

Land Administration and Economic Conditions in Telangana, Hyderabad State (1724-1948)

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Abstract: The article discusses the land administration and economic conditions of Telangana, a part of the erstwhile Hyderabad State, during the first half of the 20th century. The Jagirdari system was prevalent in Telangana, where Jagirdars controlled 33 percent of the villages, accounting for 42 percent of the area. The Nizam's Dominions were based on principles of pure despotism or autocracy, with the entire region considered as the private property of its Ruler. The traditional village system of Patels and Patwaris remained intact. The government collected revenue through contractors known as Deshmukhs and Deshpandes. The system of "Tahud or 'Sarbasta' proved detrimental to both the peasantry and the government." The last contract under this system expired in 1276 F. (1866).

Keywords: Hyderabad State, Telangana, Jagirdari, Land revenue, Mechanization, Paigah, Zamindari.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to discuss the land administration and economic conditions of the people of the erstwhile Hyderabad State, specifically in Telangana, during the first half of the 20th century. Telangana, as a part of Hyderabad State, was initially feudal in nature. In 1724, Asaf Jah-I declared independence from Delhi. Seven Nawabs ruled Hyderabad State, which was the largest princely state in India with 16 districts, from 1724 to 1948. By 1911, the state had an area of 82,698 square miles (2,65,61,000 acres).[¹] For administrative convenience, Hyderabad State was divided into four broad divisions: Warangal, Medak, Aurangabad, and Gulbarga Subhas. Linguistically, the state was divided into three divisions, namely Telangana, Marathwada, and Karnataka. Of the four Subhas, the Warangal and Medak Subhas, consisting of eight districts, constituted as Telangana, covering an area of nearly 50 percent of the state, with a total of 10,167 villages.[²] In Telangana, the Jagirdari system was prevalent. Jagirdars controlled 33 percent of the villages, accounting for 42 percent of the area in Telangana. Some of them even had civil and criminal powers, with their own courts and jails. The maintenance of law and order was the exclusive responsibility of Paigahs, Jagirdars (excluding Paigahs), and Zamindaras (holders of Samsthana). Many rural villages lacked educational and medical facilities.[³]

The Royal Commission Report unveils the nature of land tenures in the Hyderabad Dominion as follows: The Nizam's Dominions were based on principles of pure despotism or autocracy, with the entire region considered as the private property of its Ruler. The Prince held absolute power and independence, and there were no laws except those dictated by the ruler's will. There were no revenue officers or departments in place. The country was divided among nobles (Jagirdars) from the court or any individual who applied for them on contract (Deshmukhs and Deshpandex).

These contractors, known as Taluqdars, were the lords and masters of the districts under their jurisdiction for the duration of their contracts. They collected revenue through their agents and forwarded it to the State treasury. Additionally, they maintained troops to protect their Prince's interests in the districts. However, the traditional village system of Patels and Patwaris remained intact.

As A.M. Khusro notes: "Upon assuming power in the Hyderabad State, Asaf Jah-1 granted military tenures in the form of Jagirs or estates to Muslim nobles and appointed them as generals. Meanwhile, Hindus primarily worked in the administration, specifically in the Departments of Revenue and Finance. They too were awarded Jagirs as compensation for their services, and these land grants, whether for civilian or military purposes, were passed down through generations in various families across the country. There were numerous indigenous Rajahs and Chiefs who held these lands, many of whom received Sanads or grants from previous rulers, which were later confirmed by the Delhi Emperors. These native Rajahs were recognized and confirmed in their possession of the land in exchange for paying tribute and exercising a limited form of jurisdiction within their estates. As a result, the entire region was divided into two distinct parts: the first comprised the feudal Jagirs, and the second was known as the Diwani areas."^[4]

During each of the tenures, both Diwani and non-Diwani, different legal, political, social, and economic rights to the land and obligations to the State or regional rulers were present. In Jagir (non-Diwani) regions, the government had nominal authority over the land in all aspects. Some Jagirs were exempt from all forms of rent, while others paid rent in the form of 'Nazrana', 'Peshkash', 'Pan Chowth', etc. There were also Mokasa Jagirs in which the Jagirdars received a portion of the revenue, usually one-third, one-half, or one-fourth. However, most Jagirs were rent-free. Towards the end of the Jagirdari system, the State collected a type of royalty from all Jagirdars, known as Haqe-Malekana. The lands or villages held by the government and managed and administered by the Diwan or Prime Minister of the government were referred to as Diwani or Khalsa Lands. The revenue from these lands was directed towards the state's coffers. Prior to 1853 or the appointment of Sir Salar Jung as Prime Minister, the State's land revenue, along with other cases, was contracted out to wealthy and influential residents of the district through a system known as Tahud. If the revenue was farmed out to a Deshmukh, who was a prominent resident of the district or sub-revenue division, as was frequently the case in Telangana, the transactions were referred to as Sarbasta or Bilmakta. Tahud and Sarbasta transactions were leases for a specified period, and the amount to be paid was subject to change after the expiration of the lease term.^[5]

