



Trade and commerce during the Vijayanagara period with special reference to the western coastal areas of Karnataka with the Portuguese: A study

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Abstract

"Karnata Rajya" was another name for the Vijayanagara Empire. The history of Vijayanagara bears eloquent testimony to the assiduous pursuance of high ideals like protection, preservation and promotion of its culture, and faith. The rulers of this empire were also better-known as "Karnataka Rayas" which is borne in the Inscriptions and the literary works like "Jambavati Kalyanam" by Sri Krishnadevaraya and Telugu work "Vasu charitamu" and the foreign accounts speak eloquently about these rulers and about their flourishing Trade and commercial activities with different areas within and outside Karnataka. Many of the towns, cities and ports during their period ie from 1336-1565 A.D. gained very important position in the world market. Their trade contacts were beyond the seas. The coastline in the west with its harbours and enterprising merchant community of Karnataka contributed the Trans-Oceanic contacts which went on for centuries. Some of the important cities and towns in the western coastal areas of Karnataka which flourished during their time were; Mirjan, Honnavar (Ankola), Bhatkal, Bidnuru, Barkur, Basaruru, Mangalore, Kumble, Malpe etc. This paper deals with the "Trade and Commerce during the Vijayanagara Empire, with special reference to the western coastal areas of Karnataka".

Keywords: Angadi, bidis, Manyadangadi, Devaragandi, Pattaa-Swami, Keris, Adikasu, senabhova, Kotekeri, Bhutastanas, Nishka, Varaha, Honnu, Madai, Kalanju, Pava, Haga, Bele, Visa, Kani, Kasu, Tara, Duddu

Introduction

"A healthy mind and a sound body" is the popular saying and this statement applies perfectly to the Vijayanagara rulers. As the economic condition of this empire reflects very sound and a prominent feature, one can consider that the type of resources, taxation, guild system, trade and commerce etc all these factors played an important role for the glory of the Empire. The study of Vijayanagara Empire has secured the attention of many scholars, and laymen alike. Although there are and still research activities like, excavations, publications, books, journals etc which are being carried on this glorious empire, the present research paper wishes to highlight upon the trade and commerce of the Vijayanagara Empire with special reference to the Western Coastal areas of Karnataka.

The inland and overseas commerce was carried on by the Vijayanagara emperors. Calicut (kozaikode) served as the chief port of the empire in South India. Abdur Razzak states that the empire had as many as 300 ports and it had trade with islands of the Indian Ocean, Malaya, Burma, China, Persia, South Africa, Abyssina, and Portugal.

Factors Contributing to Trade

Certain factors contributed to the growth of trade and commerce in Vijayanagara Empire. Firstly, as it was elsewhere, in Karnataka also the holy places held out many opportunities to merchants to sell their goods, as many people visited those places. Secondly the annual car festivals (Jatras) provided wide scope to sellers and buyers. Thirdly the palace establishments, which were many in number proved to be great patrons of the merchantile

community. Fourthly, a "powerful army" was considered as the backbone of the empire, thus protecting the empire from external aggressions and internal disorders. There were helpful factors also like, peace and harmony that prevailed in the society, protection given by the rulers to their subjects, guild system, transport facilities, definite system of weights and measures and the fair attitude of the people towards trade and commerce played major factors in contributing to Trade and Commercial activities during the Vijayanagara period. Though last but not the least the diplomatic attitude of the rulers towards the foreigners regarding trade is noteworthy. The foreign trade was carried on at a great risk for, the seas were infested with pirates, especially on the west coast, who often attacked the merchants carrying cargoes, and robbed them of their wares.

Markets

Shops, weekly markets and fairs served as marketing places in Vijayanagara Empire. Merchants set up shops where articles and commodities were sold. There were regular streets of these shops called *Angadi-Bidis*. There were two kinds of shops Viz., *Manyadangadi* and *Devarangadi*. These shops were specialised in the sale of particular goods and articles like Groceries, textiles, ornaments, yields from plantations, perfumes, animals, agricultural implements and a host of other materials. The head or the Mayor of a town was called as *Pattaa-swami*, or *Pattana swami* who had the right to levy custom duties on the fairs. The annual fairs of temples served as great markets. They were generally gatherings of sellers and buyers



Fig 1: An ancient Market place at Hampi

Means of Transportation: Bullock Cart was the common means of transportation, to carry goods from one place to another. Pack- animals such as bullocks, he –buffaloes, horses, elephants, and asses, were used to carry goods made into convenient bundles strapped on the back of the animals. Grains and salt were put in shoulder bags and oil in pots or tins loaded on the back of animals, for sales in the local weekly-markets usually delicate and perishable goods like, oil, betel leaves were carried over the head and in some cases over the shoulders in pouches or bags by using poles, goods being suspended at both ends. Delicate articles were carried in boxes, perfumes in small containers, grass in bundles and bananas in Jelle. And even small boats were used in the canals. If all these means of transportation were used for inland trade, for overseas trade large ships, vessels and the slaves were used in exporting the goods.

