

THOMAS MUNRO AND ROYTWARI SETTLEMENT: IT'S EFFECT ON THE CEDED DISTRICTS OF MADRAS PRESIDENCY

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Abstract

The revenue from land being the main source of income in India the Colonial Administrators gave much emphasis on land settlement and land revenue administration. They introduced a series of land settlement in different parts of India. The Court of Directors, Board of Revenue all were concerned with the idea of collection of more and more revenue and had least interest for ryots and the people they ruled over. However Major General Munro also Governor of Madras had much concern for the ryots and the people of India and tried his best to introduce a system for the benefit of the ruled in addition to keeping in view the augmentation of the income of the British Government. He introduced ryotwari settlement in Madras. The points highlighted in this article are: (1) the effort made by Sir Thomas Munro in introducing the ryotwari settlement in Ceded Districts of Madras Presidency, (2) his objectives in introducing ryotwari settlement, (3) the principle and advantages of the ryotwari settlement as he suggested and his struggle to extend the same to other territories of Madras Presidency, (4) the reduction of land revenue proposed by Sir Thomas Munro, the refusal by the Board of Revenue to put it into effect and the success Munro achieved at the end.

Keywords: *Ceded Districts, Ryotwari Settlement, Village Leases, Court of Directors, Remission.*



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Introduction

Sir Thomas Munro a celebrated civil and military officer in the East India Company was born on 27th May 1761 as the son of Mr. Alexander Munro, an eminent merchant in Glasgow. His mother was Stark. Munro received his education in the Grammar school and then from the University of Glasgow. He was distinguished for mild and generous disposition with great personal courage and presence of mind. He first intended to enter into his father's business but in 1789 A.D. he was appointed to an infantry cadetship in Madras. He served with his regiment during the hard fought war against Hyder Ali (1780-83A.D.) and then against Tipu Sultan (1790-92 A.D.) the rulers of Mysore. He was then chosen as one of the four military officers to administer Barmahal, a part of the territory acquired from Tipu. He remained in that charge for seven years during which he learnt the principles of revenue survey and land assessment. This knowledge helped him afterwards in introducing a new land settlement and applying it throughout the Madras Presidency. In 1799 A. D., after the final downfall of Tipu Sultan, he was given the responsibility of restoring order in Canara.

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Munro in charge of Ceded Districts:

In 1800 A. D. he was placed in charge of the northern districts ceded by the *Nizam* of Hyderabad to British Governor Lord Wellesley in lieu of the payment to subsidiary force. The northern districts ceded thus by the *Nizam* came to be known as the Ceded Districts. These comprised of Bellary, Anantapur, Cuddapahand Kurnool districts of Madras Presidency. Munro remained the principal collector of the Ceded Districts for seven years from 1800 to 1807 A.D. He was assisted by four subordinate collectors- John Revenshaw, James Cochrane, Alexander Stadart and William Thackery. It was during this time he introduced *ryotwari* system in the Ceded Districts.

Effect of Munro' Administration on Ceded Districts:

At the time when the Ceded Districts were transferred to the British, their condition was very gloomy. Robbery and plundering was common. There was no proper settlement and collection of revenue was entrusted entirely to *zamindars*, *poligars*, *potels* who with the help of their armies carried on destructive feuds in their area. Thus the task of administering such areas was not an easy one but Munro raised equal to the situation and successfully handled it. The Ceded Districts comprised of 37 *taluks* yielding revenue of 9 lakhs of rupees per annum. Munro distributed these *taluks* among his subordinate collectors keeping for himself the southern *taluks* of Bellary District. He placed his headquarter at Anantapur.

In the Ceded Districts Munro found that all land belonged to the Government and revenue was collected from *ryots* by the mediators, i.e. *saristadars*, *amildars or talukdars* and village headmen. When he was going to affect his first revenue settlement the fields were in the last stage of harvesting season. So Munro instructed his assistants to continue the old system and settle with the above mediators the task of collection of revenue from *ryots*. At the same time he recommended for the increase in allowance to revenue servants to enable them to work efficiently and honestly.

In August 1801, the beginning of Munro's second revenue year in the Ceded Districts, he instructed his assistant collectors to make land settlement directly with every cultivator who paid rent to the Government. The assessment was regulated both by the quality of land and condition of the cultivator. The revenue was to vary from 2/5 to 3/5 of the produce. The settlement was to be annual in the beginning years. While making such settlement Munro suggested three methods to be followed: (i) to make a settlement with all villages in a district and after that make individual settlement with every inhabitants in each village; (ii) to make

village settlement of one village and then the individual settlement of it before proceeding to another village and (iii) to begin by settling with each individual of one village separately and then by adding their rents together to make the village settlement. Of these the first method was preferred to the other two.

