

Tarikere Sarjappa Nayaka and Nagara Peasant Insurrection of 1831

Dr. T. S. Narasimha Murthy

Lecturer, Department of History, Vijayanagar College, Hosapete, Hosapete Taluk
Vijayanagara District

Abstract:

The Nagara peasant insurrections hold a significant place among the peasant uprisings of 19th-century Karnataka. This struggle was unique in that it unfolded simultaneously in opposition to British rule across Mysore, Tarikere, and Kodagu. While Budi Basappa led the peasant movement in the Nagara region, Sarjappa Nayaka emerged as the leader of the insurrection in Tarikere. This article primarily focuses on three aspects: the Nayaka leadership of Tarikere's Sarjappa Nayaka, the coordinated plan to resist the British alongside the King of Kodagu, and the essential role of peasant support in sustaining these insurrections.

Keywords: Nagara Peasant Insurrection, Sarjappa Nayaka, British Resistance, Kodagu Alliance, Peasant Uprising.

Introduction

The Nagara Peasant Insurrection of 1831 was a pivotal event in Karnataka's 19th-century history, exemplifying widespread rural resistance against British colonial forces. This uprising, spanning Mysore, Tarikere, and Kodagu, reflects a unique moment when regional leaders and peasants united against colonial oppression. Sarjappa Nayaka, a prominent leader in the Tarikere area, played a critical role in mobilizing local support, while Budi Basappa led the revolt in the Nagara region. These insurrections were not isolated; rather, they were part of a

broader strategy to challenge the British, which included an alliance with the King of Kodagu. The collaboration demonstrated a shared resolve to defend local sovereignty and resist external control. This article delves into the Nayaka leadership of Sarjappa, the alliance-building efforts, and the indispensable role of peasant support. By examining these aspects, we gain insight into the socio-political landscape of Karnataka under colonial rule and the resilience of its people.

Please cite this article as: Narasimha Murthy, T. S. (2024). Tarikere Sarjappa Nayaka and Nagara Peasant Insurrection of 1831. *SRUJANI: Indian Journal of Innovative Research and Development*. 3(4), 161-166

Historical Background of Nagara Insurrections of 1831

After Tipu Sultan's death, Mysore was returned to the Wodeyars under British terms agreed upon by the Mysore nobility and the British. Following the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War, a subsidiary military agreement was signed between the British and Lakshmi Ammanni, representing Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar. This agreement, comprising approximately sixteen articles, stripped Mysore of its independent political standing, linking it instead to the British colonial system. In 1796, Rani Lakshmi Ammanni, the wife of Krishnaraja Wodeyar II, adopted the young Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar. Following Mysore's tradition, Mummadi Krishnaraja was coronated as the Maharaja of Mysore on June 30, 1799. Since he was still a minor, Rani Lakshmi Ammanni appointed Purnaiah as Diwan, with British approval.

According to the 1799 treaty with the British, Mysore was required to pay an annual tribute of 24.5 lakh rupees. Article 3 of the treaty specified that Mysore should maintain a cavalry of 4,000 horses indefinitely, in lieu of certain cash payments. Of these, 1,000 horses were allocated for internal security, while the remaining 3,000 were designated for use by the British Army outside Mysore. However, over time, the requirement to maintain this cavalry force was lifted, as the British deemed it obsolete for modern military purposes. As compensation, ten and a half lakh rupees were added to cover

the costs associated with the abolished cavalry, increasing the tribute to 24.5 lakh rupees.

In addition to this annual payment, Mysore contributed to British finances through other taxes, including the pagadi, salt tax, and taxes on civil and military stations, as well as other indirect taxes. For instance, Mysore did not impose its own duty on imported salt; instead, it was subject to British excise duty. European goods imported primarily for consumer use were exempted from core duties, while many imported goods remained untaxed in the name of free trade. Operating under strict British control, the Mysore rulers could not undertake significant actions—such as declaring war, forming treaties, or making key appointments—without prior British consent.

Purnaiah served as Diwan from 1799 to 1811 due to the minority of Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar. After 1811, Mummadi Krishnaraja took direct control of the Mysore administration. This transition of power had a profound impact on peasant society, leading to several significant changes. During Tipu Sultan's reign, peasants were able to bypass middlemen by paying their taxes directly to the government. However, with Mummadi Krishnaraja's ascent to power, changes in agriculture, laws, and administrative practices altered this dynamic.

Under Tipu's rule, local feudal lords, including pategars and zamindars, had seen a reduction in their authority. However, as the new administration took shape, these lords began to regain their influence. Since Mummadi Krishnaraja was still a minor, Dewan Purnaiah was tasked with the collection of state revenue. The British failed to accurately identify landowners, which allowed the government to establish revenue collection by granting rights to landowners. As a result, tenants and laborers worked the land under the name of the landlord, yet the revenue was paid in the landlord's name rather than the tenant's.

