LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

The Mahratha kings of Thanjavur divided the country into a number of distinct units for the purpose of efficient administration. The old administrative and political divisions which existed under the Cholas and the Nayaks such as mandalams, the nadus and the kurrams became defunct, but continued to be used only in the inscriptions. The newly created divisions during the Mahratha period were called subhas, simais or mahanams, vattams and gramas or villages.

The Mahratha kings divided the kingdom into five subhas—namely, Pattukottai, Mannargudi, Mayavaram, Kumbakonam and Trivadi. Each subha was divided into a number of simais and these were again subdivided into maganams. Therefore, it is evident that villages, maganams, simais and subhas formed the ascending scale of administrative subdivisions in the Mahratha-period. The Officer in charge of each newly created sub-division was:

The subedar managed the affairs of the subha

The amuldar (The mahanam)

The monigar (The vattam)

The patel and the karnam (a village)

The subedar who was the official representative of the king maintained peace and order in the respective subha. He exercised judicial authority too and heard cases that came to him. As the chief administrator of the subha, he was -in-charge of the
collection of revenue and gave necessary direction to his subordinate officer the karbar, who was the superintending amaldar for the collection of revenue. He also exercised the supervisory authority over the armed peons called sibbandis who were attached to each office called chavadi or kacheri, which was in-charge of the collection of revenue.

The subedar was also authorised to undertake maramat duties for agricultural operations of the subha. He arranged for takavi loans to the cultivators as a payment of compensation with the help of the hircaras.

The subedar exercised the powers and functions of a military governor too. At the time of the war, he also took part in order to assist the king. During the normal time, he recruited soldiers and selected war horses for training. He received the assistance of karbar who was the head of the amuldars of the mahanams. A Mahratha accountant called a shreshtadar assisted the subedar in the maintenance of accounts. He kept the details of every item of revenue in the Marathi language. As the original accounts were written in Marathi, the government appointed a Tamil counterpart called sjamprithi with whom the people had contact. In order to read and write the accounts in Tamil language a rayasam was appointed as a counterpart to komastas (writers). The examiner of the accounts called mapurnis checked the accounts regularly. Besides, these officials, there were hircaras, doleyets who were only higher grade attendars and kavalkars to assist the subedar and his subordinate, the karbar. The sibbandi peons in the chavadi (revenue collection center) collected the dues from the villages, and exercised supervising authority over the kavalkars too.
The subedar, jamedar, havildar and the naik were given their own sibbandi services to enforce authority.

To maintain peace and order in the subha, a faujdar was posted as a co-officer of the subedar. He was the commander of the military forces stationed in the subha to put down the riots. The daroga was the head of the police establishment of the subha. Since the subedar was a military governor, a faujdar was appointed to serve as a check upon him.

MAHANAM

The subhas were sub-divided into a number of mahanams. There were 113 mahanams under the Mahratha rule. The number of mahanams were not constant throughout the Mahratha rule. The Thanjavur Maharatha kingdom consisted of 142 mahanams between 1747-1748 A.D. When the British took over the administration of Thanjavur, there existed five subhas and 115 mahanams. The amuldar maintained peace and order within the mahanam and protected the people of his division. The amuldar also exercised civil justice in his respective mahanam and settled the disputes by peaceful negotiations with the help of the leading inhabitants.

He took the cases to the subedar for final disposal. The peshcar was the immediate assistant to him. The amuldars collected the taxes from the people in the mahanams.
VATTAM

A vattam was an administrative unit in the mahanam. A monigar was the authority of the vattam with judicial powers. He maintained peace and order and collected the tax from the people in his respective vattam. The monigar received one and a half pagoda as his salary from the government besides a grant of land. The havildar or a military officer supervised the authority of the monigar.

VILLAGE

Every village was a corporate unit comprising within itself the entire machinery of local administration. The Mahratha kingdom of Thanjavur contained 5879 villages. These villages were classified into 3 types namely, ekabhogam village (2) palbhogam villages (3) and samudayam. The villagers shared the cultivated lands among themselves. The village community which consisted of a number of hereditary officials were the proprietors of the village lands.

Each village had its headman called the patel or a maniakaran, who was appointed by the village assembly. The village headman was the chief executive of the village and he acted as the intermediary between the government and the village communities. If the patel was found unfit to discharge his duties, due to various reasons, the village council was authorised to appoint another man. The patel performed the duties of the magistrate, a local judge and a collector of revenue. He settled disputes with the help of the panchayats. The panchayat consulted its members in many matters before it came to a decision. However, he exercised no jurisdiction over the cases relating to caste or religious dispute, as there was
also the caste headman in each village. Many times, their functions (Patel and caste headman) clashed with those of each other. The post of maniakkaran (village headman) finds an important place in the Jesuit letters.32

