulous officers.

Quite alike the tendency of the officers in respect of tax collection, was the factor of the feudalization of the taxation system. In the villages granted to the temples and the brahmanas, the right of collecting the local taxes was transferred to the donees. In spite of the presence of royal representatives in such villages, the donees had the free hand in the levy and collection of taxes. But such a tendency in Karnataka at least during the pre-Vijayanagara times, was very rare as there are no examples of people's reaction to such an oppressive
rule. But in the Vijayanagara times which witnessed the hey-day of feudalism, the practice of forming out became very popular. Under this system the holder of guttige had a free hand in imposing any amount of taxes he liked. Naturally, there was an unrestrained squeezing of money from the peasants which ultimately led to the depopulation of the country. Instances of depopulation of the country are more numerous during the Vijayanagara times than earlier.

There is an instance of a charter of good faith or guarantee by the local officers to villagers who were ruined by heavy taxation and who often had to take recourse to migration from the village in order to escape the intolerable tax burden. In this instance, in A.D. 1527, Rāmaṇṇa Nayaka, an agent of Chinnappa Nayaka, the governor, had to state that he had not broken and would not break any of the pledges given by him at the time of bringing back the villagers of Dummi, who had left the village, on account of heavy dues exacted from them. Rāmaṇṇa Nayaka who was the pārupatvagāra of the village swore that he would not molest the villagers by heavy exactions.
During the Vijayanagara times the burden of taxation was rather heavy as it often exceeded half of the agricultural produce. It is evident from an epigraph which states that in the year A.D. 1370 when Virappa formed a new village called Śrīgirisamudra one half of its revenue was assigned to king and the fifty honnu were reserved for god (of the village) and the balance was remitted as uttar.\textsuperscript{21} Nuniz, while describing the court and the nobles says "The lands, they say, yield a hundred and twenty lakhs of which they must pay sixty to the King and the rest they retain for the pay of the soldiers and the expenses of the elephants which they are obliged to maintain."\textsuperscript{22} The statement of Nuniz confirms the belief that the taxation during the Vijayanagara times was, however, heavy. It has been shown above that the exaction of bitti and other forced levies and services was more rigorously implemented during the Vijayanagara times than earlier. It required the appointment of special officers meant for this purpose. These examples indicate that the taxation was rather heavy and oppressive during the Vijayanagara times.
This was rather the result of the feudalization of the system in which the feudal lords and officers were far removed from the direct control of kings.

But the rulers were not completely unaware of such tendencies in their empires. They made endless efforts to rehabilitate the peasants and artisans who had deserted their villages because of the heavy burden of taxation; received peoples' representations; patiently listened to their grievances and redressed them to the utmost satisfaction of the people.

Chalüya King Sōmesvara, for instance, listened to the problems of the fifty mahajanas of Bālguli, 1000 tambulisas and five hundred (of Ayyavole) and confirmed the toll contribution on betel-leaves formerly fixed by the Rashtrakuta king Kannaradeva. The rulers' benevolent policy is further substantiated by grants of exemption from taxation during famines and pestilence.

Thus, on the strength of the foregoing discussion, it may be concluded that the rulers of
Karnataka closely conformed to the precepts of Hindu-law givers while framing their policy of taxation. A careful study of the records leaves no doubt about the benevolent policy of the rulers as far as taxation was concerned. And at the same time it cannot be denied that people were sometimes harassed by the tax-collecting officers and the kings were quick to redress such people of their grievances whenever they were brought to their notice.

Section 4: Taxation in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu compared

A few Tamil inscriptions of the time of the Hoysala occupation of Chōla country seem to suggest that taxation in Karnataka was more oppressive than that of the Chōlas. An important development that took place before the establishment of the Vijayanagara rule and after the rule of the Chōlas and the Pāṇḍyās was the temporary occupation of the Tamil country by Kannadīvas, (i.e., Kannadigas) under the Hoysala King Sōmeśvara and his son Ramanātha for a period of about a quarter of a century. An inscription of A.D. 1501
states that the inhabitants of Velangudi had no means of discharging their revenue dues to government because that "was the period of the occupation of the Kannadiyas". Another inscription from Śrīmūšnam in the South Arcot district dated A.D. 1504 states that the rates of taxes "had become exorbitant in the time when the country was in the hands of the Kannadiyas. The cultivators had dispersed and the svarūpas scattered". Similarly, a record of A.D. 1429-30 states that revision of the revenue settlement of the whole district of Parañtaka-nādu was necessitated by the confusion into which the administrative arrangements had been thrown during the time of the temporary occupation of the place by the Kannadiyas.

These instances are sufficient enough to show that the Hoysala occupation of the Chōla country had completely disturbed the administrative system and during this time arbitrary taxes were levied on the people. But now the problem is as to what extent this unfortunate development reflects the taxation system of Karnataka, particularly of the time of the Hoysalas. These are undoubtedly a few instances of unusual
circumstances. During the period of foreign occupation when it was particularly of a short period there was bound to be exploitation and the harassment of the people. Therefore, such an unusual situation cannot be considered to reflect the taxation system of the normal times. Moreover, absence of similar examples of harassment of people in Karnataka, convincingly explains the unusual situation obtaining in the Tamil country. Except for these rare examples, the taxation systems of both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were quite alike. 28

Section 5: Salient Features of Taxation in Karnataka

The Taxation System in Karnataka was the result of an evolution which had started much earlier during the time of the Mauryas. Therefore, it is difficult to point out a particular period when it had attained its perfection. Experiments were made now and then and naturally these experiments had their own merits and de-merits. But, however, certain salient features of the system may be set out here.
The taxes in ancient times were the compulsory levies, the income from which was utilised for the public welfare notwithstanding the fact whether the tax-payer was benefitted from it or not. This is evident from the fact that severe punishments were given for non-payment of taxes. There are instances of confiscation of lands of the brahmanas for not paying government dues. A record of about A.D. 1229 shows that even the brahmana donees of agrahara villages had to pay interest on the land tax remaining in arrears. The state, however, did not wait for more than three months and at the end of this period it would sell away the shares of the defaulters. Several inscriptions record the confiscation of lands for default of payment of taxes. These examples definitely establish the compulsory nature of taxation in Karnataka during the period under review.

