



The little known history of Zamindars in the city



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Even till a few years ago, the word 'zamindar' had been a metaphor in the vernacular of Coimbatoreans to indicate any rich man or to humourously call someone with an attitude. Though the zamindari system was abolished in 1948, a descendant of the feudal lord at Vedapatti near Pollachi is still given the same respect by the people. But believe it or not, the descendant, like his ancestors, is not living in a palace, but occupying a rented house and eking out a living by working as a daily wager!

Throwing light on this and various other aspects on the history of zamindars, Shenbagavalli, an assistant professor of history from Sri GVG Visalakshi College for Women, Udumalpet, said: "Chinnasamy, the daily wager, is the descendant of Thimmanna Naicken, the yesteryear polygar. With the latter being good at hunting tigers, he earned the title 'Puliku Thimmanna Naicken'.

Addressing the monthly lecture series at The Va-

navariyar Foundation on 'Zamins of Kongunadu', Shenbagavalli traced the origin of the zamindari system to the then Madras presidency. "Vishwanatha Nayak, the Vijayanagara viceroy and founder of the Madurai Nayak dynasty, was the first to appoint territorial administrators and military governors called polygars. He did so to make the state administration comfortable. However, when the Tamil region came under the British rule, the polygars, who had great military power, posed a threat to the government. Therefore, instead of facing the challenges in annihilating them, the diplomatic British government provided them certain privileges and appointed them as aristocratic zamindars, whose duty was to collect tax from peasants and pay it to the government."

Shenbagavalli said that the popular zamindars of Coimbatore such as Uthukuli zamindar, Puravipalay-

am zamindar, Samanthur zamindar, Ramapattinam zamindar and so on were once polygars. Recalling Veerapandiya Kattabomman, the polygar from Panchalankurichi, who refused to pay taxes to the British government, Shenbagavalli noted: "After the British suppressed the South Indian Rebellion led by the polygars, Edward Clive, the then Governor of Madras presidency passed a proclamation in 1801 to establish the zamindari system by converting as many as 53 polygars into zamindars, of which, 13 were in Coimbatore. However, the sanad, a grant authorised by the British government, was provided to those 13 polygars only in 1871. This could be due to the polygars of Coimbatore being unable to win the favour of the British government."

In Coimbatore, the zamindari system operated only in the taluks of Pollachi and Udumalpet. "Pollachi had the zamins in Puravipalayam, Uthukuli, Ramapattinam, Samathur, Neganam, Avalappampatti and Kotampatti. Whereas the taluk of Udumalpet had the zamins of Mentrathi, Thungavi, Jothampatti, Mywadi and Vedapatti," she listed. "The zamindars, like all others of the period, supported the existing caste system in society, and had members of respective castes for carrying out respective jobs in their palaces."

