



Review Paper

Land Administration and Social Change in the 19th century Colonial Coorg

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Abstract

In this article an attempt is made to bring out how tiny province, influenced the British, the impact of the commissioners' rule and the establishment of the Western kind of administration in place of the old native system, immensely contributed to bring about radical changes in local socio economic transition. The commissioners' rule had far reaching consequences not only on the economy and social structure of the Coorg, but also on the various system of land that were evolved during the rajah's period and continued during the colonial rule. The British Commissioners with the reception of a few showed great interests bringing about reforms in a small hill district; While they showed interest in changing the Political and Socio-Economic scenario, they also showed great concern in preventing the cultural and ancient practices and system that Coorg had inherited. In this way, Commissioners' rule in Coorg represents a contradiction in Colonial rule.

Keywords: Commissioners, Land, Coffee, Jamma, Sagu, Umbali and Jodi.

Introduction

Coorg came under the control of the East India Company in the year 1834. Colonial masters' expressing the 1834 as a result of the war, the peoples of the country unanimously accepts the British Rule in Coorg¹. The British started to hold Coorg 1850 onwards. The British change the necessary for the better administration of the province. And create six taluks and twenty four nads and again subdivided into grams or villages. Coorg covered area of 1585 square miles contains 508 Villages². The period can be conveniently divided into *three parts* making distinct stages of the development of the country under British control³.

The first stage roughly embraces the period convened from 1851 to 1865. This period is not remarkable for any striking changes the Coorgs however displayed their unquestioned loyalty to the British connection by aiding the Government to suppress the South Canara rebellion this conduct on their part elicited the warm approved of General Sir Mark Cubbon who in 1861 rewarded the people by exempting them from the operation of the *Arms act* then known as "the Disarming Act" a unique distinction which prevails till this day. In industry however a very important event took place in 1853. In that year European capitalists began to grow coffee and from its isolating and came into direct contact with the world markets. The advantages to the mental and material welfare of the community were incalculable⁴.

The second stage may be said to begin in 1865 and continued till 1900. This was a period of great organization. *The Judicial, Police, Revenue, Forests, Education* and other branches of the

administration were organized and brought into working order. The economic like of the people was entirely changed from what it was before. Trade developed and business concerns sprang up in the principal towns of the country. The activities of the Government are detailed below in sections on the lines of the memorandum issued by the secretary of state on some aspects of British rule during a period of 50 years ending with the year 1908. The third stage is one of consolidation based on the experiences gained in the past and represents the steady line of progress adopted by the people especially on the economic side. The detail changes introduced into the administrative machinery of the country and a comparison of the previous regime and made new necessary.

Coorg capture by British in 1834, thereafter for the requirement of administration and the establishment of colonial hegemony they introduced certain rules and regulation to maintain and protect themselves. Under the colonial rule, land revenue was of great importance and it occupied a pivotal position in the general administration of the country⁵.

The direct appropriation of administration collecting dues in cash or when it collected in kind but later converted into cash by the colonial state⁶; The colonial state used the system of taxation to secure its basic colonial needs-maintenance of the colonial administration and military structure, unilateral transfer of surplus from the colony to the metropolitan areas. It was not just a continuation of the old Coorg system of land taxation; the "old" system now replaced by "new" purpose. But the government officials had no hesitation in saying that land revenue was not taxable but the rent payable to the State⁷.

Historiography of Coorg

European writings on Coorg in the 19th century, stated with the missionaries trying to reconstruct the history of Coorg. The colonial writings like the administrative reports, manuals, Gazetteers and records are helpful to produce a good number of works on this region. The colonial masters express in defence of their conquest of the land and its people. *Captain Denis Mahoney*, the first Resident at the Raja's court was also perhaps the first historian of Coorg⁸. Rev. Moegling's *Coorg memories (1855)* and Richter's *Ethnographical Compendium (1887)* are the best examples of ethical writings of Coorg history. Connor's *Codagu Survey (1817)* gives a brief discussion about the land tenure systems and the society of Coorg. Cole's *Coorg Civil Law* deals with the problems of partition of ancestral lands, particularly the Jamma lands.