According to the available information, Deshmukh was likely a significant figure in the Nizam's administration, similar to Desat's role under the Mughal rule. His primary responsibility was revenue collection, a duty typically assigned to individuals belonging to socially dominant castes like Reddy and Velama in Telangana. The system of "Tahud or 'Sarbasti' proved detrimental to both the peasantry and the government, as it lacked public offices in the Diwani area. Contractors were appointed by the government through the sovereign's goodwill, and this practice continued from the Mughal era, when clerks and other subordinate officers were hired for private convenience to help in collecting government revenue. These facts suggest that there was no confirmation of rights on land to cultivators or intermediaries like Deshmukhs or Deshpandes before Sir Salar Jung's tenure. However, the land was typically attached to the cultivator or producer. One of Sir Salar Jung-1's earliest acts during his ministry was the abolition of the 'Tahud', 'Sarbasti' or 'Bilmakta' system, which removed intermediaries from the revenue collection and Diwani areas. The last contract under this system expired in 1276 F. (1866).^[6]

Under the aforementioned tenurial system, the government did not receive proper land revenue from contractors, nor did cultivators benefit. Instead, intermediaries such as Deshmukhs, Deshpandes, and other holders of feudal tenures exploited the labor of cultivators. Tahud Sarbasti' and 'Pan-Makta' holders, who received land for lease from the government for revenue collection in the Diwani area, held significant power compared to other non-Diwani revenue assignees, such as holders of feudal Jagirs, Ilaqas (other than Feudal Jagirs), and Samasthanas given by Nizam in Telangana and other parts of the State. The distinction between Diwani (Khalsa) and non-Diwani (non-Khalsa) lay only in the degree of difference in sharing of the State's revenue. It is important to note that the territories held by the Khalsa were not dissimilar from non-Khalsa or Jagirs like Paigah (a Muslim nobles who came along with him), Samsthana (holder of Samasthanas were indigenous rulers), and other assignments given by the authority of Asaf-Jah dynasty until the reforms introduced by Sir Salar Jung.

Under Sir Salar Jung's administration, the agricultural system was structured into three main tenures: Sarf-1-Khas, Jagirs, and Diwani. However, these tenures were broadly categorized into two types based on the nature of the rights and features: Diwani or Khalsa tenure under direct control of the Diwan, and non-Diwani or Jagirdar/non-Khalsa tenure consisting of Sarf-1-Khas under the control of the ruler for his privy purse, Paigahs under the control of Muslim nobles, Ilaqas given to various servants, and Samasthanas given to native provincial rulers. The primary distinction between the Diwani and non-Diwani areas was the ownership rights and land revenue collection. In Diwani areas, the State was the supreme overlord granting ownership rights to Pattadars or registered occupants and collecting land

revenue from them. In non-Diwani tracts, this function was delegated to the Jagirdars, while the Government remained the nominal overlord, and the grantee enjoyed the fruits of possession.^[7]

THE TENURES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS:

The tenures previously discussed are divided into two categories: (1) Diwani or Khalsa, which includes pattadar, pot-pattadar, shikmidar, and Asami-Shikmidar, and (2) non-Diwani or non-Khalsa or Jagirs, comprising Sarf-1-Khas, Paigahs, Samsthanas, and Ilagas tenures. The following are the characteristics of these tenures: Prior to 1317 F., there were no rights held by cultivators of land in the Diwani region. For the first time, the 1317 F. Act provided a definitive definition of the landholder, pattadar, Kowldar, and their agrarian rights.^[8] Section 2 of the Act acknowledges a person who holds land under their care as a landholder. It further recognizes a direct land revenue payer, regardless of the type of cultivation, as a pattadar. This act acknowledges them as pattadars, and they are responsible for remitting land revenue directly to the State.

