

## **BRITISH REVENUE POLICY TOWARDS MUNRO'S RYOTWARI SYSTEM IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY – A STUDY**

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As a result the Madras Government decided on the ryotwari mode of settlement in 1814 had its origin in Baramahal and Salem. The Court of Directors, who appointed a special Commission to inquire into and reform the judicial system in the two presidencies of Bombay, approved these with his other proposals and Munro who as a principal Commissioner from 1814 to 1817. He returned to Madras in the autumn of 1818 for the purpose of at once returning to England; but owing to the difficulty of obtaining a passage in a suitable vessel, he was detained until 24 January 1819, when he and Mrs. Munro embarked and touching at Ceylon and St. Helena reached England towards the end of June. On the completion of his tenure as a successful Principal Commissioner at Madras, Munro left for England. Sir Thomas Munro who came to Madras as governor of that province in 1820 and he issued orders for the final establishment of ryotwari system throughout the Presidency. The Ryotwari System made headway and the Collectors were encouraged to break up village lease system where over it existed and to enter into engagements with ryots separately.

### **Early Career of Munro**

Thomas Munro was born in Glasgow on 27 May 1761. His father, Alexander Munro, was a merchant trading chiefly with Virginia, and his mother was sister of Dr. Margaret Stark, a well-known anatomist of that day. Thomas was the second child of a family of five sons and two daughters; all of whom lived long enough to witness the growing reputation of their relative, whilst the greater number survived to hold it at its height. In his infancy a severe attack of measles caused partial deafness; to this deafness he refers in his first letter from India, and to the increase of it, as he advanced in life, he makes frequent allusion in the correspondence of his later years.<sup>1</sup> It rarely occurs that the infancy even of the most illustrious men, is distinguished by any event worthy of record and so far the infancy of Sir Thomas Munro followed the ordinary course of nature. He suffered indeed, severally from the measles, which attached him at an early age and affected him with a partial deafness from which he never afterwards recovered. Other than this there were no occurrences at this stage of his career, deserving of particular notice from his biographer.<sup>2</sup>

Young Munro received the rudiments of his education, first at an English Day School. Munro passed from the Grammar School to the Glasgow University, which he entered when he was about thirteen, remaining in it for nearly three years. At college he was

distinguished in mathematics and chemistry, and was besides a great reader of history and literature apart from his collegiate course. Evidence of his literary taste and wide reading is disclosed in many of his private letters, a taste which he kept up throughout his life in India, showing himself no mean critic of the current literature of the day. Among the books or authors named by his biographer as his favourites were Anson's *Voyages*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Spenser, Shakespeare, Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Hume's *History of England*, and the life of Frederick the Great made large demands upon him; and *Don Quixote* came then, as it continued to the last and especial favourite. Accounts of wars and of the tactics of generals afforded him peculiar interest.<sup>3</sup> The reward which he received for this he gave to his mother as his first earnings.

So far, indeed was his admiration of performance carried, that without any other assistance besides what a grammar and dictionary afforded, he made himself, at sixteen years of age, master of the Spanish language, in order that they might duly relish those beauties, of which he had been given to understand, he rose in the winter months several hours before daybreak, lighted his lamp and sedulously pursued it. At sixteen Thomas Munro was found a place by his father in the Glasgow firm of Somerville and Gordon to begin apprenticeship in the West Indian Trade. This was usual for merchant families of Glasgow, for he was to follow his father in business. There was no thought his education, his apprenticeship and his future as a Glasgow burgher would deviate from a well-established pattern in Glasgow. However, the house of which his father was a partner became embarrassed. The passing of the Act of Confiscation by the Congress of the United States led to its stopping payment, and the Munro family was reduced to comparative poverty. The father was now glad to accept for his son a midshipman's berth in the mercantile marine of the East India Company; but just before he sailed he was able to get it changed for a cadetship. Not being able to afford to pay for his passage, Young Munro obtained permission from the captain of the *Walpole* to work his way out to Madras as an ordinary seaman, and there he arrived. Accordingly, Thomas and Alexander were found places in the armies of the East India Company in Madras and Bengal; relief from grinding and humiliating poverty did not come to the Munro family until the middle 1790's.<sup>4</sup>