Side by side, with the compulsory levies, the voluntary contributions also continued. But the voluntary contributions in general were made to the temples and charities.
Another noteworthy feature of the Taxation System in Karnataka was its universal application. Every individual, rich or poor, receiving state benefit in the form of protection was expected to contribute towards the state Treasury. This is evident from the fact that even the poorest people who were not in a position to pay taxes either in cash or in kind were expected to render free service to the state once or twice in a month.

The third feature of the taxation in Karnataka was that it was broad based. Every article of production and every item of consumption was subject to taxation.

The Land Revenue was thoroughly decentralised and local hereditary officers enjoyed considerable autonomy. The administration of commercial taxes on the other hand, was rather centralised.

Assigning local taxes for local needs was another feature of the taxation system. In other words, the income from transit duties were utilised for maintaining roads, the income from dasabandha was to be utilised for maintaining the water-tanks, etc.
Section 6: Conclusions

A comprehensive account of the taxation system in Karnataka given in the preceding pages being the first attempt of its kind, cannot pretend to have solved all the problems confronting a serious student of history of taxation. Rather it is an attempt at creating the problems than solving them. Moreover, no problem relating to the remote historical times can ever be solved to the satisfaction of all, one can at best make one's propositions and thus may claim to have begun one's own school of thought. With the full knowledge of the serious limitations pointed out above, the following generalizations and observations emerge out of the present inquiry.

The taxation system in Karnataka underwent a number of changes before it evolved into a perfect system. These changes can be marked with every change in the ruling dynasty of Karnataka. The changes were progressive except during the Vijayanagara times.

The fiscal terms used in the records appear to be quite alien. Without satisfactory elucidation of
these fiscal terms the account of taxation cannot be complete, perfect and systematic. Names of commercial taxes are very strange to us. Vaddarāvula, a road cess is interpreted here to mean a major-tax or a duty on articles of trade carried on the back of oxen.

Pannāya was a road cess on betel-leaves in transit. It was the same as pannāya of the Northern India. Achchupannāya was the tax collected on betel-leaves in cash.

Bilkode was a tax collected from both the seller and the buyer.

Bhāgakara-bhōgakara; deya-maya; dhānya hiranya (in reverse order properly); Udṛanga-unarikara; siddhāya-kirukkulāya were all the synonyms and meant king's share in produce and additional levies in the form of supplies respectively.

On the whole, taxation in Karnataka was not burdensome and peasant uprisings and migrations due to oppressive policy of taxation were few and far between. Timely concessions, provision for representations often
helped to reduce such tensions. A few of such uprisings and migrations were due to the harassment of the officers rather than either the lack of benevolence on the part of the rulers or any defect in the system. Tax exemptions, though appear to have caused loss of revenue to the State, were not really so. Exemptions in Karnataka were rather a mode of public expenditure than state benevolence to the people.

The taxation system in India as a whole was indeed a splendid creation of a rare administrative genius of ancient Hindu-law-givers. Karnataka as an integral part of India, inherited such an excellent set of ideas and practices built up by the Mauryas and the Satavahanas and on its firm foundations developed a superstructure of its own to suit its needs. Taxation system in Karnataka was thus the result of a rare blend of the genius of ancient Indian political thinkers and enduring efforts and experiments of its rulers and ungrudging sacrifice of its people through the centuries. Perhaps nothing makes its study more fascinating than the gradual evolution it attained century after century, and dynasty after dynasty. Nothing gives greater satisfaction than its pursuit and the invincible desire to pursue it endlessly.
CHAPTER VII

Notes and References

1. Ghoshal, Agrarian System of Ancient India, p. 35.
9. VI, VI, p. 252.
11. Burnell, South Indian Palaeography, p. 112, n. 3.


14. EC., XII, Kn. No. 1, For Such formidable list of taxes See EC, XVI, Ok. No. 71; EC, XIV, Kr. No. 81.

14a. EHD.

15. IA, X, p. 167.

16. As suggested by Nilakantha Sastri, perhaps, implies that the queen might have felt that the religious merit of her work would suffer if force were employed in its maintenance, EHD, p. 237.


18a. SII, IX (1), 169.

18b. Manasolla, II, Ch. 3, V. 155.

Test: Swarastre raja praajan putrama- 
iva-aurasan chaurebhe amatva Kebhyascha
tathaiva arthadhikaritah.

19. Amukta, V. 205.

20. MAR, 1939, No. 16.
21. EC, IX, Mq. 49, p. 59.
22. Sewell, For Emp., p. 373.
23. SII, IX (1), No. 76.
25. AR., No. 50 (c) of 1916. Quoted by Aiyangar, S.K., op. cit.
26. Ibid., 247 (c) of 1916.
28. For details of the taxation in Tamil country vide Mahalingam, SIP, Ch. IV, pp. 148 ff; A. Appadorai, Economic conditions of Southern India, Vol. II.
29. EG., V, AK, No. 128.