

## **DIAMOND INDUSTRY AND TRADE IN MEDIEVAL ANDHRA**

**(From 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)**

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The mining industry is an important industry in India and particularly in Andhradesa during AD 1300 to 1600 AD. Various mines worked between 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century in Andhradesa under Vijayanagara and Qutb Shahi rule. The Diamond mines were played a great role in the Andhradesa. The Qutb Shahi and Vijayanagara rulers encouraged mining industry and provided royalties to mines for digging the metal in various regions of Andhra.

### **DIAMOND MINING INDUSTRY:**

Diamond mining, diamond cutting and diamond setting flourished as an important industry during the medieval Andhra under Vijayanagara and Qutb Shahis period. Diamond is the corrupted form of damant. A naturally crystallised, pure carbon piece of substance is importance to industry because it is the hardest substance known, used in rock drills, tools for cutting glass and as andorazine powder. A clear flawless piece of this stone valued as a precious gem of great refraction power, especially after being cut and polished, is used as an article of jewellery especially for engagement rings.

Most of the travellers, who visited Vijayanagara and Golconda, unanimously accepted and acclaimed that large internationally reputed diamond mines were located in the three regions of Vijayanagara and Golconda kingdoms viz. Karnataka on the banks of rivers Krishna and Godavari and some parts of Rayalaseema.

Under the Vijayanagara regime also, the diamond mining industry flourished. The Portuguese trades consolidated their trade with Vijayanagara rulers concentrating in the

commerce of diamonds and precious stones during 16<sup>th</sup> century. Niccolo-de-conti had mentioned the existence of a diamond mine at Albenigaro towards the North of Vijayanagara city within fifteen days of journey. Fernao Nuniz described a diamond mine that functioned at Gooty. The manuscript of Francisco Pereira, the chief lapidary of the king of Portugal, dated 1548 give a clear account of various diamond-mines in Vijayanagara Empire. The list of Vijayanagara diamond mines given by Francisco Pereira includes Radique, Cortinna, Ballary, Carul, Condepelym and Pempay. All of them were situated in the northern direction of the capital city of Vijayanagara. As regards the diamond 'as large as hen's egg' was said to have been found at the sack of Vijayanagara and presented to Adil Shah. Conti says that it was a jewel which Raya had affixed to the base of the plume on his horse's headdress. Garcida Orta who was in India in 1534, says that a Vijayanagara diamond has been seen as large as a hen's egg and he even declares the weight of three others to have been respectively 120, 148 and 250 mongelis, equivalent to 150, 175 and 312½ carats. Another account of Jacques-de-coutre gives detailed information about the diamond mines which were under the control of Vijayanagara ruler Araviti Venkata-II as late as 1611 and 1614 AD. The above traveller described the active diamond mines at Ramallakota and Peli situated in eastern and southern directions of Vijayanagara city.

Niccolò de' Conti, who visited southern India particularly Vijayanagara kingdom says that diamonds were found in the coastal region of Kondaviti dynasty. He also states that 'the principal mines were on the North bank of Krishna river, and in Kurnool and Ananthapur countries not only Vajrakarur'. On the basis of the above data it can be concluded that no diamond mine existed in the western direction of the city of Vijayanagara. Thus, the above mines were located in Bellary district of Karnataka and Ananthapur, Kurnool, Cuddapah and Guntur of Andhradesa.

The foreign accounts also provide some information about state policy towards diamond mines. According to the Portuguese account, the diamond mine at Vajrakarur was regarded as the state monopoly where the Vijayanagara Emperor was considered to be the proprietor. Similarly, the Spanish manuscript of Jacques-de-coutre records that the diamond-mine of Ramallakota was controlled by the Emperor. During the medieval times, rulers also entrusted the responsibility of managing the mines to some efficient and loyal officers. Sometimes, they also handed over the rights on mines to contractors. Under the Vijayanagara rulers the above system was in practice. The tenants used to pay regular annual revenue to the emperor.

Andhradesa continued to be a great diamond mining and trading centre during Qutb Shahi period. The contemporary European travel accounts contain valuable information about diamond mines, diamond trade, diamond cutting and polishing activity under the Qutb Shahis of Golconda. The native literature and *Kaifiyats* (Telugu) also throw some light on diamond mining under the Qutb Shahis. The mining industry was very profitable for the Golconda kingdom in Andhradesa during Medieval period.

The diamonds of Golconda became so famous by 17<sup>th</sup> century that the very name of Golconda came to stand for fabulous richness in the European countries. Indeed, the Oxford dictionary says that the term “Golconda” is used synonymous with ‘Mine of Wealth’ as it was formerly celebrated for diamonds.

