CHAPTER II

READ'S REVENUE SETTLEMENT

Pre-British Land revenue System

Hyder Ali's system of revenue collection was much the same in other native governments. He rented the country in large chunks to Amildars. They paid him regularly because the terms were favourable. Besides collecting the public revenue, they amassed large sums for themselves. Hyder employed numerous spies. On getting information, Hyder ordered the Amildars to his Durbar and stripped them of their extra money. He gave them a small gift and transferred them to another area to renew the same office.

Tippu altered every Civil and Military arrangements of his father, Hyder. He transferred the officers very frequently with new regulations. The military was under an officer called the 'Suddoor' and the civil under another called 'Assoph'. One of each was stationed at Krishnagiri and Sankaridurg.
Killadar's were under the Suddoor. He could neither appoint nor remove them without Tippu's consent. Likewise there were Tahsildars under Assoph who had the superintendence of the revenue. He could not interfere in the details of revenue. Tahsildars rented out the villages separately to the Gours or head farmers. Tahsildars received a small monthly pay. He should not derive any other advantage out of his official situation. He settled the revenue of his area by remitting the collection to the Assoph who sent the amount to Tippu's Treasury at Seringapatam.

The Suddoor and Assoph were directed to hold the cutcheris in the same hall together in order to make the transactions of the two departments public. But all these checks and precautions served only to diminish the revenue. In the beginning they quarrelled among themselves and sent complaints to the Sultan against each other. They soon realised that it was wiser to compromise among themselves and divide the public money. The Assoph and Suddoor with their cutcheris; the Tahsildars and their cutcheris and the head farmers as well as the village accountants appropriated their respective shares which were unofficially confirmed as their pay.
This amounted to thirty percent as average to the total collection of Tippu's Kingdom. It was more in some provinces and in some less according to the distance from the capital. The total collections were nearly the same under Tippu and the Company. The difference between the sum carried to the account of the Company and that of Tippu's treasury was ascribed to the difference between the personal character of Captain Read and of Tippu's Assoph.¹

Tippu sultan mainly concerned with the extraction of revenue to the maximum from the people of Salem. He followed a custom of theoretical basis of assessment. The Government-share of the harvest was converted into money at current rates. The village accounts of previous years were a check on the current year's assessment and collection. His lieutenants never bothered themselves with the details of the village accounts. They farmed out the revenue of a village to a local person who would offer the best terms to collect the revenue. In return the person was entitled to a percentage of the gross collections. So long as the stipulated sum reached the Mysore treasury the authorities did not question.
Much rent was exacted from the great mass of cultivators and less was entered in the government records by the Karnam or Patel in the country. There were a lakh of small farmers in Salem, but their condition was not better. Because there was no fixed rule of collection of revenue. There was no security for their properties. There was no end to such exactions. Every man who had anything to give must give. This was detrimental to the economy of the region as a whole. Tendency to hard-working and savings towards prosperity were totally discouraged. The people lived in constant fear of punishment.²

The demands of the former government rose high in proportion to the harvest. The ryot who produced a higher yield than his neighbours was subjected to imposition of arbitrary fines or surcharges on suspicion of being rich. As a result the ryots were ready to occupy more conveniently a greater extent of land badly cultivated at a moderate rate than to pay a greater sum of fines for a smaller area well cultivated.

Revenue administration under Tippu was not as good as that of the British. He followed village rental system of rent collection from the farmers.
The unit of collection was the whole village. The village-wise collection had its demerits. The patel and karnam of a village had the authority to collect rents from all lands. They maintained false accounts. The revenue servants and their relatives enjoyed the Circar lands. These lands were entered as 'inams'. Usually most of the lands under the title 'inam' were given to them free of rent. In some cases they were given for a lesser rent. Probably some of them might be residents in the country whereas others were not. In both cases they contributed nothing to the state exchequer despite full rent collection from the cultivators of inams.

