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Nawab Saadatullah Khan (1710 – 1732 AD) – A biographical study

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Abstract

Nawab Saadatullah Khan was the founder and the most important ruler of the Carnatic region. He ruled from 1710 to 1732 AD as the acknowledged Nawab of the Carnatic. He was a great ruler in the lineage of Nawabs of Carnatic. He has been a character, neglected in the History of South India. An attempt has been made in this paper to trace the career and achievements of this great ruler of South India, so as to give him his rightful place in the galaxy of South Indian rulers.

Keywords: Aurangzeb, Carnatic, Dewan, Qiladar, Faujdar East India Company, Marathas

1. Introduction

The Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb deputed his Commander Zulfiqhar 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 Cuddapah, Salem and Dindigul. Zulfiqhar Ali Khan captured Gingee from the Marathas in 1698 AD. Aurangzeb appointed Zulfiqhar Ali Khan as the Nawab of Carnatic. The sovereign representative of the Mughal rule in the Carnatic region was called as Nawab. Zulfiqhar Ali Khan was succeeded by Daudh Khan as the Nawab of Carnatic in 1703 AD who held it till 1710 AD. He changed his capital from Gingee to Arcot near of River Palar and called himself as the “Nawab of Arcot”. Daudh Khan returned to Delhi and the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb appointed Saadatullah Khan as the next Nawab of Arcot in 1710 AD. He hails from the Islamic Nevayet family and was the real founder of the Nawabs of Carnatic. He rule Carnatic region from 1710 to 1732 AD. Taking advantage of the political situation and weakness of the Mughal Empire he became an independent Nawab of Carnatic region. The enmity and jealousy among the Hindu rulers of Tamil country paved the way for the Nawab to extend his territories up to River Kaveri.

2. Early Life of Nawab Saadatullah Khan

Nawab Saadatullah Khan was originally named by his father Mohammed Ali as Mohammed Sayeed. He was born in Bijapur in 1651 AD. He and his elder brother Ghulam Ali received religious education and martial training from an early age. They entered first in the service of the Bijapur Sultanate and then sought appointment in the Mughal army in 1686 AD. While Ghulam Ali was selected as a soldier, Mohammed Sayeed was rejected by the Emperor Aurangzeb. However his persistence and efforts finally bore fruits and he was enrolled as a servant. But by his sheer dint of merit he rose from the humble position to that of Mansabdar. He then became the Amir and Faujdar of Bidar. He was then shifted to the Civil administration and held the post of Chief Accounts Officer. The Emperor granted him the title of Saadatullah Khan and placed him under Daudh Khan, the Deputy Commander in Chief of the Mughal Army in the Carnatic.

3. Saadatullah Khan as the Dewan

Mohammed Sayeed attained fame and name in the Carnatic for his administrative capacity. He served as the Dewan (Finance Head) from 1700 to 1710 AD. Under his strict supervision the revenue officials exerted their best made the administration function like a well-oiled machine. Land was assessed and tax was fixed as per the quality of the soil.

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He showed utmost alacrity in the collection of the tributes annually from the feudatory of Trichy, Tanjore and other rulers. In short, Todarmal's revenue policies were successfully implemented by him and it elicited universal administration.

Besides the civil administration, Saadatullah Khan displayed his capacity as the Commander of the army very successfully on several occasions. His rendered assistance to this superior Daudh Khan at most crucial times resulting in the conquest of Vellore from the Marathas. He brought Arni and Pallikonda under the Mughal arms. Aurangzeb's successor Bahadur Shah summoned Saadatullah Khan in his presence and confirmed the post of Dewan of the Carnatic in which capacity he served from 1707 – 1710 AD. Just at that time Nawab Daudh Khan declined to remain in the Carnatic, Dewan Saadatullah Khan was confirmed upon the post of Faujdar (garrison commander) of the Carnatic. In addition to it, Nawab Saadatullah Khan was given the Qiladar (Governor) of Sera and Basavapatna. Thus Mohammed Sayeed, well known in history by his title Saadatullah Khan became the Nawab of the Carnatic.

4. Saadatullah Khan as the Nawab of Carnatic

After the recall of Daudh Khan, Saadatullah Khan became the Nawab of Carnatic in 1710 AD. It was confirmed by the Nizam of Deccan and by the Imperial Court. Nawab Saadatullah Khan ruled Carnatic from 1710 to 1732 AD.

