

Palaiyakkaras in Tamil Nadu Politics

¹K. Arunthavarajah and ¹S. Partheepan
Department of History, University of Jaffna

Correspondence: arunn.msu@gmail.com

Abstract

The *Palaiyakkaras* system is a political, economic and social system introduced in Tamil Nadu during the rule of the Nayaka kings. The word *Palaiyam* refers to land ownership and *Palaiyakkaras* refers to the people who headed the *Palaiyams*. This *Palaiyakkaras* system is similar to the feudal system seen in Europe during the Middle Ages. The Nayaka Empire was divided into 72 *Palaiyams* and *Palaiyakkaras* were selected and appointed for each *Palaiyam*. They were given complete responsibility and authority to manage the *Palaiyams*. The *Palaiyakkaras* were the ones who supported the Nayaka regime in Madurai. Their main duties were to pay tribute to the empire, administer justice in their camps, and maintain the forces of the rulers. While the *Palaiyakkaras* had acquired administrative powers for themselves, they also appointed some officials with the aim of facilitating their administrative activities. The *Palaiyakkaras* protected the state from foreign invasions and rendered various services to the ruler and the people. Even after the expansion of the Nayaka rule, the *Palaiyakkaras* were the ones who posed a great challenge to the early administrative activities of the British in the southern states. Due to this, the British, intending to bring them under their control from time to time, attempted to collect a large amount of tribute after 1792 by raiding the territories of the *Palaiyakkaras*. The study is based on historical methodology and descriptive method and uses primary and secondary sources (books, articles, and journals) to collect data as needed. The objectives of the study are to highlight the influence of the *Palaiyakkaras* in Tamil Nadu politics and to identify how their activities posed a challenge to the British during their rule. Although the *Palaiyakkaras* system was created by the Nayaks for their own protection, in later times, they were seen as a group in Tamil Nadu that created problems for their rule and created fear for the British. People like Pulidevan, Veerapandiya Kattabomman, and Oomaithurai were also *Palaiyakkaras* who fought against the British.

Keywords: Central Government, Palaiyam, Nayakkars, Tax, Tamil Nadu, Palaiyakkaras