### **Division of His Life and Work**

Sir Thomas Munro's life and work in India may be divided into four periods. The first, from 1780 to 1792, was purely military, and during most of these twelve years he was on active service in the wars with Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. In the second, 1792 -1807, he was employed in the civil administration of the country: from 1792 to 1799 in the Baramahal, which had been ceded by Tipu; in 1799-1800 in Kanara, and from 1800 to 1807 in the districts still known as the Ceded Districts, acquired by treaty with Nizam in 1800. The end of the Fourth Mysore War relieved Lt. Col. Alexander Read of further embarrassment over the Baramahal and took him and his junior colleague, Munro, back into the field. For Read it was the last official position he had held before retiring from India.<sup>5</sup> For Munro it was the beginning of a transition from being a promising junior soldier-administrator to becoming

an authority on Indian administration. Canara had been at one time a very thriving country, filled with industrious inhabitants, more lightly taxed than those of any other Indian province. Munro's services in Canara were very highly valued. He had in a short time put down crime and uprising and substituted settled government. It was not an easy matter to replace him. But the management of the newly ceded country was a task not less arduous than that which Munro had accomplished in Canara and it would have been difficult to find another man equally qualified for it. Accordingly, it divided Canara into two, each under a separate Collector and appointed Munro as principal collector of the Ceded Districts.<sup>6</sup> The third period, 1814-1818, after an interval of six years in Europe, was spent partly in civil and partly in military duty. He was sent out by the Court of Directors in 1814 as 'Principal Commissioner for the revision of the internal administration of the internal administration of the Madras territories' - judicial and financial; and during 1817-1818 he was in command of a division of the army in the last Maratha War. He worked for eight years and left for England on leave. Again he returned to India as a Special Commissioner for the revision of the Madras judicial system, arrived at for St. George on 16 September 1814 and served four years in this capacity. He returned to Madras in autumn of 1818 for the purpose of at once returning to England. The fourth period, after a short visit to England in 1819, was that of his governorship of Madras from 8 June 1820, until his death on 6 July 1827.<sup>7</sup>

### **Introduction of Ryotwari Settlement**

The injurious character of the permanent revenue settlement coincided with the epidemic and the famine that ravaged the Madras Presidency till 1816 badly affected cultivation as well as revenue. Besides, the calamities exposed the defects of the permanent assessments and caused grave doubts about its usefulness. When the village lease system - an alternative arrangement failed miserably, the method of future settlement seemed to be a great problem in the administration of revenue. As a result the Madras government decided on the ryotwari mode of settlement in 1814. Many Madras officials led by Read and Munro recommended that settlement should therefore be made directly with the actual cultivators.<sup>8</sup>

In the ryotwari areas of Madras and Bombay presidencies, the mistake made in Bengal of creating a class of landlords was avoided and settlements were made either with individual cultivators or collectively with the village bodies of private property in land were introduced, and the cultivator with whom the land revenue was settled was recognized as the proprietor of the piece of land for which he assumed the responsibility of paying land revenue.<sup>9</sup> The ryotwari system introduced in 1814 had its origin in Baramahal when Baramahal was ceded to the English. Colonel Read was made the Collector of that place. He was asked to proceed with the quinquennial system. During the first two years of the administration the districts were under the renting system on Annual tenures. To protect the ryots Col. Read instructed the village headmen to issue pattas or contract documents to the ryots in the villages. Already the ryotwari settlement was first adopted in the Baramahal country by Colonel Read and was followed up by other Collectors who had served under Colonel Munro, Captain's Macleod and Graham and Mr. Hurdis in the districts of Dindigal

and Coimbatore, in the province of Canara and in the ceded districts.<sup>10</sup> Munro's ryotwari settlement of the land revenues of Tamil country, a settlement made directly with the cultivators and dispensing with middlemen was of the abiding memorials of Colonial administration. When the assessment for each individual owner was fixed separately, there could be no question of joint ownership of the village. The ryotwari system was introduced not only in North Arcot, South Arcot, Tiruchirappalli, Nellore, and Coimbatore, Tirunelveli and Madurai but also "in the estates which had reverted to the government owing to the failure of the zamindars".<sup>11</sup> The government was to into a settlement with each ryot directly with regard to the rent that he had to pay. After a serious of experiments with the different forms of revenue administration, the English decided in favour of the ryotwari system.