5. Administrative Cabinet of Nawab Saadatullah Khan

Immediately after taking charge of the rule, the Nawab turned his attention towards forming a Cabinet of ministers consisting of his close confidants. His effort was to nominate persons who were dedicated and aware of problems of the people. He appointed Dakhini Rai as the Dewan. Surjaman received the post of official chronicler. Hazrath Khan was nominated as the administrator of Arcot. Abul Hassan was designated as the Naib Qiladar (Deputy Governor) of Sera and Basavapatna. Nawab's elder brother Ghulam Ali Khan became the Qiladar of Vellore. Jaswant Rai was appointed as the official reporter. This team of officials was a highly experienced one and more than that they were devoted and confident friends of the Nawab. These officials were responsible for the successful administration of Nawab Saadatullah Khan. It was he who laid the foundation of a system, which was continued by his successors.

6. Domestic Policy of Nawab Saadatullah Khan

The Nawab of Carnatic, even before Nawab Saadatullah Khan, depended on the support of the army; hence appeasement of the army was a corner stone of Nawab's policy. The Nawab developed good relationship with the Poligars, Nayaks, Kallars, Marwars, Tondimans and Qiladars of various places. Though generally lenient towards them in fixing of the annual tributes, the Nawab was very firm in collecting the tributes on time. Often he restored to a show of strength in order to cow them down. When the Nayaks of Tanjore, Trichy, Madurai and Venkatgiri and 54 other Qiladars delayed the payment, he cautioned them and received the amount. For example, he chastised the Qiladar Mahmud Khan of Satgadh and Shah Mir of Chennapattinam for oppressive system of tax collection. The Kallars also came in for some harsh treatment for their systematic theft of animals from royal

army. However he excused when they pleaded guilty and rehabilitated them so as to lead normal life.

7. East India Company and the Carnatic

Nawab as a shrewd Dewan, observed the diplomacy of the English East India Company in gaining ground and political mileage in Carnatic. So he dealt with English East India Company in a matter of fact way. Earlier the East India Company had taken advantage of financial difficulties of Rajaram at Gingee, to purchase Devanampattinam Fort. Later, it was called by the English East India Company as Fort St. David along with a 'gunshot of land' in 1690 AD.

Then the EIC managed to cajole Nawab Zulfiqhar Ali Khan and got confirmed in 1690, the grant of Fort St. David in Cuddalore. Besides, he gave the grants of Egmore, Purasawalkam, Tondiarpet, etc. Zulfiqhar Ali Khan got some gun powders but not the services of the English soldiers which he had asked for.

When Gingee fell into the hands of the Mughals, the Company sent a congratulatory letter with all the paraphernalia to the Mughal Commander Zulfiqhar Ali Khan's Nawabi lasted for twelve years and returned back to Delhi after appointing his Deputy Daudh Khan. As the Dewan Saadatullah Khan witnessed the high handedness of Daudh Khan towards EIC, he did not approve of such practices of his superiors.

In 1700 AD, Daudh Khan had treated the English East India Company at Madras rather high-handedly. The presentations sent to him by the Company including liquor were rejected by him contemptuously and with the threat to appoint a separate governor at Black Town and to patronize the Portuguese at Santhome. Again in 1701 AD, Daudh Khan marched towards Madras and camped at Santhome with a huge army. However, Governor Pitt pacified him with costly presentations and a dinner party. Despite all the pleadings, the Nawab blockaded the city of Madras and stopped all the roads going in or out of the city. Similarly all the English settlements in the coastal regions were blockaded. Finally, the siege was raised on payment of Rs.25, 000 to the Nawab. Once again in the year 1706, the Nawab threatened Madras and repeated it again in 1708; on both the occasions he extracted money and enjoyed dinners at the expense of the Company. But he continued to grumble at the inadequacy of the amount given.

In 1708, Daudh Khan once again raked up the issue of the payment of rents for five villages. But finally he issued a farman granting those villages to the English as free gifts from 5th October 1708 and left for Delhi. His successor, Nawab Saadatullah Khan was temperamentally a different kind of person. He understood the machinations of the EIC and probably had premonition of political aggrandizement by that Company. Hence, the Nawab adopted a policy of discouraging the EIC from expanding its influence over newer areas.

