

Land Revenue in Ancient Karnataka



History

KEYWORDS :

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture was the source of wealth for states' and individuals; land was the main source of revenue in ancient India as well as Karnataka. The early Indian works like Dharmasatras, the Smritis, the great Epics and the Arthashastra give us a complete picture of the land revenue and associated subjects. Inscriptions, being contemporary records, which constitute the most reliable source of information to write about the land revenue. Land revenue differed with different dynasties at different times. Land taxes which were existing in ancient Karnataka were Baga, Kara, Udaranga, Uparanga, Uparikara, Danavanda, Aravana, Antaraya, Holadere, Bannirke, Dhanyaya etc. Agriculture, as a main occupation, it prospered the ancient life. In ancient Karnataka, it was as much a land of innumerable populous villages. They were more especially the agraharas which were centers of economic activities, were richly endowed with natural vegetation, perennial water resources and fertile soil, and largely utilized by the residents of the villages to ensure their economic prosperity. Thus the revenue administration of the times still continues to be fertile and virgin field for the scholars to explore. This paper is an attempt to make analyze the land revenue in ancient Karnataka.

Introduction:

Agriculture came to be practiced when man gave up his nomadic habits and settled in favourable climate and topography. Initially depending on wild roots, fruits, and seeds for his sustenance, man eventually adopted the practice of tilling the land to grow crops. The process of evolution from the nomadic to the farming stage was slow, and the ancient man undoubtedly had to learn many things by trial and error. From the coarse elementary stone implement was developed the ploughshare to till the soil. That crops would respond to the use of manure like cowdung or decomposed plant material perhaps dawned on the ancient farmer only by chance. Animals were initially killed for their flesh and skin, but it came to be realized that they had uses for farming as well. Thus began the domestication of animals. Although it has not been ascertained when the early inhabitants of India took to farming as their chief occupation, the practice of agriculture has been traced back to the Indus valley civilization. Thus, for at least the last 4,500 years the Indian society has been primarily an agricultural one. The variety of topography and climate of the subcontinent has afforded a great diversity in the crops cultivated in different regions. Moreover, the country possesses vast arable land. Indeed, India's agricultural wealth in terms of variety and production has significantly influenced the course of her history.

The Indus valley civilization was one of the earliest civilizations of the world. Agriculture, besides being extensive, was the corner-stone of its economy. The soil of the valley was alluvial and fertile. Although no definite information is available as to the actual method of cultivation in vogue in those days, it seems likely that a toothed harrow, which is apparently depicted on one of the Indus script ideograms, served the purpose of the plough. The discovery, again, of some stone implements 'much too heavy to have served as weapons' suggests that these were ploughshares 'quite efficient in the stone less alluvial soil of the Indus plains'. Two incomplete curved blades of copper recovered from Mohenjo-daro were probably used as sickles for harvesting purposes. The discovery of charred rice grains at Rangpur and Lothal in Gujarat suggests that rice was used in India around 2000 B.C. This is the oldest record of the use of rice in the world.

In the Vedic period agriculture was the chief occupation of the people. The term *krisi* (ploughing) occurs in the Rigveda quite a number of times, indicating their familiarity with cultivation. It continued even today with great importance.

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Soil and Crops

The village was the backbone of rural economy. In the rural economy land and agriculture occupied most important place. The cultivable was generally divided in to Dry land(Veddalu), Wet land(Gadde) and garden(Tota).

Usually crops like jowar, wheat and cereals were grown on dry land. Rice, sugarcane was grown on wet land and fruits, vegetables and flowers were grown on garden land. The revenue settlement was not the same on these types of land. Distinction was also made between the lands on the basis of fertility of soil, while fixing tax. We can classify taxation system in to two types depending upon the person who levied them, one is the central taxes, which were levied by government or king and another one is local taxes, which were levied by local bodies, where as land tax is a central tax. Inscription being the contemporary records constitute the most reliable source of information for the study of land revenue system.

Many literary works give vivid description about this: The Manu Smrit refers to *kara* and *bhaga*. According to him state demand should be in between 8% to 16% and the king was entitled to take a 6th part of produce. He further states that the term 'Bali' means king's grain share.