Important towns, forts and ports of Vijayanagara period in the western coastal areas of Karnataka which served as trading centres.

Mangalore Port



Fig 2

1. Mangalore or Mangalapura

Greek monk *Cosmas Indicopleustes* referred to the port of Mangalore as “Mangarouth”. *Ptolemy* also referred to this city as “Manganoor” in some of his works. The Moroccan traveller, *Ibn Batuta*, who had visited the town in 1342 A. D. referred to it as “Manjarun” and stated that the town was situated on large estuary Bay. Muslim travellers have made references to port towns like Mangalore, which was

regarded by the Arab travellers as the biggest town and a great commercial centre. Juxtaposed between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats is a unique piece of land popularly known as South Kanara. Mangalore, the district headquarters of Dakshina Kannada, has been a trading center for several centuries. It was, since the early period of the Christian era till the end of the 14th century, the capital of the Alupa rulers. From the 14th to 16th centuries the area came under the governance of Vijayanagara dynasty. But the strongest influence was that of the Portuguese, who arrived on the coast in the 15th century. They opened a factory for trade and brought with them the Roman Catholic religion too. With an important port, this once coastal town has become a bustling commercial center. Yet it preserves its old-world charm, with coconut palms, quaint houses with terracotta tiled roofs, temples, churches and beautiful beaches.

The original name of the town Mangalore seems to be “Mangalapura” and it is ancient as at least 8th century. This name Mangalapura appears quite frequently in epigraphs even until 14th century A.D. A portion of Mangalapura is known as ‘Kodial’. At present whole of Mangalore town is known as ‘Kodial’ or ‘Kudla’



Fig 3

2. Mirjan Fort: The Mirjan Fort is located on the west coast of the Uttara Kannada district in the southern Indian state of Karnataka. The fort known for its architectural elegance was the location of several battles in the past. According to the first historical version, Queen Chennabhairadevi of Gersoppa (under the Vijayanagara Empire) was initially credited with

building the Mirjan Fort in the 16th century. She ruled for 54 years and also lived in the fort. During her reign, the port at Mirjan, which is 32 kilometres (20 mi) to the south east of Karwar, was used for shipping pepper, saltpetre and betel nut to Surat. Gersoppa, a district annexed to Bednur, was famous for the pepper exported from this region. Consequently, the Portuguese gave the epithet "Rani, the Pepper Queen" to the Queen of Gersoppa.

3. **Basaruru or Vasupura:** Basruru, once called Vasupura, is a historic port town on the banks of the Varahi River on the Kanara coast in Karnataka, India. For much of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century, it was the rice port *par excellence* on that coast. The port was used by traders of several foreign countries mainly to cater for the needs. The town had several streets, each specifically housing communities like traders, artisans, dancers, weavers etc. It was also famous for communities who were experts in singing and dancing, which art is forgotten and no longer exists. The town has become a small obscure village and the trade no longer exists.

In his travel account Moroccan Traveller Ibn Batuta (Abu Abdullah Mohammed (1304–1358)) who visited Canara on his way to Malabar from Honnavar says, "The first town in the land of Mulaybar (Malabara) that we entered as the town of Abu-Sarur (Basrur), a small place on a large inlet and abounding in coco-palms, British Major of Engineers James Rennel, has concluded with due analysis that the Bares of Ptolemy's Map is the Barcelor or Basrur.

The busy trade and commerce on the Kanara coast facilitated the growth of a number of main and allied industries. The existence of several *keris* (streets) at Barkur, Basruru, Karkala and Mudabidre represented possibly the various industries run by different guilds and the settlements of artisans.

The state also imposed taxes on shops. An inscription belonging to A.D. 1536 from Koteswara refers to sales or commercial tax collected from shops (*angadi* in Kannada means shop) amounting to one hundred and thirty-six *gadyanas* and twenty *panams*. The studies made in this field revealed that there were taxes on temporary stalls erected in the markets known as *adikasu*. There are also references to sales tax levied on branded cattle. There were taxes on the sale of fish, and on the sale of sheep, horse and bullocks.