8. Main Cause for Nawab-EIC Animosity

In 1717 AD, Nawab's official Dayaram Gajapathi attacked the English near Chinnapattinam without the order of the Nawab. In the skirmish that followed the English succeeded but Dayaram Gajapathi sought refuge with the Nawab. The Nawab took immediate action to curb the increasing power of the EIC. He decided to build a fort near Mylapore, i.e. very near the Fort St. George. Dakhini Rai was commissioned by the Nawab to construct the new fort at

Mylapore. This threat of the Nawab unnerved the English, which apologized and promised good behavior. The Nawab was satisfied and pardoned.

The policy of confrontation adopted by the Nawab was actually based on the grant of 'Five new villages' to the EIC. The villages of Tiruvottiyur, Nungambakkam, Vyasarpadi, Kottivakkam and Sattangadu became the bone of contention between Nawab Saadatullah Khan and the Company. Daudh Khan the predecessor had given away those villages as donations to the EIC in return for the gifts and dinner parties in his honour. Hence, Nawab Saadatullah Khan took over the control of the villages in 1711, however the Company managed to obtain a Farman from the Hyderabad Court in 1717. The Nawab after restoring order in the Carnatic turned towards the EIC and demanded through a 'Hukamnama' (order issue) the restoration of the 'Five New Villages' along with the arrears of the revenues as it was the Jagir of Chengiz Khan. In response the Company Governor Elwick summarily rejected the demand through a strongly worded letter.

The sober minded Nawab then lost his patience and with determination to teach a permanent lesson to the EIC, advanced with an over whelming force towards Chennapattinam. The Madras Council hurriedly met and discussed the Company situation created because of Governor haughty reply. Realizing the danger, the Governor submitted himself before the Nawab with an apology. The Nawab's camp which was set up at Santhome became the venue for the English embassy to appear. The English embassy waited upon the Nawab at Santhome with suitable presents. It pleaded for forgiveness and put forth documents obtained from the earlier Nawab. The Nawab thus satisfying himself sanctioned those villages to the Company. Thus the ticklish problem was solved. However the matter of fact behavior of the Nawab with the English and refraining from demanding costly presentations or dinner party at Fort St. George created a no-nonsense image of the Nawab in the minds of the EIC. The English remained wary of the Nawab, for there was fear and awe of Nawab Saadatullah Khan. Thus the English and Nawab remained always on opposite lines. On the contrary the French received the patronage of the Nawab and his successors. The French presented costly gifts and lobbied with the Nawab's nobles. The French Company at Pondicherry prospered with brisk trade, set up mint and also received the Sanads (Certificates) for new Jagirs such as Gingee. Thus Nawab-French friendship blossomed from the early days of Nawab Saadatullah Khan.

9. Nawab Saadatullah Khan and the Marathas

The Marathas were very apprehensive of the threat from the Mughal Emperors. They nurtured Carnatic as the second line of defence. Shahaji Bhonsle exerted himself to this end, and his son Shivaji almost put that dream of Maratha rule in Carnatic into a fact. Vellore, Gingee, Tanjore, Gooty, Bellary, Bangalore, Kolar, etc. were captured by the Marathas. But Aurangzeb put an end to Maratha power in the South. Therefore Saadatullah Khan was well aware of the Marathas danger.

As the Faujdar of Bidar, Saadatullah Khan withstood successfully the onslaught of Maratha rulers, Dhanaji Jadhav and Shantaji. Emperor Aurangzeb promoted Saadatullah Khan for that achievement and appointed him as Bakshi of the Mughal army that was fighting for the fort of Gingee under the command of Zulfiqhar Ali Khan. As the

Dewan of the Carnatic under Nawab Daudh Khan, he was summoned by Emperor Aurangzeb and he took oath of loyalty also promised the conquest of the fort of Vellore. Saadatullah Khan fulfilled his promise and captured Vellore in 1700 AD by defeating Shankar Malhar who was the deputy of Raja Ram. Aurangzeb rewarded him. His elder brother Ghulam Ali was appointed as the Qhiladar of Vellore Fort.