The Ryotwari Settlement which was following introduced in the circars and in the estates that were taken over for arrears of revenue in Madurai district in 1814. It was come into force in the nine permanently settled areas of Madurai. It was come introduced in Chingleput district in 1816 and F.H. Ellis, the Collector of the town of Madras selected the village of Vayalur in Ponneri Taluk and experimented it. Contemporary, Cook, who was the Collector of Chingleput made a similar experiment which mostly failed in Manimangalam. However, Smalley, the next Collector was directed to proceed with the Ryotwari Settlement the remainder of the district.<sup>12</sup> It should be recalled that the ryotwari system had its origin in Salem and Baramahal District. It was introduced by Col. Read, the officer appointed to take charge of that region on its cession. Col. Macleod and Col. Graham assisted him. The ryotwari system was thus introduced in the ceded District by Col. Munro when he became Collector.<sup>13</sup> The experience he had gathered under Col. Read in Baramahal enabled him to effect survey of this extensive province in a satisfactory manner. Under the system, the tax was collected from the ryots directly by the officers of the government. The *pattas* were given to the ryots duly authenticated by the government denoting the rent payable for their holdings.<sup>14</sup> The major difference between the ryotwari system and the permanent zamindari settlement was that in the ryotwari area rent was for the area of cultivation, while in the zaminadri areas the duty of collection was entrusted to private individuals called zamindars. They acted as intermediary agents between the government and the ryots. Moreover, the ryotwari ryots paid rent to the government based on the survey conducted and settlement done. The revenue was collected by a number of district servants, instead of being paid to the zamindars. The assessment was based on a permanent rent fixed on each field and liable to remission annually without a fixed and invariably stipulated revenue. The waste land was brought under cultivation which gave an increase of public revenue.<sup>15</sup> In the case of the zamindari tracts the fixations of rent was at the pleasure of the zamindars and the extension of cultivation in waste land augmented their income.

The ryots were given the freedom to take up such lands that they needed and given up others. It was also decided that the settlements should be made in all cases with persons who had a hereditary prescriptive right on other holdings and to reduce the rates whenever there was an over assessment. However, it must be pointed out that all land belonged to it, that the peasants were mere tenants who paid not tax but rent and the people hired just for

supporting a foreign government. This approach based upon Islamic tradition violated the Hindu concept had land belonged to those who tilled it. In 1815 the most positive orders directing the discontinuance of rents and the introduction of ryotwari system, reached the Madras Government, and in 1817 a definite trial was made to introduce at a ryotwari settlement. In 1818 on the recommendation of the Board of Revenue the ryotwari system was improved.<sup>16</sup>

### Implementation of Ryotwari System in Different Districts

Meanwhile, the Board analysed the report on Nellore. The Collector of Nellore had selected the village of Covoor for the experimental implementation of the Ryotwari system, after survey, classification and assessments of lands, as early as 1818; and the proceedings of Board of Revenue showed new assessment was originally, made and how it was subsequently modified. In the case of wetlands, "the grain was valued at twenty rupees per candy, being the average selling price, gave Rs.34,374, from which the usual *calavassum* or six and a half per cent, or Rs.2234, being deducted, there remains to be divided between the circar (state) and the cultivators Rs.32,139". The proportion allowed the cultivators being nine in twenty, or forty five per cent, comes to Rs.14,462; and consequently a sum which remained receivable by the circar or State in Rs.17667. For dry lands, "the dry land and garden produce being estimated upon similar principles, and valued at twenty eight rupees per candy, the share which remained to Government was, for dry land loans, Rs.678, for garden Rs.205. The cultivators objected to the Collector's calculations and the selling prices of grain which he had assumed. Some deductions were allowed and the Board came to the conclusion that the estimated amounts of the annual revenue of Covoor will be in round numbers about Rs.15,600". In other words, about one half the estimated produce of the village was demanded by the State as its revenue under the new system.<sup>17</sup>

