1. INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to analyze the nature and working of the agrarian world of Masulipatnam. It rests on the premise that agrarian economies are constituted by the interaction of a multitude of elements located in different spheres such as the political, the economic, the social, and the cultural. Any study of an agrarian economy which seeks to understand its historical dynamics must, of necessity, therefore, invoke the concept of the agrarian 'world', and attempt to analyze it in its totality. The study focuses on the century 1750 - 1850. This century has historical significance for two reasons. Firstly, it was during this period that the initial economic interests of the English East India Company in India were slowly converted into political conquests and finally established as political and economic hegemony in the region. Secondly, it was the period in which the region was being incorporated into the wider commercial and economic networks through colonial power. Colonial conquest, and the parallel process of incorporation into a wider world were historical phenomena which impinged dramatically on the colonized societies, especially on the agrarian economies which, in fact, constituted the core of these societies. A study of the agrarian world such as that of Masulipatnam would yield, therefore, insights not only into the history of the locality, but also into the history of colonialism and its effects.
The study then is an attempt to explore the various dimensions of the agricultural community in Masulipatnam in order to analyze the nature of imperial penetration into the agrarian world of Masulipatnam, its impact on different rural structures, and to examine the processes which made the agrarian world what it was. The study, in attempting to reconstruct the agrarian world of Masulipatnam, would also attempt to determine the changes and continuities and the constraints within which the people of the region operated.

Agriculture occupies the prime place in rural India. Under the pre colonial, as well as the colonial regime, it was agriculture that was the main concern and it was the main source of revenue to the state. Agriculture was common almost in all the villages and hence it was not surprising that cultivators formed the majority in the rural areas.

A study of the agrarian world of Masulipatnam would reveal several aspects of the agrarian economy and their nature and working of each group in the complicated rural structure and mainly the interaction and position of cultivator in such a situation; that is, the study would enable us to reconstruct the agrarian world of the region in totality. To do this, however, it becomes necessary to examine, albeit briefly, the nature and working of the agrarian world in the pre colonial period. This
would enable us to know exactly to what extent and in which spheres the colonial policies affected the agrarian world and what its impact was on the rural structure.

Though agriculture formed the prime occupation and an important revenue source to both the people and the state, and though the agrarian economy was at the heart of rural society, the attention of scholars has not been too sharply focussed on agrarian history. Scholars have tended to consider the rural economy as a whole, merely touching upon the agrarian dimension. There are, no doubt many studies of the agrarian economies in various regions of India. However, even these studies dealt with larger, macro regions, and there are hardly any studies which examine smaller, micro regions. There is, of course, substantial analytical value in taking a macroscopic view of larger regions. At the same time, such regional perspectives blur the distinctions between micro regions like districts.

A region like the Northern Circars has a degree of social and economic coherence. Nevertheless, there are also substantially significant differences between the various micro regions comprising the Northern Circars. For example, the micro regions of Northern Circars that is the Masulipatnam, Godavari, Guntur and Visakhapatnam districts, though similar in many ways, still had complex structures and differed from each other in some of the aspects like modes of revenue collecting, and agencies of revenue collecting.
Thus a micro region like Masulipatnam though forming a part of the larger regional economy of Northern Circars, still differed in so many ways from the other constituent micro regions that a study of the agrarian world of Masulipatnam is worth researching to know these distinctions. But at the same time, such a study cannot treat the micro region in isolation as if it were an autonomous economic island. On the contrary, the study must proceed on the assumption that every micro region is situated in a larger historical space. This is especially true of the period in which peripheral economies were being integrated into global networks.

The functioning of the agrarian world in any region is influenced by the rural structures because the way in which the different groups are structurally organized partially determined the nature of the economy. Such groups need not be only those who were directly involved in agricultural production. Thus the cultivator was only one element in an integrated economic system in which several elements such as artisans, merchants, money lenders and others interacted with each other. It is necessary therefore, to study the cultivators and their world totally to situate them in this complex system and also to have a clear picture of their working during the period of study.