The Marathas under Dhanaji invaded the fort of Tambal and occupied it but later the Fort was recaptured by Saadatullah Khan. But once again Dhanaji captured it and faced Daudh Khan, however the fresh reinforcements arrived from Maharashtra which unnerved Daudh Khan who shot himself in the Fort of Timiri. Dewan Saadatullah Khan brought timely help to him, which led to the melting away of the Maratha army. It was an important military achievement of Saadatullah Khan against the Marathas. Similarly Arni was captured from the Tanjore Nayak mainly due to timely help of Dewan Saadatullah Khan.

In the mean while the Maratha Chief Hindu Rao attacked Pallikonda. Daudh Khan purchased peace by paying 7 Lakhs of Rupees, but according to Jaswant Rai, Daudh Khan and Saadatullah Khan re-conquered Pallikonda by defeating the Maratha Chief. Emperor Aurangzeb was much elated by the victory over Hindu Rao and the recovery of Pallikonda.

10. Nawab Saadatullah Khan's Military Expedition to Mysore - 1713 AD

Nawab Saadatullah Khan was the Faujdar of 'the two Carnatics' means his rule was over Hyderabad Payeenghat and Balaghat which included the coastal regions from Guntur down to Arcot and extended towards Sidhoud, Gandikota, Gurramkonda, Cambam etc. as well as over the Balaghat regions of Bijapuri Carnatic comprising of Bangalore and Sera which exacted tributes from Harapanahalli, South Kanara, Anigondi, Bednure, Chitaldurg and Mysore. By virtue of this supreme position in Carnatic, Nawab Saadatullah Khan controlled the Faujdars of Cuddapah, Kurnool, Sera and Bavamore for four years i.e. from 1708 to 1713 AD.

It was in that year 1713 AD, Bijapuri Carnatic and all the regions in it were placed under the independent charge of Nawab Amir Khan. Therefore, the Faujdar of Cuddapah, Kurnool, Sera, Savamore and Arcot were usually referred to as Nawabs. Indeed it was severe political and economic loss to the Nawab of Carnatic as he lost one part of Carnatic and the revenue with it. He decided to make good the loss; in particular the rich treasure the Raja of Mysore. The main beneficiary was Amir Khan, the Faujdar of Sera. Nawab Saadatullah Khan organized a confederacy of all the pathan rulers namely that of Cuddapah, Kurnool, Savanure and Maratha Chief of Gooty with the main purpose of apprehending the rich treasury of Mysore. The combined army threatened Srirangapatna, which had taken strong measures to defend. Nawab Amir Khan of Sera at first showed much gusto but soon decided to come to terms. Nawab Saadatullah Khan extracted a heavy sum of Rupees one crore from Amir Khan. The confederates received Rupees 12 Lakhs from the Nawab, who returned back with 40 Lakhs to Carnatic (28 lakhs of Rupees was secretly received by him). This important development was recorded by British historians as 'The Contribution Wars'.

Nawab Saadatullah Khan, through successful in extracting a huge amount from the Nawab of Sera, however unintentionally he opened a new door for the invasions by the Marathas, who invaded Carnatic almost annually extracted huge amounts from the nawabs and change the course of history.

11. Nawab Saadatullah Khan and Raja Tej Singh of Gingee

Saadatullah Khan's rule, which lasted till his death in 1732, was full of wars, mainly against local chiefs who withheld tribute. One of these wars was against Tej Singh, the Bundela Governor of Gingee, in 1714, which, because of a well-known Tamil ballad, has become better known than its merits. The bigger campaigns were against Mysore and the Marathas.

Tej Singh, who was also called Rup Singh, was a son of Sarup Singh, a Bundela Rajput, whom Aurangzeb appointed Governor of Gingee in 1700. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, Sarup Singh withheld tribute from the Nawab of the Carnatic. He also came into conflict with the British in Fort St. David. Peace was made in May 1712. Sarup Singh died two years later, and was succeeded by Tej Singh. Tej Singh too was contumacious. Allying himself with a Maratha band, he captured the fort of the strongholds in North Arcot. Another cause of annoyance to the Nawab was Tej Singh's refusal to pay tribute.