Same method was repeated from the once we flourishing regions of Baramahal. However, the ryotwari system provided an economic frame that was different from all old system of land tenure. This new system influenced the factor of production and distribution of wealth. In Baramahal a great part of the land most suitable for cultivation was left to fallow. Poverty prevented the ryot from making the land productive and high assessment deprived him of the fruits of his labour. Attempts were made to improve agriculture by introducing new commercial crops. The cultivation of indigo and potatoes were introduced. Abe Dubois reported that he saw that there were good possibilities of agriculture in Baramahal. The cultivation was extended in different parts of the country and as a result the economic condition in some rural areas was developed and economic activities expanded.<sup>18</sup>

In Tirunelveli the ryotwari settlement was implemented with translations of the original instruction given to the servants employed in the survey and adjustment of the lands in the district. In 1817 it made a draft of the proposed ryotwari regulation and on 5 January 1818, recorded its minute on the settlements in Tirunelveli District. The Court of Directors however, finally affirmed the ryotwari system. The Tirunelveli Collector John Cotton asked the president and member of the Board of Revenue, to select a village to



introduce the ryotwari plan of adjustment experimentally. On 29 July 1818 Collector John Cotton reported on the survey, classification and adjustment of the lands of the village of Perungalam that was selected under the records of the Board for the experimental introduction of the ryotwari settlement. The ryots absolutely declined to accept the arrangement that was fixed at a figure of twenty five per cent below the average rate of decennial leases. Secondly, the *kavalkars* were required to make good the value of all stolen properties.<sup>19</sup> The total extend in acres of all the lands of the village including *poromboke*, *circarand inamland* was 8608-2-0 and following settlement showed the extent of *circar* cultivation and waste lands:

Usually Cultivated	Waste for many years	Total
Acres grant sq.ft.	Acres grant sq.ft.	Acres grant sq.ft.
Nunja 951-13766	152-17325	1,103-31-2
Bahayat 121-161.....	49-2-573	170-2-832
Pongag 4864-31-396	849-13-693	7514-5.....
Total 5937-5334	1053-33-502	6987-38-836

(Source: Board of Revenue Consultations, Vol822, 10 May 1818, p.3817)

John Cotton, after introducing the ryotwari settlement in Perungulam, made attempt to introduction in other parts of the district villages. On 15 November 1819, the several objections in the ryotwari settlement in the wet land of Tirunelveli came to the notice of government. These attempts were made to fuse the experiment of ryotwari in the villages of Srivaikundam, Vellore, Tentiruperi, Tenkasi, Shermadevi and Kilpidagai; but it met with determined opposition from ryots. At this time, Tirunelveli severely suffered due to the existing lease and *amani* system.<sup>20</sup>

In Tiruchirappalli a village was selected by the District Collector and was measured and assessed after the classification of soils. The estimated gross produce, after the usual deductions, was 5816 *collums*, "this being divided between the circar and the inhabitants at the usual rate of *warum* fifty per cent leaves as the circar's share 2908 *colums*, which being commuted at the average price of the last three years, as recommended by the Collector, amounts to Rs.3,232". Certain further deductions and additions were made, and the revenue fixed upon was Rs.3211. One half the produce of the soil, levied as land tax, was an impoverishing taxation; but the Madras Board was slow to reduce their demand even to one-third, while they still professed moderation. They said, "cannot be considered as a standard for a general assessment to be valued and paid in money, it may nevertheless serve as a guide to direct collectors to moderation". With one-third of the gross produce they could not be considered as a standard for general assessment to be valued and paid in money. It served as a guide to the District Collector to moderation. In the case of wet lands generally, the rates of assessment that prevailed in the district prior to British administration were continued.<sup>21</sup>

In the Ryotwari Settlement in Coimbatore District, evils of a gross corruption were added to the evils of a cruelly excessive assessment. A Commission was appointed to

inquire into these abuses, and they reported from his first appearance upon the scene, "directed his attention constantly and anxiously to the converting of every person and everything in the country to the benefit of his private trade". Collector Garrow was suspected to be equally corrupt, and the Court of Directors wrote indignantly in 1821 to Governor Thomas Murno about the prevalence of corruption and abuses. In another letter, written in the subsequent year (1822) the Court of Directors gave details of the over-assessment in Coimbatore apart from its oppression from corrupt motives.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the assessment was maintained at an impossible rate, and as much of it was to be taken from the cultivators from year to year, as they could possibly pay and complied from the village accounts preserved by an old *karnamor* village account in the Coimbatore District.

