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*IJMASRI, Vol. 1, issue 1, pp. 132- 136, Oct. -2023*

<https://doi.org/10.53633/ijmasri>

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY  
ADVANCED SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION  
(IJMASRI)**

**ISSN: 2582-9130**

**IBI IMPACT FACTOR 1.5**

**DOI: 10.53633/IJMASRI**

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**THE VILLAGES ACCOUNT OF THE CHINGALPATTU RECORDS – SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO THE CHINGALPATTU PALM LEAF RECORDS**

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**Abstract**

The first region in south India that the British East India Company came to rule was Chengalpattu<sup>1</sup> Jagir of the Madras Presidency. The Madras Presidency's social and economic domains were greatly influenced by the village government system used in the Jagir, known as the Mirasi system. It is crucial to concentrate on this pre-British Indian village administration system in order to comprehend the social structure of the Madras Presidency in the eighteenth century. The British East India Company performed numerous surveys in order to properly govern the territories, and based on the results, they established a new method of revenue collection, which led to the eventual disappearance of many local administrative systems. One of the first surveys in Madras and India is Mr. Thomas Barnard's Survey of Chengalpattu Jagir in the Madras Presidency (1767-1774). This study focuses on the information of the sources for the Barnard Survey known as the Chingalpattu Palm Leaf Records, which could be used to piece together the Madras Presidency's early modern sociocultural and economic history.

**Keywords:** The Chengalpattu Jagir, Kaniatchimurai, share distribution (Pangu), village community land.

**Introduction**

The late nineteenth century's intellectual pursuits included the building of the past as a historical program. It had a significant role in the intellectuals' attempts to modernize society. They understood the significance of looking into their history, which was distorted during colonial administration. Consequently, the intellectual desire to comprehend

the past became fundamentally based on historical study for both the present and the future. Despite the requirement for past construction initially perceived as a necessity to transform society, later revealed to be a post- colonial endeavours to reclaim the identity.

In the early stages of the English East India Company's rule, officials like collectors were responsible for managing the revenue in Southern

India's peninsular region. They were informed that different localities were entitled to different types of tax breaks and grants. They made an effort to learn more about the social structure of the area. The Barnard Survey Report, Place Report, Greenway Report, etc. all provide studies of such systems.

The revenue administration has been primarily overseen by the Public and Military sectors. The Public Department collaborated with relationships of the local powers and dealt with political and civil issues. The Military Department also carried out the duties of the revenue administration concurrently. A first step in the administration of revenue was made in 1774 with the Council's help as a whole. In order to streamline the administration of the land revenue of the newly acquired regions in the vicinity of the Chengalpattu Jagir and North Arcot districts, the Board of Revenue was established by 1786.

The first territory the company controlled in the Madras Presidency was the Jagir, the country that surrounds the Presidency of Fort St. George. The Nawab of Arcot gave the Jagir to the East India Company in exchange for the assistance that was provided to him. However, until Fort St. George took over direct management of the Jagir, it was given to the Nawab of Arcot on yearly lease extensions. This highlights the need to research the tax management method used in the different Jagir villages prior to British rule in India. A Committee of Secrecy was established in 1782 to investigate the history of the Jagir's leased account with the Nawab.

The Chengalpattu Jagir had a distinctive system of distributing village shares, in which the village's output was divided into numerous shares in the form of dues, taxes, or allocations of cultivators, etc. Those involved in the production and supported through these shares, which had been recognised by tradition and accompanying to the role necessary for sustaining the local society, were supported by these shares.

The village produce was divided into many shares in the allocations to cultivate or in the name of dues, state taxes during the pre-colonial society in the form of a share distribution system called *Kaniyatchimurai* or *Mirasi* system. Those who

acquired the shares were actively involved in agricultural production, which had been established through experience, and they also supported the administration of the village in other words, which were referred to as local societies. The way the rights and obligations are distributed among the shareholders may also be construed as taxing free land, which the Barnard Survey Report refers to as land that has been given away for free. Therefore, the pre-colonial village administration was the essential organisation of the local society, including the economic structure, social stratifications, etc.

The Chengalpattu Survey, which took place between 1767 and 1774, was possibly the first attempt the British made to learn about the customs of the Indian populace before coming up with strategies for successfully enslaving and managing them. As part of this Survey, data from around 2100 locations in Tamil Nadu's Chengalpattu region were gathered. These narratives give the clearest picture anywhere of how Indian culture, the economy, and the politics operated at their most fundamental levels before being upended and altered by British administrative tools.

### **Chingalpattu Palm Leaf Records**

This monograph draws heavily from the Tamil palm-leaf accounts of the Chengalpattu Survey that were obtained from the district collector's office in Kanchipuram<sup>1</sup>. It also makes use of the English summaries of the accounts that are presented in about fifty Registers that are housed at the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Chennai.

A total of 160 bundles of palm leaf records are kept at the Tamil University of Thanjavur. They were moved there around 15 years ago from the Kanchipuram office of the then-Collector of the Chengalpattu District, where they had likely been stored for the previous 200 years. Each of these bundles typically has 600 palm leaves, written on both sides in the ancient Tamil script, each measuring about one meter long and 3 to 4 centimetres wide. These manuscripts retain the locale records from the Chengalpattu region of Tamil Nadu, which is a component of the cultural region known as

Thondaimandalam, from the 18th and early 19th centuries.

