

SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF NAWAB MUHAMMAD ALI WALAJAHI

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ABSTRACT

Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi was great ruler in the lineage of Nawabs of Arcot celebrated for his charity and philanthropy. He has been a character, neglected in the History of Tamil Nadu. Moreover the inadequate research on him has been from the view point of Europeans. Any Research on Nawab Muhammad Ali has been from the viewpoint of Anglo French Struggle. As a result the socio cultural environment of his rule has not been a subject of study for a long time. The first step in this direction is to make a survey of the sources available to study the rule of Nawab of Arcot. This paper traces the emergence of Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi to throne and identifies the various sources available to make an in-depth and comprehensive study of the Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi.

KEYWORDS: Contributions, European Sources, Non-European Sources, Coins, Architecture

INTRODUCTION

Mughal emperor Aurangzeb deputed Zulfikar Ali Khan to subjugate the Carnatic region. The term Carnatic refers to the region lying between rivers Krishna to the river Coleroon and was bounded on the west by Cudappah, Salem and Dindigul. Zulfikar Ali Khan captured Senji from the Marathas in 1698 A. D. Sadatullah Khan was appointed as the Nawab of Carnatic by Mughal emperor Farruksiyar. The disintegration of Mughal Empire led Sadatullah Khan to declare his independence. Thus the Nawab of Carnatic had come under the control of Navayat family of Sadatullah Khan. In 1722 Sadatullah Khan was succeeded by his nephew Dost Ali as the Nawab of Arcot. When Dost Ali was murdered by the Marathas in a Battle he was succeeded by his son Safdar Ali. Safdar Ali was murdered by his brother in law Murtuza Ali. After the death of Safdar Ali his son Muhammad Sayid ascended the throne as the Nawab of Carnatic with the title Sadatullah Khan II. He was murdered while attending a marriage function at Arcot. Thus the first Navayat dynasty of the Nawabs of Arcot came to an end.

After the death of Sadatullah Khan II, Muhammad Anwaruddin the Regent during the minority of Sadatullah Khan II ascended the throne. The ascension of Muhammad Anwaruddin was approved by the Nizam and Muhammad Anwaruddin was confirmed as the Nawab of the Carnatic, on the 28th March, 1744. Thus he became the founder of the Second Dynasty of the Nawab of the Carnatic, the Walajah Dynasty. His appointment as the Nawab of Carnatic was contested by Chanda Saheb. The claim of Chanda Saheb was backed by the French. Muhammad Ali was supported by the British. The rival claimants met in the Battle of Ambur backed by their European Powers. In this battle Nawab Anwaruddin was murdered. After the death of Anwaruddin his son Muhammad Ali was enthroned as the Nawab of Carnatic from Trichinopoly. When the rival claimant Chanda Saheb was murdered by the Rajah of Tanjore and the French and the English entered in to an agreement in 1754 A. D. Muhammad Ali Walajah was practically the Nawab of the entire Carnatic.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE NAWAB MUHAMMAD ALI

Religious Contributions

Muhammad Ali Wallajah had not only mixed moderation in his politics, but also in religion. The Nawab respected all religions. Most of his trusted officials were Hindus. In spite of the presence of many Muslims in his Court, he entrusted the work of maintaining his personal diary to Kishan Chand, as he considered him a man of high integrity. He donated vast lands for the construction of mosques, temples and churches and maintained perfect religious harmony and unity amongst the members of different religious communities. It is a well-known fact that the land of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple in Srirangam near Trichy was a gift of the Nawab, with a sizeable estate, which is called "Nawab Thottam" even today. Similarly in Tirupati, Tiruvarur, Tirunelveli and Madras lands were donated for Hindu temples.

The Nawab also permitted the establishment of the Christian Church in South India and not only gave lands to Christian mission, but also was present in person on the occasion of the inauguration of Dr. Schwartz's School in Trichy.