In geographical terms the space covered under this study is the district of Masulipatnam. The district of Masulipatnam lies
between 15 45' - 16 26" North latitudes and 80 52' - 81-56" East longitudes. The district was bounded on the south by the river Krishna, and partly on the north by the river Godavari. The sea bounded it to the east and its Western frontier was limited by the territory of the Nizam's. Its northern frontier was irregular and the lands of Masulipatnam and Rajahmundry districts were mingled in a confused fashion.

The district of Masulipatnam underwent several changes during the span of the century under study in terms of its spatial contours. The district formed a part of the five Circars referred to as the Northern Circars. At various times, the shifting boundaries of the Masulipatnam district encompassed within its territory, parts of the other Northern Circars. For instance, segments of the Eluru and Mustafanagar Circars, particularly the Zamindaris like Nuzividu, Charmahal, Oevarakota, Nandigama, Mylavaram, Bezwada, Medurgutta, Zammulavayi, Munagala, Lingageri, besides the havelis of Kondavidu and Vallursamut.

In 1788, the District of Guntur, previously called the Murtuzanagar Circar was added to Masulipatnam, although it was again detached in 1794. In 1859, out of the districts of Masulipatnam, Rajahmundry, and Guntur the districts of Krishna and Godavari were created.

Masulipatnam was known as Masaila and Maisola in ancient times. Masulipatnam was known by different names to different
people. Masulipatnam was known in the ancient times also as a
major commercial centre. Marcopolo the Venetian traveller also
mentioned it. Later on Masulipatnam became a chief commercial
centre to many of the European traders like the Portuguese, the
Dutch, and finally the English who established their factories in
the region of this important port. In the Indo Persian Chroni-
cles of late Qutb Shahi period it was known as Bandar-i-Muba-
12 rak. The origin of the fort of Masulipatnam seemed to date
back to the fourteenth century. William Orme one of the Company
officials mentions an oral tradition that Masulipatnam fort was
founded in the fourteenth century by a colony of Arabs and there
seemed to be some foundation for the legend as the Arabs were
engaged largely in commercial ventures from the Red Sea to South
India. The first mention of Masulipatnam port was recorded
13 around 1425 A.D, when a mosque was built in Masulipatnam.

From 1425 A.D the district was under several regimes and had
varying fortunes till the Mughal sovereignty was established in
1687. It came under Nizam's rule in 1724. For a brief period
from 1752-1759 the region was under the French before it came
finally under the Company's regime in 1759. However, it was only
in 1765 that the actual authority of the Company was confirmed.

Though the district of Masulipatnam was not clearly de-
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fined in the century under study and there is evidence of occa-
sional shifting of the district boundaries, this study proceeds
on the assumption that the district can be treated as the region around Masulipatnam. Since the study is not a political history where precise boundaries may be more important, the use of Masulipatnam region as an equivalent to the district may not be unjustified.

The area of the study, Masulipatnam, was one of the most fertile and prosperous areas of the Northern Circars. Most part of the district being situated between the major delta systems of Godavari and Krishna, its soil with the exception of the sea coast consisted of fine black alluvial brought down and deposited by the two rivers during their freshes. Besides, the port of Masulipatnam became a centre of activity for many of the private trading companies.

A study focussed on such an area would enable us to examine the nature and working of the agrarian economy, within which several rural structures function and also the revenue policies of the Company, how through them the Company tried to acquire economic hegemony over the region, finally the restraints and the constraints within which the Company had to function in an hierarchical system of complex rural networks.

The impact of the colonial rule on the society and economy of India has become an interesting theme in recent years. In one popular historiographic perspective, the impact of colonial rule is perceived to have been direct and deep. In this view the
colonial policies had brought about many changes and through them
the Company was able to transform the structure and economic base
of the rural society.