The classification of pot-pattadars, or younger brothers of pattadars or their sons, is included under this category. They are referred to as pot-pattadars or hissadars and are considered shareholders in this case. The rights of all partners or pot-pattadars are equal, allowing them to equally share the expenses of cultivation and the profits of a particular piece of land. The pattadar is not permitted to evict the pot-pattadar or increase the assessment payable by them.^[9] In addition to the pattadar tenure in the Ryotwari System, based on the 1317 F. Land Revenue Act of the Hyderabad State, there are also subordinate tenures known as Shikmidar. These individuals are the actual cultivators of the land, and their rights have been recognized by the government since before the confirmation of ownership as pattadars. Although they had the right of occupancy, their names were not registered in the records. The pattadar was not allowed to evict a Shikmidar through a civil suit. Furthermore, if the pattadar wanted to transfer their rights by selling them, the Shikmidar had the right of pre-emption. Similarly, if the Shikmidar wanted to transfer their rights to someone who was not their heir, the pattadar had the right of pre-emption.

As the demands on arable land grew, the original cultivator, the Shikmidar, began to lease his land to Asami-Shikmidar, who were tenants-at-will with no legal rights to the land and no protection against eviction. The tenure of the Asami-Shikmidar was assumed to last from one cultivating season to the next and could be terminated by either party with three months' notice. Unlike the Shikmidar, the Asami-Shikmidar paid rent to the pattadar, in addition to the Government assessment. It is important to note that Asami-Shikmidar could potentially acquire Shikmidar rights if they

continuously cultivated the same land for twelve years. This provision, however, led to increased insecurity, uncertainty, and misery for the cultivating class.

CONCENTRATION OF LAND HOLDINGS IN TELANGANA

The Agrarian Reform initiated by Salar Jung and the 1317 F. Act of Land Revenue in Hyderabad State resulted in the concentration of land ownership in a select few, while the actual cultivators were left without rights to the land they had been cultivating. Out of the eighteen lakh pattadars and landowners in the State, approximately six lakh or one-third were non-cultivating owners. The majority of the land was divided into small plots, which were cultivated by either the cultivating owners or tenants who worked on their fields with the help of family members. Limited external labor was employed for tasks such as transplanting and harvesting.^[10] Wet land played a critical role in the rural economy of Telangana, where 80% of the wet land in Hyderabad was located. The possession of wet land allowed farmers to generate surplus income beyond their domestic needs. In contrast, the possession of dry land forced cultivators to continually struggle to maintain their subsistence level. This disparity led to the alienation of even small portions of wet land from poor peasants to the hands of Deshmukhs, making the latter more powerful. During the implementation of the Ryotwari System, feudal lords exploited their social status to acquire lands unfairly from ordinary cultivators. Hereditary land revenue collectors called Deshmukhs in Telangana and Deshpandes in Marathwada were granted Vatan (annuities) based on a percentage of the past collections on the eve of the Ryotwari system's introduction. This enabled them to obtain lands by fraudulent means, which in numerous cases reduced actual cultivators to the status of Tenant-at-will or landless laborers.^[11] Swami Ramananda Thirtha reported in the comment that he visited a village and found only two small pattadars owning a combined 10 acres out of 1400 acres of land, with the rest owned by a Deshmukh. The Telangana peasant movement provided details of the high concentration of land in Telangana.

(1) Janna Reddy Prathap Reddy, a resident of Nalgonda district, owned a vast tract of land comprising dry, wet, and garden lands, among which 750 acres were devoted to mango gardens. (2) Narsapur Samsthanam of Laxettipet was the proprietor of a substantial estate ranging from fifty thousand to one lakh acres. (3) Kalloor Deshmukh, who resided in Madhira Taluka, possessed one lakh acres of land. (4) Visnoor Deshmukh of Jangaon taluka held forty thousand acres. (5) Suryapet Deshmukh of Nalgonda district was the owner of twenty thousand acres. (6) Baba Sahebpet Deshmukh of Miryalaguda taluk owned ten thousand acres. (7) The Pusukuri family was another prominent landowner, with ten to twenty thousand acres under their control. (8) Mandamarri Madhavakao held ten thousand acres of land. These individuals, along with others, owned more than five thousand acres of land each. Following the accession of the

Hyderabad State to the Indian Union, the Government's annual report for the year 1950-51 indicated that there were 252 pattadars who owned more than 500 acres each and 21,913 pattadars who possessed land parcels of less than ten acres in Nalgonda district. Similarly, in Warangal, there were 155 pattadars who owned more than 500 acres each, while in Mahaboobnagar, there were 144 pattadars who owned land parcels of less than ten acres.