The Arthashastra, a systematic account of the heads of state revenue gives innumerable information on agriculture, taxation and the treasury. The Arthashastra refers different scales on the land revenue, types of soils, irrigation, crops etc. the land revenue occurred on the basis of the fertility of land. It also refers that the state's share is 1/6th of the produce and during financial emergencies it was raised to 1/4th or 1/3rd. The Arthashastra includes 'country part' (*rastra*) as the following Sita was the produce of the king's farm, while the *Bhaga*, the king's share of the produce, the *Bali* was the king's receipts from begging *Kara* the periodical taxes.

Sukraniti, the later medieval work follows the general trend of agricultural policy that is lead on Hindu technical literature on polity. It advocates instance remission on land revenue for improvement and reclamation. It also lay down that kings grain share was as follows river irrigated land 1/2, tank irrigated land 1/4th, barren land 1/6th, and it refers to the usual tax in cash(*Rajbaga*). An encyclopaedic work of 12th century A.D., The *Manasollasa* recommends the king should extract 1/6th, 1/8th, 1/12th of the crops and that these rates should be applied according to the yield and the types of soils.

Types of Revenue

Baga

Literally the term *baga* means 'Share', which was the part of state income or revenue. The *baga* may be rightly taken to be the king's customary share of the produce levied on the ordinary revenue-paying lands. It occurs in the records of Karnataka eg: *rajabhaga*, *dasabandha* occurring in the *Bennur* grant of *Krishnavarma II*, says that the king's share. *Bhogabhagakara* occurring in solitary instance of *Somangada* plate of *Rastrakuta Dantidurga*.

Kautilya stated that normally the king's share took 1/6th of the produce from land on its share and during financial emergencies the state's share was raised to 1/4th or 1/3rd. *D.C. Sarkar* concludes that *Baga* was also collected at the time of *Satavahana* records which indicates the sixth share of the agricultural produce.

Kara

The term *kara* in *Arthashastra* is supposed to mean taxes paid in cash. To *Ghoshal* *kara* seems to be a general property tax levied periodically. During the early *Chalukya* and *Rastrakuta* records appears to have been mentioned. There are inscriptions which reveal that the term *kara* would mean nothing but the land tax. The *Sorab* grant of *Vinayaditya* dated 694 AD records the grant of a village free from *karasince* in village land revenue was the only major source of income, *kara* here might have stood for land revenue. An inscription from *Gadag* register grant to a village along with *sulka* and *kara*. A record at the time of *Chalukya Jagadekamalla II* dated 1140 AD registers a grant of land and house tree of *kara* and *sulka*.

D.R. Das states that the absence of reference to *baga* in the *Satavahana* records need not lead one to conclude that there was no land revenue system during the *Satavahana* period in *decan*. Further *karu*, *kara* and *deyameya* occurring in a *Satavahana* record *Senart* says that they were the same as *dhanyahiranyadeya* of the later records and interprets it as the king's share in kind and cash.

Udaranga

The records of *Chalukyas* of *Badami* and *Rastrakuta* that requires to be reviewed in the contexts *udaranga*. *Ghoshal* interprets the *udaranga* as a similar impost levied from temporary. *A.S. Altekar* stated that *udaranga* stands for normal land tax of the government. '*Dranga*' is used in the *Rajatarangini* in the sense of collection of duties, but *Altekar* said that the term *udaranga* cannot be connected with the word *Dranga*, he further said that *Dranga* means frontier town in *Rajatarangini*. In *British museum copper plate grants of Pulakesin I*, *udaranga* occurs as source of revenue. Another *Chalukyan* record also refers *udaranga* as tax.

Uparikara

The term *uparikar* which is explained by many scholar *Fleet* interprets as tax levied on cultivators who have no proprietary right in the soil. *Sircar* refers to that in *Sanskrit*, *Bengali* and *Hindi* *upari* means upon or extra and it would have been taken an 'extra-cess'. *Gupta* identifies *uparikara* was an additional tax.

Altekar's attempt to equate *udaranga* and *uparikara* have been nearly identical with *bhagakara* and *bhogakara*, since *bhogakara* is further shown to be identical with *uparikara* and *udaranga* has to be equated with *bhagakara*, which has been shown to stand for the normal land tax of the government. The two *gadyanas*, which the villagers of *Tuppad Kurahatti* had to pay for the remuneration of the country *gavundas*, was a tax on land which had to be paid over and above (*upri*).