The Gazetteer of Coorg by G. Richter mentions that "British administration in Coorg underwent major changes such as revenue, police, forest, medical and education on this region". The *Hukumnama* written by A.J. Curgenvin (1911) gives some of the nature and infrastructure of land tenure of Coorg. The British administrators who were scholars in their own right, such as *Lewin Bentham Bowring (1869)*, *Richard John Meade (1870)*, *James Davidson Gordon (1878)*, *James Broadwood Lyall (1883)*, *Sir Oliver St John (1889)*, *Philip Durham Henderson (1892)*, *William Lee-Warner (1895)*, *William Mack worth Young (1895)*, *Donald Robertson (1896)*, *Sir Stuart Fraser (1905)*, *Stuart Edmund Pears (1925)*, *John de la Hay Gordon (1937)* and many others made detailed studies of the land tenure system of Coorg, their rights on land and their social problems brought out interesting writings and notes which even today carry great academic value and European writing creates the images as it is known.

Native writers took time to study the history of Coorg, at the end of the 19th century; they brought out their own theories, historical interpretations and traditional relation to land etc. The development of nationality many Indian and native writers took part to reconstruct the history of its own. A few works of Indian writers which were an attempt to look into the political, social and economic background of the Coorg. Nadikerianda Chinnappa's *Pattole Palame (1924)*, the land and peoples especially the Kodava community. M.N. Srinivas made an in depth study on "Sanskritisation" theory. L.A. Krishna Iyyar's the origin and culture of various groups of peoples in Coorg. The native writers of Coorg like K. Appaiah, P.M. Muthanna and recent writers like I.M. Muthanna, B.D. Ganapathy, K. K. Subbaiah, D.N. Krishnaiah and M.G. Nagaraj have made a comparative study of the changing society in pre British rule and post British rule.

Unpublished PhD thesis like, K.M. Lokesh, *Coffee Plantation in Coorg under the Colonial Rule in 1834-1947*, (1993) this work focuses on land relations and social changes in the province of Coorg and how a tiny hill region was influenced by the

European capitalist, early coffee plantation challenges and transformation in the history of colonial Coorg. T.P. Vijaya's, *Jamma System in Kodagu: Its Socio-Economic Dimension (1800-1980)* in (1993), defining the Jamma land system in Kodagu and the nature of various land tenures and their impact on the socio- economic structure of the Kodava community in Coorg. K.C. Mohan's, *Kodaginali Vasahathushahi Araniya Adalitha* (in Kannada), gives light on the land of forest administration and economic relation of British rule.

Pre Colonial Land Administration in Coorg

It is believed that the early land revenue system begins with the *dhuly tax* and it was the first voluntary offering made from the ryots to the Jangama or Lingayat priests who eventually assumed the government of Coorg⁹. When the priest became Raja he converted this voluntary offering to tax of 1 ½ of paddy and 9 annas, 8 pies in cash for each house per annum. Later on *dhuly bhatta* were converted into money payment or land revenue in Coorg¹⁰. Then they imposed a land tax separately.

In pre-colonial period two kinds of land taxes were imposed by Coorg Raj's known as "Nelloo Kanike" and "Hooloo Kanike" which continued till 1812. The process of land revenue was systematized by Lingarajendra II. In 1812 certain modifications took place in the early tax system. The system of revenue assessment kept in *Shist Account* was prepared in 1815 and bears the seal of Raja Linga Rajendra Wodeyar¹¹. "Hukumnama" or "Standing order" of Linga Rajendras explains the rules for the collection of Kandayam (land tax) in Coorg. The Coorg rajas during the period 1805-1816 carried out an elaborate survey of the lands in Coorg and made revenue settlement fixing the taxes and rents payable to the state by the ryots. This settlement was considered to be permanent and unalterable by the natives¹².

The physical features of land played an important role in shaping the nature and content of all major tenures. Coorg receives three kinds of tax; those are *the house tax, the plough tax, and the dhooly tax*¹³. The chief characteristics of tenure were first permanent and hereditary, second the assessment was fixed 5 for every 100 butties of land and was unchangeable and their land was to be cultivated by slaves attached to every proprietor¹⁴.