Land Survey in Ceded Districts:

A survey of the Ceded Districts began in June 1802. The survey was divided into two parts: (i) measurement of the extent of land and (ii) assessment of actual money rent on each field. Detailed written instructions were given to all concerned in the survey and at each stage the work was carefully checked. The *Potel* and *Curnum* with other inhabitants had to attend while surveyors worked in their village. The settlement took five years to complete while Munro was pressing on with survey for *ryotwari* settlement of the Ceded Districts, in other parts of Madras Presidency, the Bengal system of permanent settlement was introduced.

Munro's Plan for permanent Ryotwari Settlement in Ceded Districts:

Munro had proposed a plan of permanent *ryotwari* system for the Ceded Districts which was possible to extend to other districts also. According to this plan, the existing assessment under the *ryotwari* settlement was to be lowered by 25% with a still greater remission on land watered by machinery. This remission was to be provided for all contingencies and nothing further was to be allowed for bad crops or failure of an ordinary kind.

Principles of ryotwari settlement

The principles on which Munro proposed the permanent *ryotwari* settlement are as follows:

1. The settlement should be *ryotwari*.
2. The amount of settlement should be decreased or increased according to the extent of land in cultivation.
3. A reduction of 25% on all land should be made in the survey rate of assessment.
4. An additional reduction in the assessment of 8% or 33% in all should be allowed on all lands watered by wells or by water raised by machinery from rivers.
5. Every *ryot* should be at liberty at the end of every year to throw up a part of his land or to occupy more according to his circumstances, but whether to throw up or occupy should not be permitted to select but should take or reject proportional shares of the good and bad lands together.

6. Every *ryot* as long as he could pay the rent of the land should be considered as the complete owner of the soil and should be at liberty to let it to a tenant with out any hesitation as to rent and to sell as he pleased.
7. No remission should be made on ordinary occasion for bad crops or other accidents. In case of failure of crops which could not be made good from the property or land of the defaulters, the village in which they happen should be liable for them to the extent of 10% additional on the rent of the remaining *ryots* but no further.
8. All unoccupied land should remain in the hands of the Government and the rent of whatever part of it may be further cultivated should be added to public revenue.

Thus Munro proposed a land settlement where no intermediary could exist between the Government and the *ryots*. The *ryots* should be owner of the land, could sell or purchase the land according to his capacity. Remission would be allowed to *ryots* in case of crop failure and reduction of 25% on all lands in the survey rate of assessment and 8% to 33% on all lands watered by wells and rivers. The amount of revenue could be increased depending on increase in land under cultivation. This would enable the Government to get increased revenue from land. At the same time the *ryots* were also free to enjoy profit from land in case of increased production. According to Munro a *ryotwari* settlement had a number of advantages. These are discussed below :

1. It was more simple then the *zamindari* settlement because there was no intermediary in *ryotwari* system and the relation between the Government and the *ryots* was direct.
2. It would produce a quarter and more law abiding population then the establishment of holders of large estates.
3. It was better calculated to promote industry and augment the produce of the country because it would create more proprietors.
4. The *ryots* would be more likely to improve his land as proprietor then as tenants of a *zamindar*.
5. By allowing the revenue to increase or diminish each year according to the extent of cultivation failure would become less frequent and increase of agricultural stocks would be accelerated. The fluctuation would decrease steadily as the *ryots* become wealthier.
- 6.

Unlike the *zamindari* system, the unoccupied lands were retained by the Government in the *ryotwari* system. These lands enabled the Government to gradually augment the

revenue without imposing burden on *ryots*.

Munro's Proposal for Reduction in Land Tax:

The survey continued for five years. All lands whatever kind except hills and rocks were measured. All fields were registered. The survey was completed. The result of the survey on its completion showed that the extent of land actually in cultivation in Ceded Districts was 3203850 acres and the land fit for cultivation was estimated at 12066923 acres. The assessment fixed upon uncultivated area was 1852955 pagodas and the total assessment of arable area was fixed at 3954417 pagodas. The assessment according to Munro's estimation was about 45% of the gross produce a demand which was more than the whole economic rental of the country. Munro perceived this and in 1807 proposed to reduce the assessment to a third of the produce. Bentinck the then Governor recognized Munro's knowledge of revenue administration as virtually "unrivalled in the Presidency". The Government of Madras also admitted the justice of Munro's proposal but could not give effect to it because the Court of Directors did not support him. Bentinck also was removed from the post of Governor.