However recent historiography has presented a different
image of the results of the British rule for India. According to
this line of thought, the early period of British rule in India
witnessed not new directions but continuities. Further the
works of Sumit Guha, B.S. Cohn and Ratnalekha Ray apart from
stressing the influence of the colonial policies on the agrarian
economy, contended that several autochthonous changes were also
taking place within the rural economy that ultimately affected
its working.

Thus though the impact of the British conquest on India
during this century seemed to differ from one historiograph
tradition to another, the basic fact was that it did have an
impact on several rural structures and revenue systems.

The century 1750-1850 is of particular significance for the
study of the history of the agrarian world of Masulipatnam. This
was the period during which the Company had experimented with
different kinds of revenue systems. Coming to terms with a
strange political economy, the Company in order to establish its
control both in political and economic spheres tried out various
revenue systems. The frequent changes in the land revenue struc-
tures and their functioning, influenced and affected the stability of the agrarian world. In the revenue history of the region the period became a period of transition. This was the period during which the British had tried to penetrate deep into the regional economies and tried to bring out a change in the nature and working of the agrarian world by bringing it into contact with global networks. In such a context the study tries to analyze how the agrarian world functioned and in what way it resisted the change or yielded to it.

The period 1750-1850 may be called the pre anicut period in the history of Masulipatnam. The regional economy had not yet been introduced to the impact of the introduction of large scale irrigation systems such as those which resulted from the construction of the Godavari and Krishna anicuts. An investigation of the agrarian world before these large dams came up, would be useful as it enables us to understand how it coped with the irrigation needs.

Thus studying the world of agriculture during this period would enable us to analyze the impact of the policies of the colonial economy and the way in which various elements responded to it. In studying such impact, it would be possible to reconstruct the agrarian world and the way different elements of the rural structure interacted with the external world.
The territorial possessions of the Company in Masulipatnam district consisted of Zamindari and Haveli lands. The Zamindari lands were hereditary estates for which the Zamindars who were the proprietors held the estates and managed the revenue affairs. Some of the Zamindaris were of ancient origin and some were self-created territorial proprietors who came into existence during the turbulent times that followed the breakup of the Bahmani Kingdom and the Mughal empire.

The lands that were under the immediate management of the pre-colonial regimes without the intervention of the intermediaries were called Haveli lands. Under the Company they became the direct possessions of the Company. The land revenue systems and the methods of revenue collecting agencies differed significantly in both these lands.

During this period, the most important and the profound impact of the British rule in the region as elsewhere was on land. In order to establish and stabilize their position the Company had tried out different land revenue systems in the region. One of the aims of the study is to examine the operation and functioning of these revenue systems and their impact on the rural structures to understand the nature of the rural economy.

Any attempt to explore the dimensions and depth of an agrarian population remains incomplete without a proper understanding of the revenue policies and revenue administration of the re-
gion. In particular, the base of the rural structure and the nature of it which was influenced by the revenue policies and also its working depended on the broad contours of revenue administration. The rural economy and the rural structure it engendered and was located in were interdependent. The regional economy, thus, influenced the rural structure, and was in turn influenced by the working of the agrarian structure. For example, it can be argued that the various revenue systems had their impact on the economy in general and on the agrarian structure in particular. Similarly, it can be argued that the elements of the economy and society conditioned the imperial policies.

In the initial stages of its rule, the Company followed a very cautious policy of recognizing the position and power of the local territorial magnates. One aim of the study is to see how the Company dealt with the Zamindars. A corollary aim would be to study the concept of the Zamindar and the Zamindari and the working of the Zamindari system in the region in all its ramifications.

The power of rural elites like Zamindars was often reinforced by economic and extra-economic privileges which they enjoyed. Of the many privileges that existed in the region, in fact in South India, the most common were Inam holdings. But apart from these Inam tenures, there were certain other economic privileges enjoyed by the privileged sections of the rural socie-
ty. One of the aims of the study 19 to examine these privileges and to understand the Company's attitude towards these concessions. If the Company had abandoned them what were the reasons or if the Company had allowed these grants what purpose did these grants serve? Which sections of the society did they benefit?