Coorg had four different kinds of land tenures those are *Jamma, Sagu, Umbali, and Jodi tenure*. Each land had its own identity. Land was granted to people who rendered services to the state, religious charitable and other purposes. *Jamma* tenure system throws light on the socio-economic changes in Coorg¹⁵. Then what is *Jamma*? It has been the "hereditary land" of Coorg. Richter defines that the word *Jamma* was originated from a Sanskrit word which mean's *hereditary by birth* it was held by privileged class called *Jamma* ryots. The history of *Jamma* assessment before the annexation of Coorg; *Jamma* was hereditary and the assessment on the lands were clearly fixed at half *Sagu* rates¹⁶. *Jamma* ryots had to do their work in wetlands

without pay. And some time *Jamma* ryots had to do free services in military and general services, polices, treasure guards and escorts of the state. *Jamma* and *Umbali* ryots paying revenue at reduced rates for their free service (*betti*) to the state. Ryots who did not wish to render free services or ordinary Ryotwari tenure of land hold on full assessment were known as *Sagu* land. Another important change in land matters in Coorg affected during the decade was the introduction of certain rules dealing with the settlement of *Bane* and *Hitlumanedalas*¹⁷.

Colonial rule in Coorg and Land Administration

In the British administration no existing changes took place in revenue system¹⁸. In the custom of the Raja's period attached to rice lands, the wasteland was given to the *warg* in order to supply the holder with the leaf manure, firewood, timber and grazing required for the service of *warg* such lands were known in Coorg "*Bane*" (in *Kanara* and *Malabar* were called '*Kumaki*'), That was a very little cultivation of these lands, so no separate land revenue assessment was imposed on such lands¹⁹. At the time of allotment of *Banes* coffee was unknown in Coorg and the *Bane* land had no special value. When Europeans entered Coorg as planters they introduced coffee in Coorg. They planted up their *Banes* with coffee wherever the soil was suitable and in many cases have occupied more forest to replace the old *Bane*²⁰.

In 1863's good number of Cardamom forests were converted into coffee estates. The many native people followed the European planters and opened up large coffee estates. Many Coorgs people began to acquire more and more *Bane* lands and purchase from *Sagu* ryots not for paddy cultivation but to cultivate coffee. Later it was converted into *Jamma* tenure²¹. Some *Bane's* (*forest land*) were occupied for rice cultivation and were converted as coffee estates. Therefore the nature of the Coorg society and tradition changed after the development of coffee plantation. The young generation of Coorg made use of the opportunity to become independent from the joint family and acquiring the lands on *Jamma* tenure under the registration in the name of an individual member. In 1863 Government planned to impose tax on coffee Plantation and the chief-commissioners of Coorg decided that ryot could cultivate coffee in his *Bane* land but should not exceed 10 acres. By the development of coffee, the superintendent of Coorg underlined the principles of assessment²².

In 1864 the government implemented new regulations to collect assessments. Hereafter Rs.1 per acre on the whole area from the 1st may 1864 rules for the first 4 years there should be no assessment and fifth to ninth year government had the right to impose Rs.1per acre and after 9th year Rs.2. In 1866 the government made an attempt to restrict the distribution of *Bane* lands and the extension of coffee cultivation. It stated that the ryots used to apply to *Bane* lands not to cultivate paddy but to set up coffee plantations. Consequently a new class emerged within Coorg society which acquired lands with or without the consent of the *Okka* (the Coorg joint family)²³. In 1875 Richard

Meade Chief Commissioner of Coorg ordered that those Coorgs who enjoyed privileged tenures were ordinarily exempted from paying any assessment on coffee cultivation²⁴. In 1882 W. Hill in his *Bane* rules for Coorg stated that *Bane* was given for the supply of forest produce and that no ryots should claim any privilege or right over *Bane* lands. For this in 1882 ryots and *Jamma* Coorgs, protested against the government acting and a petition to the Viceroy Ripon that at the time of transfer of this province to British Government assured the ancient rights, customs and privileges would be respected. According to that new *Bane* rule were "Unnecessary" administrations to the land tenure of Coorg²⁵.

In 1883 Chief Commissioners replied that *Bane* holders had violated every condition attached to the tenure²⁶. They had separated *Bane* lands from rice lands for the service to which they had been granted. The government succeeded in implementing the *Bane* rules and restricted the unauthorized coffee cultivation in *Bane* lands. In Madras Boundary mark act on XXVIII of 1860 the British Government was planning to carry out the survey of lands in Coorg. The official reason was that Coorg ryots were avoid paying revenue on land. 1871 H.G. Thomson Superintendent of Coorg disapproved the plan of survey of *Jamma* lands for political reasons. However in 1875 captain C.J. Van Someren the conservator of forest in Mysore and Coorg made suggestions to the Chief Commissioners that a survey of the lands in Coorg be carried out to check the encroachments. In 1876 Coorg planters association pointed out those thousands of acres which were occupied by ryots illegally. However the *Jamma* ryots supported the survey plans of the government for different reasons²⁷.