Social Contributions

During his reign, he did a great deal for the uplift of the people of South India. The Nawab evinced great interest in the welfare of the people of South India. He built a large hospital in Madras, where the poor were given free medical treatment. He gave strict instructions to Hakim Ghulam Ali Khan, the head Hakim of the hospital that poor patients should be treated with utmost care and courtesy.

DEATH OF THE NAWAB

In 1795, Nawab Muhammad Ali, the most popular of the Carnatic rulers passed away at the age of seventy eight after a reign of forty six glorious years. His name is commemorated by a bastion and gate at Fort St. George and by the bridge outside the fort. The road which leads from Triplicane to Chepak Palace is still known by the name Wallajah Road. There are towns like Walajahbad and Walajahpet named after this Nawab. He was buried at the Santhome and later after two years his remains were conveyed according to his wishes to Trichinopoly, with full honours and buried at the feet of the Holy Saint Tabrey Alam. A historical study on this noble and majestic ruler would help us to understand the characteristics of a person who was literally the most powerful personality in Tamil Nadu in the second half of the eighteenth century.

SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF NAWAB MUHAMMAD ALI

A survey of the sources reveals enormous sources available for making this study. The literary sources can be classified in to Primary and Secondary Sources.

Primary Sources

The Contemporary primary sources of the period can be divided in to European and Non- European Sources.

European Sources

The European sources consist of the records preserved by the British, French, Dutch, Danes and Portugese. These records need to be dealt carefully as there are conflicting views depending on the political stance of the Nawab.

Robert Orme an English officer who served the company has recorded the events that occurred in between 1745

and 1761. His work '**History of the Military transactions of the British Nation in Indostan from the year 1745**' provides us with a descriptive account of the political contests between the Nawab and his rivals. His work though accurate and thorough needs to be handled carefully as at places he puts forth his own suggestions. Hence it has to be critically analysed before acceptance of facts. **George Patterson** an English resident in the court of the Nawab has maintained his diaries. He was a personal advisor to the Nawab. He met the Nawab daily and his diaries are valuable source that deal with the life of the Nawab. The diaries are considered to be quite accurate as he does not seem to have any pretensions. **Henry Davison Love** in his work **Vestiges of Old Madras: 1640 -1800** records important events in the life of Nawab Muhammad Ali in Chennai. Love was commissioned by the Government of Madras in the early 1900s to supplement "known facts by the collation of the topographical references which are scattered over the ancient records." What he did find was a singular absence of maps of old Madras in the Madras Records Office as well as in London. What he instead found in the Fort St. George archives was "a mass of interesting and hitherto unpublished matter, illustrating the origin of Madras institutions and the social life of the city's inhabitants." With examples of this material, he was able to persuade the Governments of Madras and India to publish a 1640-1800 History of Madras in one or more volumes in the India Records Series. When the work was completed, it was published in 1913 in three volumes of about 600 pages each with a fourth volume containing an awesomely comprehensive index. The Government Records Preserved in Chennai Archives provides us a large collection of information. These records can be classified as Country Correspondence; Military Country Correspondence; Military Consultations; Secret Consultations; Sundries and Despatches to and from England. These records are grouped together as Country Correspondence. These volumes contain the letters written by the Nawab Muhammad Ali to the Company and the replies sent by the Company to the Nawab. Moreover the correspondences of Nawab to the regional powers like the polegars are also covered in these volumes. The English records are valuable for they are Contemporary, authentic and preserved without any change. However still these records are required to be handled carefully for there are instances of false dates and accuracy.