Added to this, was the peculation of karnam and patels. Patel was the headman and magistrate with little authority. He was the chief medium of communication between the Government and the ryots. The peculations were the extra profit for the village officers. These were the extra burden on the ryots who could not escape from paying. A small portion of the extra profits was utilised for agriculture as an eye wash. The rest was squandered in pagoda-feasts and marriages. Otherwise they buried it in the fear of being called rich.
Some of the principal farmers paid very little. They acted as revenue officers not as cultivators. Some even threw their own rents upon the under-farmers and paid nothing at all. Because of this, the 1788-89 accounts showed that the collections were very low probably by the false statements of the Karnams.  

Tippu had not been long in the Baramahal. The administration of that region had been oppressive to the extreme. The renters pillaged the people by Uncivilized exactions. They were constantly getting the illicit gains. The Sultan in turn extorted from them great part of the gains. The renters were again driven to recoup themselves by further exactions. They took from all as much as they could get.  

The usual practice in this region was to collect the assessment on the dry lands in money and on the wet lands in kind. ‘Rent in Kind’ was the age old system and resembled barter system. This cumbersome system was exposed to fluctuations in the market value of the produce as well as fraudulent practices in collections. In the other case, money rent was nominally fixed and was neither registered nor accurately known.
Renter

The renter was either the money-lender or grain merchant. He made advances to the cultivators at the beginning of the seasons to buy seeds, implements and cattle; and recovered it at the time of the harvest. He cultivated his own lands and had no interest in the cultivation of others beyond squeezing from the maximum possible by way of advancing loans. He made the best bargains with the cultivators. Though the cultivators were grievously oppressed, they enjoyed one powerful method of defense. They did not deal with the renter individually, but bargained with him collectively. They distributed amongst themselves the burden of the total assessment. It was only in this way that they were able to bear the excessive burden of the land tax.6

After 1792

In 1792 Captain Alexander Read was appointed the first Collector and Superintendent of the ceded territory by Marquis Cornwallis. He was also nominated to the Military command of the troops in these areas. He took possession of different forts
and made the necessary arrangements. The village of Tirupattur was his headquarters.

The first and the foremost crisis that the British confronted was the problem of administration. Very soon he was directed by the company authorities to initiate a new land revenue settlement. Further they insisted that the new system should be based on the lease system which was widely prevalent in the region till then. 7

Quinquennial leases postponed

Of late, the Government favoured a settlement for five years with the ryots on fixed rates as practised in Bengal. This mode of settlement involved a prolonged enquiry as to determine the dues by petty farmers to patels. The demand for all the three divisions could not be finished even after 1792. Read did not carry out the order without getting detailed data to avoid any loss to Government. He correctly apprehended the gravity of the task and thought it was very imperative to survey the whole territory before that. He obtained permission for a survey and requested the Government to defer the introduction of the lease system until he completed the survey. As
his request was conceded, he ordered for an elaborate survey which was carried out by his assistants between 1793 and 1797. 8

Read's View

The orders of the Board of Revenue did not state specifically with whom five years lease should be made. Read studied carefully the renting system at close quarters. He found that it offered the renters great opportunities for oppressing the ryots. That would retard certainly the recovery of prosperity. Wars and oppressive taxation had already damaged the mechanism of agriculture. For they drained away the capital on which cultivation depended. It had not only become standstill but deteriorated. Fields were left barren. Otherwise they produced progressively less. Read's contribution to the solution of the problem was important. He recognized the duty of dealing directly with the ryot. Government owed the duty to its subjects. It should demand a tax and collect that tax itself from the subjects. There should not be any third party between them. 9
Read's Views on "Lease Settlement"

Read saw early enough the evils which might arise from the periodical disputes in lease settlement. After four years of experience he strongly believed that this kind of settlement was impracticable in Salem. The share of the produce taken by the Government was so large. Lease settlement, understood by that name in other parts of the world, was of different nature. Favourable terms to the ryots were essential to the establishment of a 'Lease settlement'. But the revenue might not be sacrificed. That meant nothing left to the ryots from which capital might be created. That capital was absolutely essential for a strict adherence to such agreement. An English farmer might be glad of his lands under a ninety-nine year's lease. But this country was then only less than nine years under the British rule. The people looked askance at the British as those who had come and gone before in quick succession.