In 1878 they pointed *Bane* which lands did not show clear boundaries so they felt that a proper survey would completely define boundaries more clearly and prevent needless litigation²⁸. In 1878 R.M. Clarke the acting 1st Assistant Superintendent of Coorg pointed that Coorg ryots were in the habit of selling their *Bane* lands but they don't have legitimate rights to do. And he suggested that survey of land not only prevent the Coorgs from encroaching on government lands but it would most effectively put a stop to all "illegal sales of *Bane* lands". Haller the Assistant Superintendent of Land Records gave another report to the Commissioner a history of the survey and settlement details of the probable results. James Gordon the Chief Commissioner of Coorg reported craftily had obtained lands from the British Government under the *Jamma* tenure. But they did not contribute to fill the loss of revenue to the Government so he called to stop the acquisition of lands from *Sagu* tenure to *Jamma* tenure²⁹.

For all these reasons Governments of India pointed out that the land may be granted on *Jamma* tenure to Coorgs, for old waste land cultivation and of the *Jamabandi* for 5 years of upwards. In 1885 the first round of the survey was completed, J.B. Lyall the Chief Commissioner of Coorg recommended the government of India that the Bombay survey act with a few amendments

should be extended to Coorgs as it had been to Mysore³⁰. J.P. Grant Superintendent Revenue Survey planned to take up the survey of *Jamma Bane* lands after finishing the survey of *Sagu* lands. He hoped that the ryots would welcome the settlement as they had suffered more from undue revenue restrictions. In some cases revenue officials of lower rank did not co-operate in carrying out the survey in their villages. The state loses half revenue on all existing *Jamma* lands without obtaining any equivalent³¹. In this way the British government officially gave up the policy of controlling the land tenure system in Coorg. The land revenue settlement was completed by the end of 1895-96 and report was submitted in 1896³².

For this the total revenue of Coorg from all sources in 1834-35 was 1, 17, 021 whereas in 1890-91 amounted 8, 77, 027³³. In 1897 Donald Robertson the Chief Commissioner pointed that unfavourable to the introduction of higher Revenue demand. The elites of Coorg ryots began to submit a series of memoranda against the new settlement and the inhabitants of Coorg questioned the Government's authority to impose assessment on *Jamma* and *Sagu* lands. They argued that Government already unjustly taxed of *Bane* which had been granted "free of assessment". Now the poverty and poor economic condition of ryots made them unable to pay enhanced revenue³⁴. *Jamma* land holder Mr. Ganapathy urges the argument that the *Jamma* assessment was not originally fixed with reference to any obligation of service to be rendered by the *Jamma* ryots to Government but settlement made by the former Rajas of Coorg.

The *Jamma* assessment was fixed permanently at the rate of Rs. 5per 100 betti's (free) and he pointed out that there is nothing in the sands granted to the *Jamma* ryots to show that any conditions of service were attached to this tenure³⁵. *Jamma* ryots were dissatisfied with the unnecessary interference of the Government in their right of permanent settlement. The *Jamma* land tenure dividing the British rule and legalized holdings of *Jamma* lands secured during Raja's regime³⁶. In British regime 1876 and 1895 the *Sagu* lands were converted into *Jamma* lands and added them to the *Jamma Boomi*. Only the wetlands were considered as *Jamma* lands under the Raja's regime and this system continued under the British administration also.

Hereafter in 1895 British office stopped granting lands on *Jamma* tenure. Subletting is prohibited and *Jamma* lands are not allowed to be grant by sale or mortgage³⁷. Orders have been passed by the Chief Commissioner office; enforcing strictly *Jamma* riots have cultivated their lands themselves. When lands are sub let it is generally on the warm tenure half the produce to the owner who provides the seed and pays the *Kandayam* and half to the cultivation who has to provide the manner³⁸.