The French, Danish and Dutch have left us with records of great interest and value. They contain enormous information about the Nawab of Arcot and his conflicts with the regional powers. They are very much useful for clarifying many complicated events connected with the life of Nawab Muhammad Ali. The Dutch and Arcot during the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali had frequent contacts over the pearl fishery at Tuticorin on the Gulf of Mannar (from 1750s-1780s). The archives of the Dutch East India Company thus provide lots of information on the Nawab, his kingdom and circumstances in Carnatic. The Dutch archive harbours many translations of letters written by Nawab Muhammad Ali to the Dutch. These letters represent the voice of the Nawab and are thus very valuable. The French records give a detailed description of the problems faced by Nawab Muhammad Ali and the role of Anglo French rivalry in aggravating the problems of Nawab. Ananda Ranga Pillai as dubash of the French in Pondicherry has recorded the events from 1736 to 1761 in his private diaries. These diaries translated in the 20th century provide us primary source for the period. These diaries provide us a day to day account of the events. The role of Nawab Muhammad Ali in the Carnatic wars is derived from these diaries. The Tiruvengadam Pillai diaries covering the period from 1762 to 1799 also provide us with relevant information regarding the rule of Nawab Muhammad Ali.

Non-european Sources

Among the Non- European sources the court chronicles of Nawab Muhammad Ali are the most important sources.

The **Tauzak-i- Walajahi** is a detailed history of Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi of Carnatic written by his court historian **Burhan ibn Hasan**. He was the court historian of Nawab Muhammad Ali and hence there are many exaggerations and coloured statements. Further the Nawab's deficiencies are overlooked, achievements magnified and Virtues elaborated. Hence this work has to be used with caution by comparing and contrasting facts with other sources.

Bahar – I – Azam Jahi is a chronicle of the pilgrimage tour of Nawab Azam Jah compiled by **Ghulam Abdul Qadir**. It gives a picturesque account of the rural Tamil Nadu. It also describes the social customs and cultural traditions prevailing in Tamil Nadu as witnessed during the tour. There is a neat description of the receptions given by the District Collectors to the Pilgrimage team.

Nishan-i-Hydari composed by **Mir Husain Ali Khan Kirmani** in 1802A.D. is a valuable storehouse of information on the Nawab of Arcot. It deals with the reign of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore. It narrates the relation between Nawab Muhammad Ali and the Mysore rulers. Again this work has to be dealt with caution as the sequence of events is at times wrong in this work.

Numismatic Sources

The coins of Nawab Muhammad Ali form an important source for understanding the socio-cultural beliefs in existence during his reign. Most of the coins of Nawab Muhammad Ali were minted at Nathar Nagar the former name of Trichinopoly. Mints had also been in existence at Arcot, Santhome, Covelong, Chinthadripet, Poonamallee, Porto Novo, Tiruvanmiyur and Pondicherry. Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi issued gold, silver and copper coins. Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi had been given the title **Walajah-Nawab-UI-Hind** in 1766 A.D. which has been inscribed in a coin. The coins of Nawab Muhammad Ali bear the legend Mamudali, Walajah, Nawabu and various other motifs in the obverse. Some of his coins bear the motif flowers, plants and animals like Lion. In some coins peacock, horse, swan, fish, bull and elephant are also depicted. In some cases the coins are depicted with bow with an arrow, sword, dagger, gun, spear, anchor etc. The use of these armories in their time is proved by these coins. The legends are inscribed in Tamil, Persian, English, Telugu, Canarese, and Grantha. The study of the coins of the Arcot Nawabs through chemical and instrumental analyses, metallographic studies and specific gravity measurements has revealed the metals used in these coins. Gold Coins consist of Gold and Copper, Silver coins consist of Silver and Copper and copper coins consist of Copper, Tin and Zinc. An interesting aspect of these coins is the inscription of Hindu deities in the coins. The Nawabs were ardent practitioners of Islam but they were tolerant to all religions. They gave importance to the majority community living in their region. Scholars like C. H. Biddulph, John Allan, Alakkudi Arumuga Sitharaman, Sangaraman, Thanjavur S. M. K. Hameed Jalal, R. P. Jackson, K. Ganesh and Jeyaraj have carried out intensive study on the coins of Nawabs of Arcot.