Inams of village officers

Read found that most of the inams granted to village officers, had been alienated to persons who
had no claim to them. He ordered that all such inam to be resumed in Fasli 1206 (1796-1797). The village officers were paid a fixed allowance which was deducted from the land revenue. After sometime that was also discontinued. Read’s percentage remained the basis for calculating the salaries of village officers for many years after that.  

Read's ryotwari system

Read resolved to adopt a different settlement which practically annihilated the lease system. He sent a circular of Instructions for making future settlements to his assistants for opinion. As per this circular the ryots were given the option of keeping lands either under the lease system or under annual settlement. The latter mode of settlement allowed them to give up easily in each year the lands which they did not like to cultivate that year. They were to retain any number of years those lands they liked and to pay their rent. They should give their Fasli (Persian) season or crop. This term was used in the revenue department for the harvest year as opposed to the fiscal year. Fasli era started 590 years after the Christian era. Fasli 1202 corresponds with the fiscal year 1792-93. (Salem Cyclopedia, p.76).
wishes at the beginning of each year. His assistants Munro and Macleod stood for lease settlement as it was conducive to the permanency of revenue and the prosperity of ryots. Read did not get the approval of his superiors to implement his proposed mode of settlement. He was so sanguine as to the ultimate success of his scheme. On 10th December, 1796 he publicly gave his settlement to the ryots of Salem as their charter.11

Read not only detected the error but also had the courage to stem the tide of popular opinion. If leases had been established they had to enforce agreements. The ryots had not the means to meet. The country was not then ripe to carry out such a scheme. In his ryotwari system the rates of assessment remained unchanged. The prices fell materially. The Salem ryots nevertheless prospered.

He extended his original plan of dividing landed property. Many of the farms composing village lands were given to rent to the first and second class of ryots. By that means, they were relieved from a state of dependent servitude and extreme poverty. They became the proprietors of their own farms and were immediately under the Collector’s protection.
They were freed from the vexation of additional assessment of every favourable crop. Also the lease system for five years was partially carried out. But long before the five years had expired this system collapsed.12

**Tahsildars**

Read had to guard the ryots from oppression and in turn the ryots would create revenue for the Government. He subdivided the three divisions into Tahsildaris. Some earned ten and others more than thirty thousand pagodas. The Tahsildars took charge of them. They were mere receivers of revenue. They could neither raise nor lower the rent of a single individual. They decided only small affairs and referred property disputes to a court of arbitration. They received the 'Kists' (Land rent) from the head farmers and accounts from the village karnams to send them to the Collector of the division. Every man who paid a single rupee to government had the rent of his land fixed by the Collector of his division. The Collector had a roll signed by him with particulars about the nature and extent of it and the periods of payment. Every division contained over twenty-one thousand renters.
It was undesirable that the government should have no tenants but a few great proprietors. They would contribute nothing to the security of the revenue. They were more capable of intriguing and combining together to withhold their rents under various pretenses in unfavorable seasons and times of hostility. On the contrary, by adopting the system of collection to the condition of natives, the country would be filled with a multitude of small independent farmers. They were to extend or contract their farms according to their different success. This would produce, in course of time, various categories of rich and poor proprietors. At the same time big and small farms were created. Every man was free. Those who did not like to serve others, could set up for himself. The fairest chance and the widest scope was given for the industry and population. The people were themselves happier than they could be parcelled out among great landlords. They were also more easily managed. The Collector entered into engagements with them all. He was able to judge the state and resources of the country.