The village assembly was an important establishment in the local administrative set up. They possessed the right of acquiring or disposing of lands on behalf of the village. The elders of the village served in the village assembly. In addition, the headmen of different castes in the village also assumed membership. The influence of caste or holding of land was the qualification for membership. This shows that caste had an influence over the representation. Every village had village officials to assist the patel. The karnam assisted the village headman. The kudikarnams or village officials and public servants or sarkar karnams assisted the patel in exercising his duties. The karnam (or kanakkupillai) kept a rostram or register and maintained the accounts called nattukkanakku.33 Besides, the karnams, there were many minor functionaries to assist the patel. The kavalkars served as the village constables.34 The village shroff sorted and checked the collections. The astrologer of the respective village announced the auspicious day for social and religious festivals. In addition to these functionaries, there were also priests, dancing girls, snake charmers, vettians, talayaris and barbers. The village community or the village servants formed the vital basis of the village administration.

The totis who were the scavengers of the village carried out the order of the patel. The washerman washed the clothes and potmakers provided pots. The cobblers supplied footwear. These local servants were divided into two groups. Those who served the community in total and to certain other individuals. No uniform
The British took over the administration of the Thanjavur Mahratha principality by the treaty of 1799 A.D. Later the British introduced a uniform system of judicial and revenue administration to the whole of the Mahratha country. The king's authority was confined only to the fort, where he exercised authority. The village administration after 1799 was essentially democratic in its character and did not know any patel or headman as in the Mahratha rule. It was only after the establishment of the British administration in Thanjavur, the office of the village headman was created. During the Mahratha administration, the village establishment included only servants of the village community and contained no regular officials of the government. The first attempt to establish the office of the village Munsif with police and judicial functions was made in 1816 A.D. It was only in 1836 A.D. the village headman was made to collect the public revenue under the designation of pattamaniar. The karnam was only a private servant to the patel during the Mahratha rule. The office of the karnam as a servant of the government was created only in 1807. The village servants except
the government *karnam* were paid by percentages on the gross produce of village called *swatantram*\(^1\).

The government *karnam* was paid from the treasury which was called *karnam's fund*\(^2\). The village *panchayats* came to be largely dropped out of use though Munro tried to revive them\(^3\), by Madras regulations Act of 1816.

The economic relationship of the village communities under Mahratha rule was caste oriented. The lower caste served the village in return for food and shelter. There was an inter household nature of economic ties and the village was a self sufficient productive unit under the Mahratha rule in Thanjavur.

But, during the British administration in Thanjavur, that is after 1800, significant economic changes came in the village economy. Inter-caste service relationship in the villages was modified by the abolition of serfdom in 1843 A.D.\(^4\) The expansion of trade led to caste free employment. In the later days of Mahratha rule, land became a freely marketable commodity available for purchase by any caste. Hence, many new castes came into village due to immigration from other places. The influx of new caste groups were due to extinction of the royal lineage in 1855 A.D. and break up of the royal estates. The economic control of the Brahmans over the lower castes also gradually diminished.

The village community based on caste was no longer homogeneous in composition, for caste is not the determining factor in the choice of occupation.

As already observed, king Serfoji II's authority was confined only to the Fort area in Thanjavur city. As he was keenly
conscious of his civic duties, he entrusted the responsibility of looking after the welfare of the Thanjavur town to the *nagarapariskarasabha* and the Fort area to *mudrarakshakasabha* a term corresponding to the municipality and the head of this body was known as *mudradhikari* a term corresponding to Municipal Commissioner. The elected office of the chairman was not then in vogue. It was this *sabha* which looked after the public hygiene, drainage and kept the water tanks neat and clean and carried out the periodical repairs.

The *mudradikari* looked after various hospitals established by king Serfoji II, and supervised the schools started by him.

There are instances in Modi records stating the fines levied for contaminating the water of Sivaganga tank and expenses incurred to repair the bridges, annual grants made for deepening the tanks, for digging wells and for the repair of the drainage on either side of the streets.

The major act of public utility which king Serfoji II made was the construction of large and well planned drainage system covering the whole of Thanjavur town. The Modi records reveal the plan, and the amount spent for its execution. The drains constructed on either side of the streets at last led into the moats outside the fortress walls, so that the drain and rain water could be easily received into the moats leaving the city clean. King Sivaji II repaired and perfected this drainage system in 1845 A.D. It is still in use at Thanjavur.
The masterly contribution of Serfoji II to the civil amenities of Thanjavur consisted of his wonderful system of a network of tanks, interconnected by means of underground courses, for maintaining a uniform supply of good drinking water to the town. This scheme is mentioned in Modi records and the amount spent on its construction and its maintenance are also recorded.

The Seppannawari also called Sevappanaikkan tank, where the water was stored in those days was again dug deep and repaired, so as to serve as a big reservoir outside the Thanjavur Fort. Similarly, the old Sivaganga tank, adjacent to seppannawari was also kept deeply dug.

Another great achievement was the construction of a filtering canal and a network of underground waterways or feeder canals through which water could be supplied from Sivaganga storage tank, not only to the other smaller tanks, but also to the wells in the residential quarters found in the four main streets near the palace.