Besides these economic factors, there are certain non economic factors also which influenced the economic behaviour of the peasants and their social world. Another aspect to be analyzed in the study is, these dimensions of the agrarian world with an emphasis on aspects like behaviour, beliefs, rituals and customs of the peasants.

Another major aim of the study will be to analyze in detail the nature of the agrarian communities. In this context, the social dimensions of the community have to be particularly highlighted especially the role of caste. How different agricultural castes and their dependent castes were positioned in the complex social structure and how their relations were determined within the matrix of custom and tradition has to be analyzed. Besides these, several other social aspects concerning the cultivators like their costume, education, their settlements also need to be studied.

While the various revenue experiments that the Company conducted in the region had their effect upon the rural economy,
what has assumed special historiograph significance is the question of the impact of the so-called Permanent Settlement introduced in 1802. It is, therefore, necessary to analyze the Permanent Settlement in the district of Masulipatnam examining reasons behind its implementation and the consequences of the settlement. In Bengal, it is seen that the Permanent Settlement had created certain drastic changes in the rural structures and did initiate a regular revenue system. In this light, it would be interesting to see what the aspirations of the Company were in introducing a similar settlement in Masulipatnam. Did the Company find a rural society and economy similar to that of Bengal in the region? If not, what were the regional variations?

It was believed that the Permanent Settlement had changed the village administrative setup drastically. It is one of the aims of this study to study what the changes were in village administration in the region. How did it better the revenue systems, as this was the ultimate aim of the Company in effecting any system in the region, for that matter in any region?

The Regulation of 1802, it is believed, for the first time transformed the customary relations between the Zamindars and the cultivators into contractual terms through various engagements between the two groups. What did this signify in terms of the agrarian relations in the Masulipatnam region?
British policies, especially the land revenue policies created a land market where one had not existed before, for two reasons. Firstly, the dislocations resulting from the imposition of new revenue systems brought land onto the market. Secondly, new attitudes to land as property were created. One of the major aims of the study would be to see how the Permanent Settlement affected the land values. How did it create a market for land? Who bought the lands that were put up for sale? This question of who the buyer was, assumes critical importance in any discussion of the social consequences of the Permanent Settlement, especially because of the traditional assumption that the Permanent Settlement initiated a revolutionary transformation of rural society.

In the pre-anicut aararian world another major aspect of interest is irrigation. One of the aims of the study is to look at the indigenous irrigation systems and their organization and the way it underwent changes with the development of large scale irrigation networks later on. The irrigation systems in the Masulipatnam region like in the other Circars were controlled within a network of certain customary practices which determined the regulations regarding the distribution of water. Any slight breach in the existing arrangements led to water control disputes. These disputes certainly raise issues like why were there numerous disputes in the region? How were they settled?
Recently historians have began to specifically explore the impact of the colonial rule on irrigation systems of the region. These scholars suggest that the Company tended in the early period of its rule to neglect the irrigation facilities and that consequently such facilities fell into disrepair. There is an apparent paradox here, for the Company's desire to maximize the land revenue collections should have led to a concerted effort to improve irrigation. Why then did the Company neglect this important aspect of the agrarian economy?

The existence of direct relation between the prices of the agrarian products and the revenue policies and their consequent effects on different groups of the agrarian structure would necessitate a study of fluctuations in the prices of agrarian products and its immediate effect on agrarian economy as a whole. Another objective of the study would be to understand the links between the nature of the revenue systems and price fluctuations. How did the price fluctuations affect the different strata of the society and who were the main beneficiaries of such price fluctuations?

Markets and the trading groups played a crucial role in the agrarian world of the region. Not only did they link various elements in the rural structure but also connected different rural structures through their trading networks. At a higher level the markets brought the rural economies into contact with wider commercial networks. What were the major trading castes in
the region? what were the duties collected by the state on traders in the region? How were they collected? As there were no specific and regular markets on a large scale at the village level how the surplus grain was marketed by the cultivators is another question to be analyzed.