The state collected taxes on goods in transit, which entered the cities and towns by both road and waterways. There was also a custom duty levied on the transactions of goods within the state as well as on goods exported from and imported into the state. The volume of trade facilitated the state to impose maximum taxes on trade and traders and extract as much amount as it liked. The tolls collected on the entry of the goods into a region and at the gates of cities varied from place to place. The rate of taxation depended upon the inflow and outflow of goods. The quantum of goods traded determined both the amount of revenue collected and the nature and extent of the trade with which it was linked. Here one has to make a distinction between the situation before the emergence of Vijayanagara empire and the scenario after the establishment of Vijayanagara empire.

It was the establishment of Vijayanagara empire which gave a great boost to the trade since the state took active interest in protecting the interests of traders.

The unification of empire under one uniform system made the transit of goods from place to place more easier. During the Vijayanagara period, the petty coastal principalities were allowed to extract land revenue while the empire concentrated on collection of the customs of ports and tolls on the highways connecting the ports to imperial city of Vijayanagara. Even in these, the imperial interest was limited to ensuring that the commercial links to the seaboard were not harmed. The sources refer to two types of custom duties: (i) on the movement of goods from one region to the other within the Vijayanagara state, and (ii) on goods which were either exported from or imported into the Vijayanagara state. There were two important methods of collection of transit and custom duties. One method was leasing out the work of collecting the custom duties, and the other was of the state collecting the dues directly through a network of officials.

The Basrur inscription belonging to A.D. 1465 refers to *senabhova* attending the ports to collect the taxes from loaded ships leaving the port of Basrur.

4. **Barkuru or Barakanur**

Barkur was the ancient capital of the Tulu kingdom. It was known as Barakanur. The rulers were known as Tulu kings or rulers. They spoke Tulu language. Most of the districts ruled by them were in coastal Karnataka. Many ancient inscriptions found in Barkur are in Tulu language. These are an essential part of history of Tulunadu. The Coastal Town of Barkur was also a flourishing port in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Apart from the Tulu rulers, Cholas too had their share of rule on Barkur, who are said to have ruled the city in the 11th century A.D. Alupa rulers made Barkur as their capital. There are two forts whose remains have been built by the Alupas and Vijayanagara governors. It was also a sub capital of the Hoysala kings for some period. The city had ten extensions called Keris - each being named after its professional residents. Each Keri had a tank and number of temples. Tradition says that, the King visited a temple every day, thus visiting all the temples of the city and on the last of the year, he visited the most important Panchalingeshwara Temple. That day was the day of car festival of this temple situated with the old Fort area called "Kotekeri". As per tradition, the city contained 365 temples, the remains of which can be seen to-day. A few of them are now in renovated condition. Besides, there are Bhutastanas (spirit worshipping centres). There are remains of palaces and other constructions in both the Fort areas. The port town was a busy commercial centre almost from 2nd Century B.C. Evidences of Megalithic and mesolithic ages have been discovered recently. The place abounds with history and has yielded a little over 100 stone and several copper plate inscriptions. They belong to the Alupa, the Hoysala, the Vijayanagara and the Keladi periods.

Today, the main language spoken in Barkur is Kannada, which is the official language of the State of Karnataka. Konkani, another local language, which is also said to be an Aryan language, is widely spoken in Barkur. or Barakanur.

Barkur Fort Under the Vijayangara Period



Fig 4

5. Anjediva Island



Fig 5

Fort Anjediva, built on the Anjadip Island, off the coast of the Indian state of Karnataka but under the administrative jurisdiction of the Indian state of Goa, was once under Portuguese rule. Anjediv—the name means "fifth island", is the largest of an archipelago of five islands (known as the Panchdiva chain of five islands); the other four islands are the Kurnagal, the Mudlingud, the Devgad and the Devragad. Because of its strategic importance in the seafaring route to India and also as a watering destination for ships, a fort was built on this island by the Portuguese to enhance their military presence and control of trade route. The fort island was also known as Agiadvipa (clear butter), Angedvpa (some isles), Agadvipa (derivative from goddess Aja) and Adiadvipa (Ancient Island). It was called Aigidias by the Greek geographer Ptolomey. Etymology of Anjediv is also attributed to the name of the local Goddess *Ajadurga Devi*.

and Quilon) where seafaring merchant vessels from Greece, Arabia, Egypt, and Portugal would stop for water on their way to and from the East carrying valuable goods, such as spices from India. Almeida took up the task of building the fort so seriously that he even declined an invitation from King of Bisnaga (Vijayanagara), a staunch ally of the Portuguese. As soon as he landed in Angedipa on 13 September 1505, he started building the fort with enthusiasm. The Vijayanagara emperor or his local vassal, the chieftain of Gerosopa, did not object to the fort building activity. Construction materials such as timber, cane, palm leaves and lime were readily supplied by the local people.