The ryots were poverty stricken. The lands ploughed were left waste the next day. The agricultural stock, was insufficient. Generally the
ryots drew from the land only the wages of labour. It was always doubtful whether next year they would be in the rank of cultivators or labourers. Few of them were so rich as to withstand the loss of one or two bad seasons. Others threw up a considerable part of their farms. Many ryots of the middle-class failed from the most trifling accidents such as a loss of a bullock or of a working member of the family. Even his confinement to bed in sickness disabled the ryot from paying the rent in the ensuing year. The land had no value in the market. These were the realities and reasoning on which Read deduced the impossibility of the lease settlement. 13

Concept of Private Property

Under Tippu the inhabitants did not feel secure. New demands always followed close upon their ability of payment. They would hoard their gains instead of employing them in useful way. The concept of private property, with the exception of movables, was widely unknown to Salem people. Even in the beginning of the British rule there was little knowledge about this kind of possession. Private property seemed to have been always as ‘inam’ from the sovereign. 14
The 'Patkat nilam' under ryotwari system

It meant the land on leasehold tenure, i.e. in modern parlance "patta land". Every field of the land was measured and valued. The assessment at the full rate was fixed for ever. The ryot had not to pay less or more than the fixed rate. Dry fields might be converted into wet thereafter at the expense of government, such as construction of tanks or cutting of canals. The rate would be proportionally raised according to the consequent increase of the produce and fixed for ever. The works of improvement afterwards at the ryot's own expense such as planting topes of palmyra, coconut, tamarind, mango, orange, lime or plantain trees; garden of betel-nut, betel-leaf, Sugarcane etc., should have the same fixed rates without any increase.15

The interests of the cultivator was safeguarded. The ryot under this system was virtually a proprietor with a simple and perfect title. He was also farmer and labourer on his own land. He had all the benefits of a perpetual lease. Read spread the kists over ten months of the year from August-September and ending with May-June. The percentage payable in the several instalments were 4, 4, 12, 24,
24, 10, 10, 4, 4, and 4. This arrangement did not long last and kistbundi underwent several fluctuations.

This was the first instance in the history of land rent collection of this region that the records were kept in original and copies were issued to the Tahsildars for collection. This was the unique step taken by the British to streamline the revenue collection in Salem district.

It was interesting to note that the personal health and strength of the ryot, the size of his farming stock, his small capital by his neighbour's estimate were all taken into account during the survey. The final figures showed an excess of 21 percent in the amount to be collected in Salem district. At first this seemed inexplicable. But the survey brought to light a vast area of cultivation in the hands of influential ryots under native rule and they paid no tax. Also, the favourites in the courts had a large extent of the country at concessional rates permanently. All these indulgences lowered the revenue. The survey assessment swept away all these except a few.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Officer</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>In fasli 1202</th>
<th>Survey Rs.</th>
<th>Actual Rs.</th>
<th>Increase Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macleod</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>5,12,489</td>
<td>6,99,516</td>
<td>1,87,027</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munro</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>5,28,806</td>
<td>5,45,694</td>
<td>16,888</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>2,66,319</td>
<td>3,44,953</td>
<td>78,634</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total of Central division when corrected by the survey showed an excess of 3.25 percent on the revenue temporarily fixed for the first year. The excess in the Southern division was more than 36 percent and the Northern division nearly 30 percent.16

The ryots were already ruling under heavy taxation under the native governments. Read imposed still higher land rent on them. Option was given to the ryots. The Revenue Board was ignorant of the changes introduced. The revenue of Fasli 1207 fell off to the extent of pagodas 54,049 below that of Fasli 1206. It was 20,000 pagodas less than that of Fasli 1202 the first settlement. This caused much sensation in the Board. They called for an explanation from Read for the cancellation of lease settlement.
The annulment of the lease settlement could be done only by the government. Read did it on his own accord without obtaining the required permission. The highhandedness and the arbitrary behaviour on the part of Read was commented by the Board of Revenue. His action was disapproved. It also directed to reconsider the arrangement he proposed for remodelling the system of remunerating village servants.

Read remained during the settlement of 1208. In the subsequent years annual settlements were fixed by the survey on the lands. The lease system survived to a very insignificant extent.