This wonderful system of underground feeder canals was known as Jala Sutra. By this scheme of Jala Sutra water flows from Sivaganga tank to several other tanks in the fort within the palace.

Sivaji II who succeeded Serfoji II in 1833 A.D. had only a small territory, the Fort and the surrounding area to govern, but even this small area he governed so badly, that his relatives, his officers, his subjects and the resident constantly complained of his administration and oppression.

In spite of the fatherly advice of the resident (H. Forbes) and the Governor, he never improved and showed not the least concern for the welfare of his subjects. In 1841, as a result of his...
misgovernment, the British took away from him all authority which he was exercising in the small area round the Fort. The rule of the weak Mahratha king coincided with the rise of strong British power. The British annexed the Thanjavur principality in 1855 after the extinction of the kingdom.

To avoid administrative confusion and to maintain contact with the people, the Mahratha kings appointed counterparts to Maratha officers in the local administration. Yet, the political condition of that time disturbed the smooth functioning of the local administration. The officials became corrupt and did not care for the commands of their superiors and took law in their own hands.

The local administration of the Mahrathas, was neither entirely of their own, nor of the inherited system, but a combination of both. Though the Mahrathas adopted old territorial sub-divisions like mahanams, vattams and villages, they increased the number of mahanams and vattams to suit their administrative convenience. The Mahratha kings inherited the Nayak system by retaining the services of the samprithi, rayasam and the karnam.

The creation of a new territorial division above the mahanams called the subha was a hitherto unknown system to Thanjavur. Further the appointment of administrators like the subedar, faujdar, amuldar and the havildar in the sub-divisions was also dissimilar from the old system. In the previous set up, the rulers appointed nayaks as the viceroys, but in the new set up, the subedar occupied the place of the viceroys and the nayaks were relegated to the status of mere military officers. The amuldars and the havildars were the new entities in the local administration.
The local administration was beneficial to the head of the state but at the same time expensive too. The administrators made use of the services of the local sub-divisional officers only to promulgate their orders, extract taxes to fill their treasury and to force the defaulters to pay the arrears of tax. The high officials were mostly the relatives of the royal harem who enjoyed privileges. The officials took law and order in their hands, and so it did not give a clean rule. The welfare of the people was totally neglected during the rule of Sivaji II the last Mahratha ruler.
Footnotes

   
   Ibid No.15 of 1921.
   


3. A.R.E. 420 of 1918 speaks of Kaderayar as the governor of sirgalisimai.
   


8. Ibid.


10. *Takavioan*. This loan was paid to the cultivators, if the crop was destroyed due to movement of the army or any other natural calamity.


13. A report of the commission for the revision of the Judicial system, dt July 14, 1815, pp.1608-1010. 


17. Ibid., Vol.3200, p.23. 

18. B.S. Baliga, Hand Book of Tanjore District, op.cit., p. 91. 


23. The Jamabandi Report of 1800 gives the names of 115 mahanams. They were as follows: Trivady, Kudiyur, Rajendracholaganallur, Paramour, Chanampatty, Swaminalai, Varagur, Nemum, Ambalapandy, Ambattuvelly, Cothangoody, Salyamangalam, Moorthimapuram, Poonapuram, Kunnathangudi, Orthanadu, Polavankadu, Papanasam.


30. Ekabhogam villages 1807.
   Palabhogam villages 2202
   Samudayam villages 1774
   Villages under inam tenure 96

   5879 Villages


35. The dancing girls belonged to a special non-Brahman caste (Melakkaran) who served in Tanjore district. At festivals, they were paid in grain from temple lands; at marriages they were paid by from the host family.

   Kathleen Gough, *Caste in a Tanjore village, op.cit.*, p.27.
36. "Village Communities in Southern India" (Connemara Library, Madras), p.56.

37. The government assigned certain inam lands for the support of Talaiyari known as 'Talayari Manyam'.

*Judicial sundries*, Vol.1, 1805, p.120.


41. Any fee claimable by village servants was known as ‘Swantantram’.

42. In 1832 the karnam’s fund was absorbed into state exequer. C.S. Srinivasachari, *op. cit.*, Vol.1, p.23.


44. Kathleen Gough *op. cit.*, p.48.


46. *Personal Interview*, with the senior prince, Tanjore palace, dt.10.7.92.
47. This supply scheme can be noticed even to day although the whole course is not maintained in proper operation now. By cleaning the obstructions in the course of the feeder canals, good water supply can be secured for the Tanjore town.

48. The word ‘Jalasutra’ can be seen even to-day written in big letters in Tamil on the outer prakara of Sri Brihadeeswara temple, Tanjore and just below it the water ways of feeder canal in the shape of tunnel masonry can be seen. (The sketch of the plan of ‘Jalasutra’ which was drawn in 1863 is given in the Annexure).


51. S. Muthunathan, op.cit., p.97.