The following text describes the situation of land ownership in Nalgonda, Warangal, and Mahaboobnagar districts. It notes that many individuals belonging to dominating castes owned over 500 acres of land, and that the government did not specify an upper limit for land ownership under each patta. Kesava Lyengar observed that in the 12 selected villages of Warangal district, at least 16 individuals possessed between 100 and 1500 acres of land. Additionally, other groups such as Deslumukhs, Deshpandex, Jagirdars, Patels, and Parvaris were also found to own land in the range of 100 to 500 acres. During the economic crisis of the 1930s, peasant cultivators were vulnerable to exploitation by money lenders. This situation allowed the money-lending class to take advantage of the peasantry's vulnerability and seize their lands. Apart from this, the socially dominant castes also employed other unfair means to acquire land from the peasant cultivators.

According to the Additional Revenue Secretary's Inspection Report (1937), a significant portion of land in Girmitle village, Baghat taluka, Medak district, was transferred to Sowcar due to non-payment of loans. Specifically, out of the nearly 2000 acres of land in the village, 1500 acres were occupied by non-agriculturists such as Marwadis, Brahmins, and absent landlords. Additionally, the report indicates that the Sowcars acquired about 25% of the land they originally possessed in Manakondoor and Korbali villages of Karimnagar and Huzurabad talukas. Moreover, the report reveals that not only Deshmukhs, but also village chiefs such as Patel, Patwari, and Malipatel with hereditary rights, often grabbed lands. In Mahaboobnagar district, Patels and Parwaris were found to be grabbing lands from poor ryots. In one instance, the village officers were in possession of one-third of the occupied land in the village. Notably, in Bedepalli village of Mahaboobnagar taluk, 56% of the total occupied land was in the possession of Patels and Parwaris, while only 10% was held by money-lenders.^[12]

The Village Tenancy Committee Report of 1940 uncovered the fact that in a particular village of Siddipet taluka, a woman Maktedar's agent who had only recently joined service, and who did not possess any land in the village, was able to secure a land assessment of not less than Rs. 4,880 in the name of her minor son as the pattadar at the time of the settlement announcement in the village. This occurred while the names of the long-standing occupants were merely

recorded as tenants, a mere few weeks prior to the Tenancy Committee's visit to the village. The legislative reforms introduced by Sir Salar Jung-1 in 1385 F. (1875) and the Land Revenue Act of 1317 F. (1907) were primarily focused on increasing the revenues of the Nizam's Dominions, rather than addressing the welfare of the cultivators. Unfortunately, this indifferent attitude towards the peasantry by the State appears to have only served to further the inhumane practice of exploitation by feudal elements such as landlords, money-lenders, Vatandar, and Village officers. By taking advantage of the economic depression affecting the producing classes, as well as any available loopholes in the law, these feudal elements were able to acquire more and more lands. As a result, the concentration of land in the hands of a few became increasingly prevalent, thus strengthening the feudal stranglehold on the peasantry of Telangana.

CONCLUSIONS:

The article discusses the land administration and economic conditions of Telangana, a part of the Hyderabad State, during the first half of the 20th century. The Jagirdari system was prevalent in Telangana, where Jagirdars controlled 33 percent of the villages, accounting for 42 percent of the area in Telangana. The traditional village system of Patels and Patwaris remained intact. The Nizam's Dominions were based on principles of pure despotism or autocracy, with the entire region considered as the private property of its Ruler. The Prince held absolute power and independence, and there were no laws except those dictated by the ruler's will. The country was divided among nobles (Jagirdars) from the court or any individual who applied for them on contract (Deshmukhs and Deshpandex). These contractors, known as Taluqdars, were the lords and masters of the districts under their jurisdiction for the duration of their contracts. They collected revenue through their agents and forwarded it to the State treasury. The legal, political, social, and economic rights to the land and obligations to the State or regional rulers were different in Jagir (non-Diwani) regions. The government had nominal authority over the land in all aspects. The lands or villages held by the government and Lands. The revenue from these lands was directed towards the state's coffers.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY

1. Telangana, as part of Hyderabad State, was feudal in nature with 16 districts and 82,698 square miles.
2. The state was divided into four broad divisions: Warangal, Medak, Aurangabad, and Gulbarga Subhas.
3. Jagirdari system was prevalent in Telangana, with Jagirdars controlling 33% of the villages and 42% of the area.

4. The Nizam's Dominions were based on principles of pure despotism or autocracy.
5. During each tenure, different legal, political, social, and economic rights to the land and obligations to the State or regional rulers were present.
6. The State's land revenue was contracted out to wealthy and influential residents of the district through a system known as Tahud, which was abolished by Sir Salar Jung.

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