Another aim of the study is to analyze the impact of various economic crises on the agrarian community. For example, how did the famines affect various strata of the agrarian structure? What were the attitudes of these groups to famines, that is, in times of crises how did different strata of the social structure behave?

Another consequence of such economic crises was an increase in the crime rate. The common feature was grain robberies during such crises and Masulipatnam district also witnessed this. Were these grain robberies sporadic incidents or were they part of a more general increase of crime during the period? The economic crises affected various elements of the rural structure and more so those that were directly linked with agrarian world. The intensity of the impact and its nature on various groups of agrarian structure depended on their positions in the rural set up.

What was the attitude of the Company towards various economic crises that affected rural groups in the region? Did the gov-
ernment interfere as in the pre colonial period to alleviate the distress of the poor? Was the policy followed by the Company similar to that of the earlier times? What were the measures taken by the government to alleviate the distress of the subordinate groups?

The study also attempts to understand the colonial attitudes and the impact of colonial policies on the regional economy and society. It attempts to explore the complex patterns of socio economic base of the agrarian world in relationship with others. Several recent studies have suggested that colonial rule was not as powerful as it seemed to be and though the administrative policies of the Company were shaped ideologically at a higher level, the Company had to take the local reality into consideration in framing and adopting the systems. It is important in this regard to examine how the Company and its policies and the agrarian world interacted and how in turn their nature and working was influenced from each other? For instance, one of the received notions about the impact of colonialism on the agrarian economy of the region in the first half of the nineteenth century is that this period witnessed stagnation and decay. How far is this argument applicable to Masulipatnam?

This study is based primarily on Archival material. This mainly consists of unpublished manuscript records of the district of Masulipatnam which are available at the Andhra Pradesh State
Archives. Other important sources of information were various kinds of records catalogued under different department heads in Tamil Nadu State Archives, Madras. The published Mackenzie collections of Masulipatnam district have also been used. An attempt has also been made to utilize non-archival material such as folk songs and tales and contemporary literary sources and travellers accounts.

The use of the place names as they occurred in the records, on which the study is based, created a problem regarding the spelling of names, of persons and of places. Though we have tried to give the current names of the places wherever possible, it was not always possible. Some of the place names could not be identified. So wherever such a problem arose, we have retained the spelling as it was given in the records. But regarding the more common names we have adopted the modernized version. For example, for some of the places, in the records they were spelt as Bezoara, Noozed, Zamulvoy, Madoorgutoo. We have used the current spellings like Bezwada, Nuzividu, Zammulavayi, Medurgutta. Even the names of the villages, district, Zamindari officials were also modernized to the extent possible. For example, the names of Curnums, Desponde, Desmook have been changed to aranams, Deshpandes and Oeshmukhs.

Another problem was with regard to currency, and years. It would have been useful to have a common currency system throughout the study. Since conversion was always a problem it was seen
that in a particular table there was uniformity. Regarding the years the contemporary official sources used both Fusli years as well as the modern years. Hence, again, the original records have been followed. However, the corresponding modern year has also been given though it does not correspond exactly. The non English words were not underlined in the text as they occur too frequently.

However, the name Masulipatnam is used as it was used in the records. The name was not modernized to Machilipatnam, though the other place names were modernized. The idea of retaining the name of Masulipatnam was arbitrary. As during the period 1750 -1850 the region was popularly known as Masulipatnam and as it was also used in the official records and contemporary accounts the name Masulipatnam instead of Machilipatnam has been used.
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(24). For a detailed general account of the agricultural castes in South India, and their dependent caste groups, their social customs and traditions, see Edgar Thurston, Caste and Tribes of South India, 1-7, Delhi, 1975. While drawing heavily upon this exhaustive work, this study has also derived information from the records, census reports and literary sources.


(26). For an account of estates both Zamindari and Haveli lands being put up for sale in Masulipatnam and for the details of Permanent peishkash fixed on each estate, amount of arrears and the prices at which the estates were bought see table A 19.