They provide a summary of Chengalpattu society and politics in the eighteenth century as indicated by the documents from the Chengalpattu Survey 1767–1774<sup>1</sup>. They have talked about the purampokku, maniyam, and varappatru land-use patterns and describe how the purampokku (common Property) was made up of a lot of kovil, kulam, kuttai, turavu, tangal, madu, eri, puntottam, toppu, kalamedu, nattam, malai, and other things. They have highlighted the specifics of the several communities that inhabited these areas.

They have highlighted the substantial levels of agricultural productivity and production as well as the broad range of grains that were farmed, including Nel (paddy), Varagu, Kelvaragu, Kambu, Tinai, Samai, Kollu, Ellu, Tugarai, Ulundu, and others. They have also drawn attention to the fact that many cultural corporations, including the big temples, got a portion of the harvest from numerous regions.

### **Symbols and the Script**

The manuscripts utilise various specific symbols, particularly for fractions, integers, units and measures, etc. They are written in the earlier Tamil alphabet that is typically used by traditional Tamil Account-keepers, the Kanakkappillais. Tamil manuscriptologists are well familiar with the common eighteenth-century script. By comparing the Tamil narratives of various locales with the matching archival documents in English, we were able to decipher some of the peculiar symbols.

### **Sections of the Report.**

There are numerous sections or divisions among the accounts. Each division or segment of leaves has its own name and is collected in its own bundle. Thus, a number of bundles contain what are known as the *Tarappadi Vagai Edu leaves*<sup>5</sup> which provide information about the land and households in the area, as well as occasionally grain production and income. Other bundles of leaves, known as the *Sutantira Tittam* and *Merai Chattam*, provide information about the distribution of the harvest among

the various beneficiaries. Yet other bundles contain *En Alavu leaves* that outline the costs and anticipated profits from fixing irrigation tanks, the Eris, and other things.

Two of the bundles contain leaves that are referred to as *Tirvai Vagai Edu*; these provide information on how the total produce's revenue was calculated. Additionally, there are some leafy bundles referred to as *Beriz Tugai Edu* that merely keep track of the assessed revenue. A number of the *Tarappadi Vagai Edu*<sup>6</sup> packages additionally include a data summary known as the *Tugai Edu* for the particular location. These summary data sheets are most likely what were translated into English and entered into the survey archives. *The Tarappadi Vagai Edu* leaves provide a thorough description of the land and residences in a region<sup>7</sup>

### **Classification of land**

Every piece of land in the area is identified, located in relation to the neighborhood's centre, and its intended or potential use is noted. Every temple, pond, and forest identified and measured by the names Kovil, Kuttai, Kulam, Tangal, Toppu, Tottam, etc. Each dwelling is also identifiable by the name and community of the head of the household, as well as by its placement within the dwelling, its size, and the size of the adjacent backyard.

The *Tarappadi Vagai Edu* also keeps track of how much land is used for cultivation in a particular area, as well as how much of that land is kept in revenue-free maniyams and who the beneficiaries are. The *Tarappadi Vagai Edu* often also documents the actual area cultivated for each crop and the harvest for the years 1762 to 1766.

About 20 of the 160 bundles of palm leaves contain accounts that were gathered between 1767 and 1774 at the request of British engineer Thomas Barnard and Rajasri Chengalvaraya Mudaliar, who worked as the British government's dubash (interpreter)<sup>9</sup>.

On the direction of his superiors in the British administration, Mr. Barnard conducted a thorough survey of around 2,100 places in Chengalpattu using the original data from these accounts, which refer to

roughly 1,500 localities. He was able to extract and interpret some information from these palm-leaf recordings into a certain format. These English Summary records are housed in over fifty volumes in the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Chennai.

One of the earliest attempts undertaken by the British to comprehend the customs of the Indian people before coming up with successful subjugation and administration methods was the Chengalpattu Survey, which took place from 1767 to 1774. The data collected during the survey is of utmost significance. It forces us to reevaluate our assumptions about the society and daily life in India in the second half of the 18th century, right before the foundation of British rule.

### **The Chengalpattu Survey Records from the English Archives 1767–1774:**

The Chengalpattu District surrounds Madras, the capital of Tamil Nadu and the location of British colonial power in South India, in a broad arc that is roughly 180 km long and up to 80 km wide in some parts. Mohammed Ali, the then-Nawab of Arcot, handed the regions that make up this District to the British in October 1763; as a result, the British referred to the aforementioned areas as the Jagir. The Jagir estates, which encircled Fort St. George on three sides, were undoubtedly crucial to British strategy.

Records from the survey that provided information on the population, their living conditions, land use patterns, cultivation, trade, production, and distribution, among other things, for the 2,100 localities in the area were presented to the Madras Board of Revenue and recorded between 1775 and 1776. Longhand registers of the records are kept in the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Madras<sup>10</sup>. The survey data is contained in 39 volumes of the Board of Revenue Miscellaneous Series and 10 volumes of the Chengalpattu District Record Series.<sup>11</sup>

The more thorough Tamil palm-leaf accounts of the survey, which it appears were recorded in every locality, were used to create the English records. Referring to such statements Mr. Barnard, in his letter of 10th November 1774 written to the Governor-in-Council at Fort St. George.

### **Conclusion**

The reports give the clearest picture of how Indian culture, the economy, and the government operated at their most fundamental level before to being interrupted and altered by British administration, hence this study give a clearcut understanding that the distinctive system of distributing village shares, in which the village's output was divided into numerous shares in the form of dues, taxes, or allocations of cultivators, etc. Those involved in the production and supported through these shares, which had been recognised by tradition and accompanying to the role necessary for sustaining the local society.

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