



Proceedings of I.C.H.R. Sponsored
Two Day National Seminar
On

MILITARY HISTORY OF TAMIL COUNTRY THROUGH THE AGES

20th and 21st March, 2019

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Organised by
Department of History



Mannar Thirumalai Naicker College (Autonomous)
(Founded by Tamilnadu Naidu Mahajana Sangam)
A Linguistic Minority Co-Educational Institution

MILITARY HISTORY OF TAMIL COUNTRY THROUGH THE AGES

© Department of History, Mannar Thirumalai Naicker College,
Madurai.

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First Edition: March 2019

ISBN: 978-93-88398-74-9

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Publisher

SHANLAX PUBLICATIONS

61, 66 T.P.K. Main Road

Vasanthanagar

Madurai - 625003

Tamil Nadu, India

Ph: 0452-4208765

Mobile: 7639303383

email: shanlaxpublications@gmail.com

web: www.shanlaxpublications.com

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CIVIL AND MILITARY ADMINISTRATION UNDER NAYAKS

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Introduction

The word Nayak is derived from the word Sanskrit term Nayaka.¹ Nayak means a leader, chief or general or viceroys and frequently indicating an army captain. They also served as inspectors and supervisors of temples. They were military chiefs transformed into the status of hereditary ruling chiefs like that of the rank of the feudal barons of medieval Europe.

Nayankara System

Nayakas have played an important role in the administrative pattern of the Vijayanagara Empire. The common perception is that Nayakas were very influential in political and military units of the state. In Kannada speaking areas this new administrative system was introduced by the Vijayanagara rulers in general and Tuluva dynasties' ruler Shri Krishnadevaraya in particular. In his rule it has reached its high watermark.²

According to Robert Sewell Nayakas means Captains who were received land from the emperor on the condition of providing military service and paying annual tribute to the Vijayanagara Empire. (Sewell, 1900, p. 373). All the lands belong to the king and from his hand the captains hold it. They also pay to him every year sixty lakhs of rents as royal dues. (Sewell, 1900, p. 373).

Vijayanagar rulers gave due importance to provincial administration. The administration which existed in the provinces was called as Nayankara system. It was similar to that of feudalism in Europe. According to the system, all the lands were won by the ruler. He distributed the lands to his generals. They functioned under his control and acted as feudal lords. This administrative system flourished during the period of Vijayanagar rulers. Based on the system most of the lands were distributed among the Nayaks (landlords). They lived with pomp and show and constructed forts for their protection. They accepted the supremacy of the Vijayanagar rulers and acted as their protectors.³ The Nayaks who received the lands from the ruler, distributed them to the tenants for cultivation. In turn the Nayaks collected land tax regularly from the tenants. The amount of tax was very high. Nuniz, in his account mention that the Nayaks collected one tenth of the total revenue as land tax. They collected the tax by arbitrary method. No sympathy was bestowed them. The Nayaks gave half of the revenue to central government. Rest of the amount was utilized by the Nayaks for administration, military and other charitable works. Accordingly the Vijayanagar rulers received seventy lakhs of Varagans from the Nayaks. Vijayanagar rulers spent the major portions of the revenue for their luxurious life.⁴

Maintenance of army

According to this system, the maintenance of army was entrusted in the hands of Nayaks. Nayaks maintained a standing army. The army consisted of the traditional divisions of infantry, cavalry and elephantry. They assisted the Vijayanagar rulers with army at the time of external threat. Particularly, the success and failure of the Vijayanagar ruler depended upon the