Architectural Sources

The Architectural structures of the Nawabs of Arcot provide us with information regarding their assimilation with local culture and the level of other external influences. We also can infer the economic prosperity and social values by studying the buildings constructed by the Nawabs. Nawab Muhammad Ali constructed the Chepauk Palace in the year 1768 A. D. Chepauk Palace was the official residence of the Nawab of Arcot from 1768 to 1855. It is situated in the neighbourhood of Chepauk in Chennai, India and is constructed in the Indo-Saracenic style of architecture. The Chepauk

Palace comprises two blocks—the northern block is known as Kalsa Mahal while the southern block is known as Humayun Mahal. The palace is built over an area of 117 acres and is surrounded by a wall. The Senate House of the University of Madras was built on the site of the Nawab of Carnatic's artillery park from where salvos were fired to greet visiting dignitaries. When Nawab Wallajah built a marine villa in the palace compound at the South end of the Cooum River, it was merely his personal bathing pavilion. The bathing pavilion of Nawab Muhammad Ali Wallajah, Nawab of the Carnatic subsequently became the residence of Governor Clive, and Wellesley and later the residence of the Surgeon-General. The Wallajah Big Mosque situated in Triplicane High Road, Chennai is one of the biggest mosques in South India. This Mosque is probably the only mosque in the entire world which contains a chronogram written by a non-Muslim (his Private Secretary Raja Makhan Lal Khirat).

Secondary Sources

The Works of several European authors serve as contemporary source for the study of Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi. **Mark Wilks** who served the English Army in the Fort St. George and later as resident of Mysore has written the **History of Mysore**. This work traces the rise of Nawab Muhammad Ali to power.

There are numerous secondary sources for the study of Nawab of Arcot. **“I am Nawab of Arcot’: Reconsidering the Political History of the late eighteenth century Kingdom of Arcot Through the eye of Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajah”** is a research work by **Pimmanus Wibusilp** of Leiden University in the Netherlands. This work questions the European centric approach of historical studies relating to the Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi. It studies the response of the Nawab of Arcot to the International Islamic environment and the Indian environment by which he was engulfed. **Holden Furber** in his classical work **Rival empires of Trade in the orient 1600 -1800** talks about the Nawab of Arcot but from the viewpoint of Anglo French Rivalry and as a result the European shadow overcasts the History of Nawab of Arcot. **Dr. K. Rajayyan** in his work **Administration and Society in the Carnatic** the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi is seen as a period of British ascendancy. Likewise **N. S. Ramaswami** also in his work **Political History of Nawabs under the Carnatic** conceives the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi as a period of British expansion and as a result reduces the significance of the reign of Nawab of Arcot. The history of the Nawab is told from the lens of Madras Council and its officers and not from the view point of the local ruler. Gurney picked Nawab Muhammad Ali Wallajah as his object of research, consulted various European and Persian sources, and tried reflecting the image of this Nawab as clear as possible: his physical description, his palace, his character and personality, his fears, his demands, his feelings, his inner life, his policies etc. Though very interesting, his article is rather small and preliminary.

In her classical work *Saints, Goddesses, and kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian society 1700-1900*, written in 1989 the author Susan Bayly, does not aim to present the history of Arcot or its Nawabs, but to study the development of Islam in the Tamil country. She focuses on questions, like what type of Muslim society emerged in the region and why Islam did not become fully established as a majority religion in the south. She thus views the kingdom of Arcot as the first permanent Muslim-ruled state and its Nawabs as the first Muslim rulers in the Hindu Tamilnad region. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions: Making Politics in Early Modern South India* again under estimates the rule of Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi as a puppet in the hands of the English. Lewis Moore's *A Manual of the Trichinopoly District* published in 1878 provides us information regarding the rise of Walajahi family, the Circumstances under which the family migrated from Arcot to Trichinopoly. We also get information regarding the political rivalries of the Nawab of

Arcot and the economic exploitation of the Nawab by the British.

CONCLUSIONS

The sources listed above are the important Primary and Secondary Sources for the study of the life of Nawab of Arcot. A Comprehensive and exhaustive study of these sources can reveal the Socio, Cultural and economic impact of the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi. These sources also give information about the contributions of Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi towards literature and society. By these sources the researchers can analyse the various Inams (grants) given by the Nawab.

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