Siddhaya

The main item in land revenue during the period of 9th to 16th century was generally designated on *siddhaya*, it was an annual levy on agricultural and other land. The term *siddhaya* is compound of two terms *siddha* and *aya*. *Altekar* translated *siddhaya* as fixed revenue and he gives example of the *Tuppad Kurhatti* inscription of *Krishna II*. *D.C. Sircar* says that it was an agricul-

tural income. An inscription mentions *siddhaya* includes taxes on *areca nut* and all other income, and records say that it was levied on shops also. Another epigraph from *Munavalli* dated 1222 AD of *Yadava king Singhana* records the grant of *siddhaya* on the *betel leaves garden*. Sometimes the tax levied on entire village, where the entire amount was paid to *Brahmanas* for maintaining the *agrahara*. It was generally collected in both cash and kind. *Affixes* like *purva* (earlier), *modalu* (original) clearly show that *siddhaya* was subject to revision, which means an initial assessment probably this was first assessment when the land was cultivated for the first time.

Dasavanda

Besides the regular land from the cultivator were expected to pay a variety of additional taxes on their land. *Dasavanda* was one of such demands. It is the corrupt form of the term '*dasabandha*', which was used in *Arthashastra* and it means the share of 1/10th of the production given by the land lords to cultivator or to the laborer. Modern scholars also have interpreted the term *dasabandha* in a number of ways. *K.A. Nilakanta Shastri* says that the term stood for marking 1/10th of the income for a specified public purpose. According to *Saletore* and *B.L. Rice* *dasavanda* was a rent free land granted for building or repairing a tank on condition of paying 1/10th of the produce. *M.V. Krishnappa* referred the term as 1/10th of the income from the land.

The *kannada* equivalent of *dasavandha* was '*pattondi*', which means 1/10th of the produce this term occurs in the earliest *Kannada* inscription from *Halmidi* of 450 AD similarly '*aiydon-di*' refers the fifth portion of the produce of income.

Aruvana

Aruvana was small customary levy from the agriculturists. *D.C. Sircar* takes it to mean the tax of six *panas* levied on many lands. It becomes clear from inscriptions that five *gadyanas* had to be levied six *mattara* of land for twelve *mattara* of land on *gadyana* and three *pana* for three *mattara* of land *aruvana* had to be paid. Similarly *Muttagi* inscription of the *Kalachuri king Sovidevea* dated 1165 AD records the grant of eighteen *mattara* of land as *aruvana* land to god *Chennakesava* of the place. From these examples it is clear that the many lands were expected to contribute something towards state treasury. An inscription from *Konnur* states that the donees might enjoy the grant after paying six *gadyanas* to the king as *aruvana*. Here *aruvana* tax is mentioned as six (*aru*) *gadyanas*. *Aruvana* is probably divided from *aru+pana*. It might also have been derived from *are+pana*, means half of a *pana*.

Antaraya

Yet other minor tax which agriculturist were required to pay was *antaraya*. It might be the same as *antakara* of the early *Kadabas*. The *Kudgere* plates of the *Kadamba ruler Vijayashiva Mandhatrivarma*. *Antakara* which has been translated as internal tax. In an inscription dated 1071-72 AD prescribed that two *kasu* should be paid for each plough on account of the tax known as *antaraya*. Scholars say that it might have been the professional tax levied on agriculturists.

There are some of the terms used in the inscriptions relating to agriculture taxes. They are; *Dhanayaya* was another land tax which was collected in kind. The term '*dhanaya*' means grain. *Bannirke* and *Holadere* both taxes levied on garden and wet land. *Kattashi* and *Karuneniger* perhaps land revenue in the time of the *Seunas*.

Many of the inscriptions give different types of taxes. In many cases we failed to give definite meaning of the terms. Land revenue in ancient Karnataka was designated by different names at different period of Karnataka history. It is also clear that taxes were levied on variety of land of holdings like individual holdings, community holdings and *manaya* lands etc. The professional taxes and the water cess were levied in addition to the major land revenue.

The vast majority of Indians from ancient times have lived in

countless villages tilling the land for their sustenance. This condition still prevails in the modern age. The kind of agriculture that has been in vogue over the centuries can be described as a combination of common sense and practical experience based on sound scientific principles, although these may not have been understood by most farmers. In ancient times it enjoyed great respect, ownership of land considered respectable and prospered the life in different spheres.

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