The features of land tenure in Coorg, the *Jamma* and *Sagu* are the main land tenure in Coorg. *Sagu* and *Jamma* holding by wargs, in only 41 villages out of 526, in 1,358 acres as against 74,922 acres under rice is the warg cropped with ragi. The

whole of the cultivable area in Coorg is very small. Out of 10, 12,260 acres in the province 5, 46,850 are forest and only 1, 36,619 acres are actually under cultivation. 74,922 acres are rice lands held as *Sagu* or *Jamma warg* only 1,657 acres are cultivation with ragi and other food stuff. In 59,787 acres under coffee cultivation almost on *Bane* lands. The difference between *Sagu* and *Jamma warg* are the *Sagu* tenant holds on ordinary ryotwari tenure paying the full assessment and the *Jamma* tenure intended specially for *Coorgs*, *Amma Coorgs*, *Heggades*, *Eimbokkalus*, *Airis*, *Moplas*, *Gowdas* and few others involves payment of only half rate of the *Sagu* assessment.

Every original *wargdar* had a right to the jungle within the area of the village and there *Banes* are entered with the vaguest descriptions of areas in the *Shist*. The original *Bane* attached to the *warg* became converted *Sagu Bane* into *Jamma Bane*. Under this process the Chief Commissioner states that land administration in Coorg has been very much in a weak position, when coffee became popular, *Bane* land acquired a new value. New areas were brought under coffee cultivation and development took place in coffee industries. The British made deep elucidation into the native system of landholding and made it impossible for the tenures to remain and continue as the British found them in 1834. Most privileged tenure became continuously subjected to changes and alterations by the new economic forces that entered Coorg. The new economic forces also ensured that the traditional stronghold of Coorg social unity cracked up, and many compromises were made it merely shows that the Coorg society did not remain stagnant in its idyllic world. It is interesting to note the role of woman in the social order of Coorg. A woman could not hold *Jamma* lands. But she can hold lands under the family settlement and it was controlled by her husband or head men of the family³⁹.

Conclusion

Under the British rule land revenue had an essential position. The structure of administration, the mode of assessment and collection was continued⁴⁰. Land revenue was not a rent but a tax which the peasantry has to pay in extreme circumstances. Hereafter no certain changes in the existing revenue system were introduced in Coorg. The first major change in administration was the abolition of slavery in 1843 A.D, the Imperial Government abolished slavery in all British colonies. It had a sweeping effect on land holders. Slavery as an institution was so deep roped in contemporary Coorg. But in the early year of the abolition, native did not face much difficulty. But the increasing cultivation of coffee, labour problem took place in Coorg. For that bringing labour from the neighboring regions to work on native farms increased the cost of living in the tiny province. The Superintendent of Coorg observing in 1864 that one side labour migration and *Bane* lands were converted into coffee lands.

When the British realized the certain development, introduces the *captain Le hardy's Jamabandi* and the fixed assessment in

accordance with the old *sistu* system. The preparation of *Jamabandi* registers (record of rights) for time to time supplement of land revenue. This system continued up with the introduction of summary land revenue settlement of 1896. The Chief Commissioner *William Mac worth Young* undertook a revenue survey in the year 1896. His report submitted in the year 1898 had the sanction of the government of India. This led to an increase of land revenue assessment. It is clear that the system of land tenure in Coorg was essentially *Ryotwary*. There were no middle men and each holder required to pay the land revenue directly. Full assessment was payable only by the holder of Sagu lands. They were not under any obligation of rendering free service to the government. The Sagu tenure comprised about 43 percent only. In the various land tenures in Coorg that about 1/3 of the area was assessment free. According to the report of Gustav Haller, in Coorg the class of tenants hardly existed and all lands were cultivated by the land holders themselves.

In Coorg tenancy based revenue settlement could not be introduced. Transport and communication were very limited in Coorg and out sliders could not settle down and extremes of climate. The value of agricultural holdings was also much less. In Coorg different rates of assessment and different descriptions or class of lands in other taluks came to be fixed. Orange was cultivated in large part of Coorg but no assessment was demanded. The extent of cultivated land and the total revenue demand settled with little variation from one area to another. According to a rule introduced from the year 1899. The land revenue could be paid in three installments at the rate and the summer crop was raised land revenue was allowed to be paid in four installments. In two of the major revenue survey and settlement cooperation conducted in 1896-97 and 1907-13 respectively the main intention of the government was not to increase its revenue but to assent its right to revise the existing structure of revenue and impose a new one.

It is also true that the social structure of Coorg society drastically changed. Coffee plantations and English education immensely change the face of Coorg in the last decades of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. British indirectly encouraged partition of ancestral property and Coorgs imitate the culture of the lingayats and Brahmins on the one hand and British life style on the other. In this way early transition took place in Coorg.

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