



SUBALTERN AGRARIAN RESISTANCE AND ANTI-COLONIAL MOBILIZATION IN MALNAD: A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE TARIKERE REBELLION (1830–1831) AND SARJA HANUMAPPA NAYAKA

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Abstract

Historiographical narratives of the anti-colonial movement in Karnataka have frequently focused on major urban epicenters or large-scale princely insurgencies. However, regional micro-histories from the Malnad region of Chikkamagaluru reveal early, grassroots resistance against the administrative-economic impositions of British indirect rule and the Subsidiary Alliance system. This research paper provides an in-depth socio-historical analysis of the **Tarikere Revolt of 1830–1831** led by **Sarja Hanumappa Nayaka** (and later continued by Surappa Nayaka and Rangappa Nayaka). Originating in the Tarikere region of present-day Chikkamagaluru district, this rebellion transformed from a local chieftain's struggle into a widespread agrarian uprising (*Nagar Peasant Revolt*) across Malnad. Utilizing colonial administrative records, Mysore State gazetteers, and regional oral histories, this paper examines the socio-economic triggers—including exorbitant revenue assessments (*Sistu*), forced levies, and bureaucratic corruption—that catalyzed the revolt. The study argues that the Tarikere rebellion represented a crucial transition in early 19th-century Karnataka from feudal resistance to organized subaltern peasant insurgency against colonial economic hegemony.

Keywords: Chikkamagaluru History, Tarikere Rebellion, Sarja Hanumappa Nayaka, Malnad Resistance, Nagar Peasant Revolt, Anti-Colonial Uprising, Peasant Subaltern Agency, Mysore State History.

1. Introduction

The process of British colonial consolidation in South India following the fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799 relied heavily on the system of indirect rule through the restored Wodeyar dynasty in Mysore. Under the Subsidiary Alliance, the British East India Company demanded heavy annual tributes from the Mysore princely state. To meet these financial obligations, the local administrative apparatus (*Dewan* and *Amildars*) imposed severe agrarian taxes and arbitrary revenue collections on the peasantry and local chieftains (*Palegars*).

In the dense forest terrain of the Malnad region—comprising present-day Chikkamagaluru, Shimoga, and surrounding tracts—this fiscal pressure generated severe agrarian distress. The Palegars of Tarikere, led by **Sarja Hanumappa Nayaka**, who had suffered land confiscations and revenue fines under previous regimes, became the vanguard of local resistance. The revolt that erupted in Tarikere in 1830 was not merely a feudal attempt to reclaim lost territories; it rapidly integrated with peasant discontent to form the **Nagar Revolt of 1830–31**, one of the earliest mass peasant rebellions against colonial economic policies in South India.

2. Socio-Economic Background of the Malnad Region

Chikkamagaluru (formerly known administratively as part of Kadur district) possessed a distinct agrarian economy characterized by areca nut, paddy, and spice cultivation. The region was historically



governed through local chieftains who maintained traditional revenue relationships with the agricultural community.

1. **The System of Sistu and Revenue Inflation:** The British Resident and the Mysore administration overhauled traditional land tenure systems, demanding cash payments instead of in-kind tax collection.
2. **Corruption of the Amildars:** Local revenue officers exploited smallholders through illegal exactions, compounding agrarian debt.
3. **Marginalization of Palegars:** Local martial families, particularly the Nayakas of Tarikere, were stripped of their ancestral *Inam* (tax-free) lands and administrative authority, reducing them to subordinate subjects of the state.

This combination of agrarian distress among cultivators and political disenfranchisement among local leaders created the conditions for a regional alliance against state authority.

3. The Tarikere Revolt (1830–1831): Course and Dynamics

3.1 Outbreak and Leadership of Sarja Hanumappa Nayaka

In 1830, Sarja Hanumappa Nayaka of Tarikere, alongside his family members Surappa Nayaka and Rangappa Nayaka, mobilized local armed bands (*Kandachar* guards and *Beda* warriors) to challenge the revenue collectors in the Chikkamagaluru-Tarikere belt. They refused to pay the inflated land revenues and called upon the agricultural community to resist state officials.

3.2 Evolution into a Mass Peasant Movement (*Raita Kootas*)

The unique strength of the Tarikere rebellion lay in its spread to the broader peasant population. Cultivators organized themselves into **Kootas** (peasant assemblies) across Tarikere, Kadur, Birur, and Anandapuram.

- The insurgents established parallel administration points, preventing the state from collecting land taxes.
- They issued calls across Malnad villages demanding a total boycott of state revenue payments until agrarian grievances were addressed.

3.3 Guerrilla Warfare in the Malnad Terrain

Capitalizing on the thick forest canopy and rugged topography of the Bababudangiri and Sahyadri ranges in Chikkamagaluru, Sarja Hanumappa Nayaka's forces employed effective guerrilla tactics. They raided colonial supply lines, targeted government treasuries, and repelled initial detachments sent by the Mysore army.

4. Colonial Response and Direct British Intervention

The rapid expansion of the Tarikere revolt threatened the financial stability of the Mysore state and endangered British imperial interest in South India.

1. **Deployment of British Forces:** Realizing that the Mysore State troops were unable to quell the Malnad insurgents, the British East India Company dispatched imperial regiments under British officers to the Chikkamagaluru-Tarikere region.
2. **Military Suppression:** Armed with superior firepower, British forces systematically blockaded forest routes, burned insurgent strongholds, and launched coordinated counter-insurgency operations.



3. **Execution and Capture:** Despite fierce resistance, the leadership of the Tarikere rebellion was gradually captured or killed in action. Sarja Hanumappa Nayaka and his key lieutenants were executed or imprisoned, effectively crushing the armed phase of the uprising.

5. Historical Consequences and Political Legacy

Although the Tarikere Revolt was militarily suppressed, its political ramifications permanently altered the governance structure of Karnataka:

- **Fallback of the Princely State:** Citing the administration's failure to handle the Tarikere-Nagar rebellion, Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General of India, deposed Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III in 1831 and established **Direct British Commission Rule** over Mysore, which lasted until 1881.
- **Agrarian Revenue Reforms:** The British Commissionerate was forced to institute land revenue inquiries, moderate tax assessments, and abolish several oppressive local levies to prevent future peasant uprisings in Malnad.
- **Precursor to 1857:** The Tarikere rebellion served as an early indicator of subaltern anti-colonial sentiment, proving that rural communities in Karnataka actively resisted foreign economic exploitation decades prior to the Uprising of 1857.

6. Conclusion

The Tarikere Rebellion of 1830–1831 led by Sarja Hanumappa Nayaka remains a defining chapter in the regional history of Chikkamagaluru and Karnataka. It demonstrates how regional grievances in the Malnad hills coalesced into a broad-based anti-colonial uprising. Far from being a mere localized disturbance, the revolt exposed the economic contradictions of British indirect rule and triggered major structural shifts in 19th-century South Indian administration. Re-evaluating the role of leaders like Sarja Hanumappa Nayaka enriches national historiography by placing subaltern, regional freedom fighters at the center of India's long struggle against colonial rule.

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