The British presence in the Mysore kingdom led to various changes that had lasting implications for the peasantry (Joseph, 2018, pp. 106-107; Saki, 2004, pp. 168-174). According to Shambhat, records from the British East India Company referred to the peasant revolt as "Kootu." The shortcomings of the colonial administration persisted from 1811 to 1831. Several factors, including high revenue assessments, issues with tenancy and sub-tenancy, the indebtedness of poor peasants, open land auctions, the rise of loan sharks, and taxes on essential goods like tobacco and salt, created overwhelming burdens on the peasantry. Additionally, village taxes, court fees, and stamp duties further exacerbated their plight. John Stokes reported a significant decline in rice prices from 1827 to 1830, contributing to widespread unrest. The

reduction in the availability of cash crops, such as pepper and cardamom, further fueled the peasant insurrection against British rule (Shambhat, 2018, pp. 76-77).

Tarikere Sarjappa Nayaka Leadership: Peasant Support and the Kodagu Plan Against the British

Tarikere's Sarjappa Nayaka, also known as Sarja Hanumappanayaka, played a prominent role in the urban peasant protests alongside Budibasappa. He was the son of Sarja Rangappanayaka and the sixth king of the Tarikere camp. The title "Sarja" was bestowed upon the colonists of Tarikere by Hyder Ali, and Sarjappa maintained cordial relations with him. However, this relationship soured during Tipu Sultan's rule. In response to British oppression, Rangappanayaka stood up against the British by "seizing their debts and distributing the wealth to the poor." The Mysore government, unable to tolerate the prosperity of Tarikere, sent the British army to capture the area, resulting in Rangappanayaka's death in battle.

Following his father's legacy, Sarja Hanumappanayaka continued the struggle, significantly bolstering the peasants' resistance (Poojarahalli, 2006, pp. 2-15; Thambanda, 2022, p. 212). His leadership transformed the farmers' protest into a more unified and organized movement. According to Hatte, the rebellion echoed earlier attempts by the camp to break free from central control. Some camp workers, who had been living on pensions in Mysore, returned to their original places, viewing Sarjappa as a legitimate ruler,

representing a Kshatriya lineage, in contrast to the political powerlessness of the palegars during Tipu's reign. After Tipu's death, the colonists made a concerted effort to restore the sovereignty of their princely state.

After Bidanur and Chitradurga, the Tarikere palegars were well-known among the palepattas of northern Mysore State. The campers exhibited apathy during the Fourth Mysore War, leading to the loss of Srirangapatna, where a British army remained stationed. Sarja Rangappanayaka was imprisoned in Srirangapatna for 25 years due to his opposition to the British presence. Eventually, he escaped and returned to Tarikere, where he took over the leadership of the protest movement.

Four months into the protests, Rangappanayaka had been living on a British pension for decades. He was joined in the movement by his son, Hanumappanayaka, and his nephew, Sarjappanayaka, along with their family in Tarikere. Although the Tarikere settlers had lost their formal power, their influence over the peasants remained strong. Rangappanayaka, addressing the farmers, argued that land revenue was not a burden during their rule. He assured them that old dues had been waived, which garnered their sympathy and support. He called upon the peasants to unite and help remove the Mysore government from power, thus initiating a large-scale protest against the British.

Rangappanayaka became known as "Rangappa Nayakana Adavudi" (Paramashivaiah, 2015, p. 314). His leadership helped mobilize the local populace, and Budibasappa emerged as a key figure in the Nagara region. Rangappanayaka sought out Budibasappa, offering assistance for the protest in exchange for the restoration of his title as the leader of Tarikere.

Rangappanayaka Belagutti, inspired by the growing resistance, assumed leadership of the Nalamathi region, receiving support from Balarama and Mariappa Rakaya, the Jahgirdar of Belagutti. Ranganayaka, the Amildar of Honnali, also joined their cause. The Mysore Amildars attempted to arrest Rangappanayaka but were unsuccessful. During this time, the peasants of Udugani besieged the Amildar and looted the government treasury. In response, Faujudara led an army to the area. Reports indicated that Srinivasaraya, a resident farmer, had besieged and wounded one of Faujudara's platoons. The British quickly dispatched troops to the region, successfully rescuing Srinivasaraya, but also executed several arrested protesters.

As a result, traffic was disrupted in Anandpur and Kungsi districts, prompting Faujudara to report the deteriorating situation to Mysore. An officer named Annappa was sent to regain control, and a contingent of British troops was dispatched to Kadur and Tarikere, first attacking Kungsi. Budibasappa's executioner fled during this offensive.