Nawab Saadatullah Khan directed Lala Dakhini Rai to proceed to Gingee. The latter advanced to Arni and was planning a surprise attack. Tej Singh resolved to make a stand in Chetpattu. Nawab Saadatullah Khan joined Dakhini Rai in Arni. The battle was fought in Devanur near Gingee on October 3, 1714. Tej Singh was severally wounded and died on the battlefield. The Fort of Gingee was captured and all the Imperial and Qiladari officials paid homage to him. The Nawab displayed compassion and sympathy to the Rani and referred to her as his daughter. With a heavy heart, he permitted her to perform Sati as per Rajput custom. The bodies of the Raja Tej Singh and Rani were cremated at Chattikulam. Nawab Saadatullah Khan built a tomb near Arcot and called it 'Ranipet' to commemorate the heroism of the Raja and the Rani.

Nawab's brother-in-law Sadatiyar Khan became the new Qiladar of Gingee Fort. Gingee became the Nawab's new headquarter for about four years. A Central Mosque and residential place were built in order to increase the populace. Lala Dakhani Rai built a beautiful palace surrounded by garden in Gingee.

12. Suppression of Rebellions

Many rebellions and revolts took place during Nawab Saadatullah Khan's rule. A short account of these revolts is given below.

The rebellion of Mahmud Yar Khan, the Qiladar of Satgarh was an important one. He was an official of Aurangzeb's regional administration. First he held the post of Arni and then Qiladar of Satgarh. He had held the command of the army at Elkonda and Medak. Hence he enjoyed sufficient influence as well as financial resources. It turned his head and he became a tyrant. Nawab Saadatullah Khan received several complaints of his high handedness. So an additional commander was appointed to the Fort of Satgarh. The new arrangement was resented by Mahmud Yar Khan and he rebelled. The Nawab at first tried to pacify him. He provided

opportunities to mend his ways. Finally military action was taken against him. Dewan Dakhini Rai compelled him to surrender.

Trimalraj, the Chief of Pallipet rebelled several times and tried to continue his rebellion during Saadatullah Khan's reign. Hence, Dewan Dakhini Rai made a short work of him and forced him to submission. However he was pardoned.

Another rebel was Shah Mir of Chinnapatan. This place name is intriguing. It cannot mean Madras, which bears that name in Tamil. Shah Mir had made money in trade and thought that he would become a ruler. Gaining the support of a number of people in Arcot and Vellore, he rose in revolt in Vandavasi. But he was quelled easily enough.

The Zamindar of Kakidurg continued to defy the authority by non-payment of annual tribute. Nawab Saadatullah Khan marched from Cuddapah and surprised the Zamindar who submitted himself. The Zamindar was pardoned and reinstated.

The Nawab handled the supstarts in different parts of the State with a strong hand. For example, a local leader Cheel by name took law in his hands and terrorized the people from Gingee to Mylapore. Innocent travelers and merchants suffered severely at his hands. Warnings did not deter him and complaints were on the increase. Jaswant Rai was deputed to bring Cheel dead or alive. He led specially trained army in jungle warfare and surprised Cheel at his forest 'Jaksi'. The raid was successful as fort of Jaksi along with gangster Cheel, his family and treasury was captured. Thus peace, law and order prevailed in that region.

13. Death of Nawab Saadatullah Khan – 1732 AD

The good natured Nawab Saadatullah Khan passed away at the ripe old age of 81 years on 28th September 1732 AD. He was buried in the compound of the Jamia Masjid in Arcot. Nawab Saadatullah Khan had no issues and so he adopted his brother's sons, Dost Ali and Bokkar Ali. Dost Ali ascended the throne?

14. Conclusion

Raja Jaswant Singh, the biographer of Nawab Saadatullah Khan was all praise for the noble characteristics of the Nawab. But the praise lavished upon the late Nawab by the court historian of the rival ruling family namely the Walajahi dynasty is noteworthy. Similarly the words of the famous diarist Narayanan's words portray the correct picture of the Nawab. Nawab Saadatullah Khan was highly successful in his civil administration and military campaign because he did not depend only on the ability of the nobles or family members but utilized the services of men of merit and loyalty, irrespective of their religious and regional affinities. A team of Rajputs with their families had come along with Saadatullah Khan and settled in Arcot. In his biography we often come across the names of Dakhini Rai, Todarmal, Surjanmal, Jaswant Rai, etc. who were Rajput Scholars, writers, poets and artisans who illuminated the administration.

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