In October 1798 the war with Tippu broke out. Read and Munro were recalled to military duty. After the war (1799) neither Read nor Munro returned to Salem. Though Macleod remained behind in Talaghat, he never counted for much in the gradual development of Read's policy. There was no one in Salem to assert the merits of the system introduced by Read. The way was cleared for assimilating the policy of Madras to that of Bengal. The Zamindari system was introduced in Baramahal and Talaghat. 17
Read's achievement

The arable lands in the District were minutely surveyed. The extent of each field was accurately ascertained. The assessment was fixed according to certain rules. Each and all of these particulars were registered with care. In all the permanently settled villages of the Talaghat and Baramahal his measurements and assessments continued to the present day.

Read's method of assessment was of the greatest interest and importance. It embodied in embryo all the main principles of ryotwari settlement still in force in the Madras presidency. He evolved them directly from the indigenous system which he found in vogue in Salem District in 1792.

It was easy to find flaws in Read's work. The assessment was too high. It must be admitted that Read and his assistants erred. The survey and assessment had to be carried out by native agents. They could hardly avoid mistakes in the mass of details in making the classification of lands and settlement.
Criticism on Read's settlement

The well intentioned efforts of Read and his assistants failed. Their estimates proved fatal and remained a hindrance to progress and prosperity.

Referred back—a mistake

Read's great error was that he continually referred back to what the district had paid during Tippu's time. He made his results square with those of Tippu's administration. The precedent of a tyrant's rule was taken as a guide. Instead of that, Read should have ascertained the land rent in accordance with his own findings. The existing value of the land produce and the capacity of the land together with the ryot's offer might have been taken as the basis of his first demand in Fasli 1202. The assessment so arrived at should not be raised or lowered simply because it happened to be lower or higher than the rates previously in force.

The error committed by Read had pervaded the whole system of Revenue settlement since his time. His successors were continually arguing from the past to fix the land rent of the district. As Read referred to Tippu so the officers concerned in later
years referred back to Read. The land rent was too heavy until 1853 when Mr. Brett's 'Taramkammi' at reduced rates, was brought into force. It greatly alleviated the condition of the people. Read's settlement collapsed because it was excessive.

In still earlier times, Madura Province including a portion of Salem District was in the hands of Poligars. They paid to the local Viceroy only one-third of the revenue of their palayams. Out of this one-third the Viceroy had to pay the tribute to the king after defraying their own expenses.\(^1\)

The native governments had a loose system of revenue administration. The full demand was occasionally realized. The ryots had many opportunities of cheating the government of its dues with the connivance of the revenue agents. Under the more regular system introduced by the British, chances of evasion and peculation were less frequent.\(^1\)

**Good cultivator punished**

A field which could fetch high rent at one period might fetch low at another. It is not possible to separate the value of the land from that of the country as a whole. The assessing authority should be
so moderate. The ryot who made the most ordinary degree of cultivation might be able to pay the rent. A good and efficient cultivator could farm in a better way and his returns might be more than that of ordinary cultivator. In such instances the ryot might reap all the benefits of his extra labour and expense. If such a hard working ryot could harvest much more, it did not mean that he should pay more tax to the Government. This did not mean that his land was entirely different and far superior to other fields in the village. For the purpose or reckoning taxes, this should be treated on par with the remaining portion of the said village. A lazy and incompetent ryot would be continually falling in arrears. They might be more usefully employed as agricultural labourers than as an independent farmer.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{No option needed}

Sir Thomas Munro was of the opinion that the option given to the ryots to give up land annually at his will would result greater loss of land revenue. On the other hand Munro suggested a reduction of 20\% of the land tax to each ryot. He proposed this on the supposition that all the lands covered in the lease settlement were to be kept in cultivation. Read had
given the option of giving up or taking up whatever part of the land the ryots chose. Munro considered such an option as an equivalent for the proposed reduction. If rents were so high as to be oppressive, the collection would be difficult and occupy full of the Collector’s time. But if they were moderate, it would make the collection easy whether from a few great farmers or from many thousand small ones. The thing was to employ some more accountants.