Rangappanayaka then launched an invasion of Kamadurga, where he detained the Mysore Diwans. He communicated that he would only release the Diwan if a ransom was paid. The British managed to capture Kamadurga on March 3, 1831, resulting in the death of about fifty of Rangappanayaka's soldiers. Following this, Rangappanayaka went into hiding at Kamadurga. However, the protesters from the camps in Tarikere escalated their activities, engaging in robbery, kidnapping, and arson in Lakkavalli and Mandagadde districts. As the situation spiraled out of control, an army led by Mysore General Kshem was sent to the Mandagadde area, resulting in the arrest of many protesters.

In the tumultuous years of 1831-32, Sarja Rangappanayaka lost his life fighting near Jagartarpugonakkallu while attempting to evade capture by the British. Following his death, his descendant Nanjappa succumbed to severe cholera. Nevertheless, Sarjappanayaka, Rangappanayaka's kin, continued the rebellion, garnering support from 1,500 Beda Kandachar sepoys of the Mysore army. He traveled extensively to rally support against the British and, after several encounters with British forces, went into hiding to evade capture.

Chikkaviraja provided refuge to Sarjappanayaka and his companions during their resistance against the British. A report to the British Commissioner noted that on September 1, 1833, Chikkaviraja met Sarjappanayaka and his

group at Nanjarajapatnam, sending supplies to their men at Maharajadurga and Manjarabad. Sarjappanayaka, who had departed from Madikeri towards the Yechusavira region, brought along 200 individuals and 500 armed warriors from the surrounding Ramaswamy Valley. During this meeting, Pradhan Diwan Basavayya held discussions with Sarjappanayaka to strategize their next steps. However, Chikkaviraja ultimately decided it was unsafe to harbor Sarjappanayaka in Madikeri and dismissed him from the area (Tambanda, 2022).

Chikkaviraja established an alliance with Tarikere, strengthening his ties and shaking the foundations of British authority in Kodagu. His influence extended from Madikeri, where he inspired rebellions in Bangalore, Mysore, and Nagar (Tambanda, 2012). Despite the alliance, Sarjappanayaka's time with Chikkaviraja was short-lived. He managed to garner support from local peasants, and by 1831, the British had taken over the administration of Mysore State due to the peasant insurrections in Nagar. However, the protests persisted until 1833 in the Chikkamagaluru and Chitradurga districts. According to Suryanath Kamath, Sarjappanayaka, a descendant of Tarikere camp workers, arrived in Kodagu to incite the young Veerararaja, which led the Kodagu king to instigate a rebellion in Bangalore in 1832 (Kamath, 1992).

Although Tarikere had been conquered by the Mysore kingdom, the residents

retained a strong trust and emotional attachment to the settlers, leading many farmers to support Sarja Rangappanayaka and Sarjappanayaka. The belief was that restoring the settlements would allow farmers to collect the previously low revenue. Sarjappanayaka traveled extensively, rallying peasants against the Mysore government. Recognizing that both the British and Mysore kings could not apprehend him, they resorted to cunning tactics, using financial incentives to lure his followers. This led to Sarjappanayaka's arrest; he was tried in court and subsequently hanged in Guttahalli Forest Park, Bangalore (Poojarahalli, 2006).

This marked the end of the protests by the Tarikere camp workers in the nagara peasants' movement. Budibasappa capitalized on the farmers' discontent, masking his motives with financial allure. The desire to reclaim their previous positions made the peasants susceptible to exploitation, as both leaders leveraged the unrest among the disgruntled peasant communities to regain their power.

References

- Joseph, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Karnataka history* (Vol. 6). Prasaranga, Kannada University. (2019)
- Kamath, S. (1992). *History of Karnataka*. B. P. M. Publishers.
- Paramashivaiah. (1999). *Folk poetry genres of southern Karnataka*. Abhinava Prakashana.

- Poojarahalli, S. (2006). *Peasant Movements in Karnataka*. S. Chand & Company Ltd.
- Poojarahalli, V. (2006). *Tarikere Sarjappa Nayaka's narrative poetry*. Prasaranga, Kannada University.
- Saki. (2004). *Making history: Karnataka's people and their past*. Vimukthi Prakashana.
- Tambanda, D. (2012). *The Role of Chikkaviraja in the Kodagu Rebellions*. University of Mysore Press.
- Tambanda, D. (2022). *Rebellion and Resistance in Colonial Karnataka*. Karnataka University Press.
- Thambanda, V. P. (2022). *Amarasulya sangrama 1837: History of Kodagu western Ghats: Study of transitions and criticism*. Prasaranga, Kannada University.