Munro's Resignation:

In October 1807 Munro resigned from his post and returned to London. In 1808 the Board of revenue decided to experiment with the village leases in place of *ryotwari* settlement. At London Munro was received with open arms for his success. Even the Board of revenue praised him by writing in 1808, "the example we believe to be unparalleled in the revenue annals of this Presidency of so extensive a tract of territory reduced from confusion to order and a mass of revenue amounting to no less than 11990419 star pagodas being regularly and at length readily collected with remission of only one farman twenty-two cash payment.

Renewal of Village Leases in Ceded Districts and their Effects:

On Munro's departure, immediately village leases were introduced in the Ceded Districts. It was expected that the villages as a body would agree to the leases, but as the assessment was high the leases were taken up by mere speculators, the renters were ruined, the *ryots* impoverished and the villages returned to Government. In Raydurg *taluk* alone half the *ryots* emigrated, most of the headmen were reduced to poverty and many of them were sent to jail. The substantial *ryots* whose stock supported the agriculture of the villages were no more found.

Realisation of the British Government of the importance of Munro's Proposal:

In the meantime, the Permanent settlement which was concluded between 1802 to 1805 with the ancient *zamindars*, *poligars* and *muthadars* showed signs of failure. Adverse season, over- assessment, mismanagement and extravagance were the reasons of its failure. As a result within 10 years, several estates fell into arrears. The Government found 2 ways for realising these arrears- (i) they had to attach these estates and manage them for some years and (ii) put these estates up for sale. In several instances they followed the former course but in many cases they were compelled to take recourse to the latter course. Thus by 1814 some ancient and many proprietary estates were auctioned in Rajmundhry, Chingleput and Salem Districts and in many cases purchased by the Government itself because of the absence of proper bidders. This state of affair was viewed with alarm by the Court of Directors. By permanent settlement the state had been deprived of its legitimate income forever. The right had been left to the oppression and exactions by the *zamindars*. The *patta* regulations failed to protect the right of the cultivators.

In these circumstances all- the British Government, Court of Directors and the Board of Revenue were convinced that the interest of the state as well as the agricultural classes could be secured best only under the *ryotwari* system. At last in 1814, the Government ordered the introduction of ryotwari system in North Arcot, Trichinopoly, Madurai and also in all these estates which had reverted to Government owing to the failure of *zamindars*. The system was largely based on Munro's experiment in the Ceded Districts and his official report. The same year, Munro returned back to India and joined as Governor of Madras. He was greatly delighted to see his system working successfully in greater part of the Presidency. The Court of Directors also appreciated his efforts in these words, "It is highly important that you should consider it preparatory only to the introduction and establishment of a *ryotwari* settlement on the principle on which such settlements were carried into effect by our servants..... Proceed in the execution of so beneficial a work we desire that you will furnish them with the best practical hints and instructions from the official reports of Thomas Munro.....". On 15th June 1815, Munro was promoted to the rank of colonel. In 1820 the Board asked the Collector of Vizagapatnam to adopt the *ryowari* system in his estate. In 1822, Munro sanctioned the proposal made by himself earlier for reduction of assessment in Ceded Districts and granted alleviations to other districts also.¹⁷ In 1823, the board ordered the same system to be introduced in Palconda, Mangole, Belgaum, Kurupam and Merangi *taluks* .Many estates which were under *zamindary* system were purchased by the

Government and converted into *ryotwari* land. Many raised the question of the legality of this method and said it was a violation of the provisions and terms which Government had entered in to with *zamindars*. In answer to this Munro stated, “The Government had reserved to themselves the right to alter and improve the condition of people from time to time to enact such regulations as experience may suggest or the progress of human affairs render necessary.” His bold arguments silenced the opposition. The system was also introduced in some of the estates attached and managed by collectors or placed under the Court of Wards. In 1827, Munro intended return to his native land but he died of cholera while on tour in the ceded districts. In 1833, six years after his death the board recommended to Government the introduction of *ryotwari* system into the entire estate the Government agreed to the Board’s proposal.

Conclusion:

Munro served India from 1780 to 1827 A. D. for about 47 years. He atlast died in India. Among the British colonial administrators in India, Munro was an exception. Though a foreigner he had concern for the Indians He was a just and benevolent and talented ruler. His military achievement promoted him to the rank of colonel. His experiment in the land system showed his administrative talent as well as his concern for the well being of the *ryots*. His hard struggle to *ryot* into effect his *ryotwari* system and also to extend it to other parts of Madras Presidency atlast brought success and his name came to be associated with *ryotwari* system. Subsequently, *ryotwari* system was introduced in Bombay Presidency also.

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