In South Arcot District the Collector of Nellore selected the village of Cavour for the experiment introduction of the ryotwari system after survey, classification and assessment of lands. The proceedings of the Board of Revenue showed how the assessment was originally made and how it was subsequently modified. In the case of wetlands the grain was valued at twenty rupees per candy, being the average selling price at a total of Rs.34,374,<sup>23</sup> from that the usual *calavasam* on 6 ¼ per cent or Rs.2234, being deducted; these were divided between the circar and the cultivators for Rs.32139. The proportion allowed the cultivator being nine in twenty or forty five per cent which comes to Rs.17667. For dry lands garden produce was estimated upon similar principle and valued at twenty eight rupees per candy, the share that remained to government was for dry lands of Rs.678 and for garden at Rs.208.<sup>24</sup> The cultivators objected to the Collector's calculations and the selling prices of grain that he had assumed. Some deductions were allowed and the Board came to the conclusion that the estimated amount of the annual revenue of Cavour village in round numbers of about Rs.15,600. In other words, about one half the estimated produce of the village was demanded by the State as its revenue under the new system.<sup>25</sup> The same situation existed in Arcot. The Board in conformity with the suggestion of the Collector, made another proposal for reduction of the assessment. The Collector and the Board of Revenue were unwilling to acknowledge their assessment. They declared the assessment as high of the exhausted state of the country could be realized in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, through the harshness of local officers and the grant of the Court of Directors. To the credit of Thomas Munroe, he strove all through his seven years of his administration to lower the assessments and he did succeed in lowering them throughout the Province. Following the implementations for Dindigul regions, the Collector had proposed for introducing ryotwari settlement for Madurai region also. The ryotwari settlement was established and introduced in all circar lands in Madurai district. In the districts of Madurai and Dindigul cultivation was extended by distributing increased number of *pattas* among the ryots. In Dindigul the wet land was assessed at a higher rate than in Madurai and Coimbatore. The result was that all these lands, which from their high assessment could be considered the best were thrown up and the ryots cultivated lowly assessed but poorer lands. Yet the irregularities caused by faulty survey and over assessments remained unmoved throughout and when it was combined with the corruption of the officials, they harmed the people greatly.<sup>26</sup>

The Ryotwari Settlement was introduced in all *circar* lands in Madurai District and in the estates that were assumed for arrears. In fact, the permanent or zamindari settlement was there in existence in the twelve estates and fourteen *palayams* of Dindigul, ten *palayams* of Madurai, six *palayams* of Manaparai and in Ramanathapuram and Sivagangai zamindari. In the rest of the lands in the district, the ryotwari system came into operation from 1821. The system was adopted in all the estates whenever they were attached for arrears and later on extended to the estates that the Government purchased when they came up for sales on account of default. The Court of Directors were convinced that the interests of the State as well as the agricultural classes could be secured best only under the ryotwari system. They therefore ordered that in all the districts in the Madras Presidency, the ryotwari settlement should be implemented. However, it cannot be denied that the ryotwari system established a definite and more intimate contact between the Government and the people. The frequent tours enabled the English officials to learn more about the customs and habits of the people. During the Munro's Governorship, the ryotwari settlement became the rule by which most governing powers were centralised and retained by the Government. The system, hence, generally became desirable both for the Government and the ryots. The improved system known as the modern ryotwari system, continued to operate till date. Consequently, the Government acknowledged the need for the final adoption of a fixed and permanent assessment. Yet the practical case of the ryotwari settlement was selected after much discussion. It was finally introduced in all places except the areas under the zamindari system.

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