Small farmers or Big ones

If the farmers held the same lands as before and the rents were the same, there would be no disputes however great the number of them except when they applied for remission. But when the country was parcelled out among great farmers many complications would crop up. The great farmers might be directed to enter certain specific form of agreement uniformly with their tenants. The endeavour to introduce this practice and the vigilance to keep it in force would eat as much Collector’s time as if the whole had been done in his Cutchery. In this district, it was not the number of small farmers, but the missing fixed system of management created workload for the Collector. Changing a part or a whole of it every
year and incomplete survey details were the hurdles. When a fixed plan was determined upon and the changes were at an end a system of small farms was no headache. However this was not a guarantee that failures would not happen in future.

Defective valuation

Baramahal included the taluks of Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Tiruppatur, and Uttankarai, under Read first in 1792. Then Hosur and Denkanikottai were added after the death of Tippu in 1799. In the Northern taluks there were so much waste and were taken at three quarters of the average rent of the village. But in Sankari taluk agriculture was better understood. There was no waste except utterly unfit for cultivation. The valuation of waste was too low in Northern taluks for the first and second years. At the same time it was very high everywhere.

The main aim was to make the ryots keep their fields under cultivation. This was not achieved by the higher valuation at the third year. The low rates of the first and second years tempted them to abandon the lands. Because of this, the total cultivation of the country was not increased. The waste required more labour and produced less. The gross produce was
also diminished by the difference between the produce of the relinquished waste and that of the exchanged waste. The public revenue also diminished by the difference of the full rent of third year and that of the half and quarter rent.

Again in most cases, the rent of the second year was high as that of the third year. Some ryots threw it up in the second year and all of them in the third year. It was impossible to bring the whole area under cultivation. 23

The system which caused the ryots to forsake productive for unproductive lands could not be a good one. Such a system introduced by the British in this district either totally prevented or retarded the increase of cultivation. First of all a good system should secure the cultivation of all arable lands and in the second place to accelerate that of the waste. The ryots were allured by the prospect of getting waste on favourable terms. They did not give up their arable lands unless they were really over-valued. If that was the case the right course of action was to lower the rents. The British did not think in that direction and went along insisting that all lands must be cultivated by one way or other. It seemed they were in a hurry to step up the revenue at any cost.
They committed an error by ignoring the bitter consequences caused by granting favorable terms for waste. The Regulations which would impede cultivation ought to have been abolished. Because it would be better that the whole of the waste should have been left barren than to be cultivated at the most trifling rent. A field assessed as waste, was under a ryot for two years and then abandoned. Another ryot occupied the same field for the first-year rent. In this case, the same field which fetched more in the previous year could get only half of that. There was possibility of less revenue for the Government. This could have been avoided if the classification of waste was handled in a better way.

The ryots of Salem district played a trick on the regulations imposed by the British. The ryots exploited the revenue system to their advantage. The fields abandoned as waste were occupied at regular intervals among the neighboring ryots themselves. This was a slight set back in Britisher's revenue management in Salem District.

At the end of the eighteenth century in Salem, there were a number of categories of land utilised for agricultural or pastoral purposes, of waste lands and of lands incapable of cultivation or set aside for
public or communal purposes. These categories reflected the profile of environmental types in the area at that time. They were indicators of Tamilian exploitation of local ecological conditions.

The important category of land was 'Waste' (tarisu) but more commonly called 'banjar' in the British records of the late eighteenth century. 'Waste' had always been a troublesome category to interpret from the records. Apart from that there were lands called 'porambokku' or incapable of cultivation or set apart for public or communal purposes. All such lands in a village were classified as waste. Many kinds of waste and fallow were included in this category. Over fifty percent of the total acres in the surveyed village lands was under 'fallow and waste' in the taluks of Attur and Namakkal. In these taluks it was customary practice to fallow lands lying at the bottom of the hills every alternate years. Some portion of waste were annually brought into cultivation and again after two or three years forsaken for fresh lands. According to Brian J. Murton, the classification of land in Salem district was erratic and led them eventually to inefficiency and mismanagement in collection.