The fort walls were mostly built with clay and stone, since there was shortage of lime stone and other materials on the island. Still, the fort as built was considered a good base for

the military exchanges with the enemy. The military operations launched from this location helped Almeida subdue initial enemies like Timoja (a Hindu privateer who served the Vijayanagara Empire and later became of great help for the Portuguese. After the fort was built, Portuguese used it mainly as military establishment and as a regular watering stop for their ships.

Anjediva fort, when it was a Portuguese territory, was used by the Christians and Hindus of the mainland as a refuge during the invasion by the coastal kingdom of Bednore, and by Tipu Sultan.

6. Bhatkal: It was another city of great importance. The travellers have praised it. "Varthema" says that Bhatkala (Bhatkal) was a very noble city of India. Walled and very beautiful and almost a mile distant from the sea. Barbosa describes it as a very large town of very great trade in merchandise inhabited by many Moors, (muslims) gentiles and commercial people. Many ships of Ormuz congregated here. It was an important center of influence of the Portuguese. Ships from this port carried goods to Aden.

Import and export of articles

Imports: Barbosa's account written between 1504 and 1515 A.D. gives an account of how the foreign trade was passing from the hands of the Arabs to the Portuguese. The Ormuz ships came hither Bhatkal every year, brought horses in great number and many pearls were sold to the kingdom of Narasimha. A few ships belonging to the other countries brought in articles of imports were Elephants, from Ceylon, musk, and sandal, copper, brocades of gold, and silk from China, and drugs were the main imported articles. The extent of trade activity in the ports of Western coastal areas of Karnataka cannot be determined easily owing to the prevalence of piracy and vulnerability to bad weather for a considerable part of the year.

Exports: The articles of export were cloth, rice, iron, salt-petre, sugar, spices and Rice mostly of the Coarse variety was exported from Basruru, Barkur, and Mangalore to Malabar, Maldiv Islands, Ormuz and Aden. The Portuguese purchased cloth from the Vijayanagara merchants either at Ankola or Honnavar and iron from Bhatkal. Pulicat exported a large quantity of printed cloth to

Malacca, Pegu and Sumatra. Spices were exported to Mecca.

Coins of Usages: An uniform Currency, weights, and measures and a sound system of taxation contributed to the balanced growth of the economy of the Region, coins made of Gold, silver and other metals were issued. If Nishka, Gadyana, Varaha, Honnu, Hana Madai and Kalanju, were the gold coins, silver coins were Pava, Haga, Bele, Duddu, Pon, Pagoda Visa, Kani, Kasu, Tara etc. the exchange value of these coins was based on the metallic content. The standard coin was the Varaha. The "Pardao or Pratap" was the currency used throughout the year, as told by Domingo Paes. Barbosa found this use of the coin in Gujarat. The coins are very rich with iconographic details. Hanuman, Garuda, Nandi, Durga etc are the symbols used by these rulers on their coinage.

Weights and Measures: References are made in epigraphs to different units of weights and measures. The conspicuous feature of the system was its diversity. In the principal centers of trade foreign units of measures and weights were also in use. Very little was done to introduce any kind of uniformity in this respect.

Security: The rulers Of Vijayanagara anxiously encouraged Trade. The state sought to assure security to the merchants, who brought their goods from distant places, and countries. However, the articles from foreign countries were subjected to customs duties at the places of imports. The government provided safety and security on trade routes and in the markets. The foreign travellers who visited the empire were impressed by the sense of security prevailing there. Varthema says one could move about anywhere in safety.

Conclusion

In the 15th century there were significant changes in the trade on the western coast of India. The changes were in the expansion of sea trade, and land trade. The commercial contacts of the Vijayanagara empire to the coastal areas and to the foreign countries continued for a long period. The sea ports, Harbours forts and the coins of Vijayanagara speak about the flourishing trade. It deals about the settlements at those places where the traders stayed and relaxed about.

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