The lure of diamonds has drawn ambitious adventurers to the Coramondel Coast since times immemorial from far off lands like the ancient Rome and Phoenicia, Arabia, China, Venice, France and England. Marco polo of 13<sup>th</sup> century Niccolo de Conti of 15<sup>th</sup> century, Caesar Frederick of 16<sup>th</sup> century, Methwold, Tavernier, Streyntsham Master of 17<sup>th</sup> century all visited the

diamond mines. India, especially the Golconda area, was the chief supplier of diamonds to the world market since BC 800 to 1728 AD.

According to a report published in England in 1677, 23 diamond mines by name were enumerated to have been within Golconda territory. Although the identification of some of these places is still puzzling the scholars, most of these mines are now located in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Geologists have bracketed these mines into two broad groups, viz., those in Cuddapah, Kurnool and Ananthapur districts and those in Guntur, Krishna and West Godavari districts.

According Thevenot, the French traveller, the kingdom of Golconda was called the country of diamonds. Another traveller, Tavernier said that twenty three internationally reputed and other diamond mines were located in Golconda kingdom. All the diamond mines existed till the downfall of the Qutb Shahis. Some of these mines were not identified because of unclear information provided by the European travellers about the location of mines. Most of the mines were live during Vijayanagara period also. Golconda diamond mines were definitely known in the Vijayanagara times. Golconda mines flourished in Vijayanagara Empire which remained almost intact despite its fall in 1564. Kondapalli and Kondavidu Circars were brought under the firm control of Golconda by Ibrahim Qutb Shah a year before his death in 1579. The Coastal Andhra diamond mines came under the charge of Golconda. Thenceforth, mining was carried on a smaller scale by merchants and the Dutch to whom the mines were leased out and with the condition that the diamonds above 10 carats in weight should be surrendered to the King. Diamond mining in the coastal area became the state monopoly, when Mohammed Qutb Shah took special interest in this regard until 1623. But the Rayalaseema diamond mines remained with the Vijayanagara emperors until 1652 when these areas were conquered by Bijapur and Golconda with the approval of the Mughal emperor. The Qutb Shahi commander-in-chief,

Mohammad Sayeed Astrabadi, who was elevated to the post of Mirjumla, occupied Gandikota and made it his headquarters until he effected to Mughals. This has brought almost all the Vijayanagara diamond mines in Kurnool, Cuddapah, Ananthapur districts under the control of Golconda.

Among these, the mines near Gandikota were farmed by Mirjumla, while the most famous mine at Vajrakarur in Guntur taluk was reserved for the King. The last mentioned mine was visited by the Russian traveller Athanasius Nikitin in 1472. To him there were assigned 300 dealers residing at this place and that from here diamonds were exported to all parts of the world. Indeed, these were the mines that have supplied diamonds ceaselessly to the *Vajrabhandagra* (treasury of diamonds) of the Vijayanagara emperors. The splendor of the forgotten kingdom was described by scores of foreign travellers such as Abdur Razzak, Varthema Panento, Nuniz, Domingo Paes, Niccolo de Conti and Duarte Barbosa, Jan Huyghen van Linschoten in 1585 observed that in Vajrakarur mine, diamonds above 25 mongelines were reserved for the Vijayanagara king. In 1614, according to Barnades, in the treasury at Chandragiri, the Vijayanagara capital, there were 3 large chestfuls of finest diamonds. All this goes to show that the Golconda diamond mines on Krishna and Pennar are the same as Vijayanagara diamond mines. Thus, these mines under the label Golconda Diamond Mines, became world famous during the last 50 to 60 years of Qutb Shahi rule.

The most important mine in Andhradesa is Kollur which was located on the bank of river Krishna, presently in the Guntur district. When Tavernier visited this mine, it was a large town and the mines were in the space between the town and high mountains in the form of a cross “which were at a distance of a league and a half” from the town. This mine produced famous diamonds in India, and it yielded many stones ranging from 10 up to 900 carats and sometimes much bigger. Tavernier asserts that this mine produced the great diamond which is known as

Koh-i-Noor presented by Mirjumla to Shahjahan. When Tavernier visited this mine there were nearly 60,000 persons working there, including women and children.

Another important diamond mine was Vajrakarur in Bellary district, now in Ananthapur district. Nearly 40,000 men worked in this mine for diamonds. The Orloof diamond was found in the Vajrakarur mine. This mine was live even before the Qutb shahi rule. According to Vessot, this was the chief mine for the Qutb Shahis. “The labour, nearly 6000, worked in this mine daily and extracted diamonds weighing 3 pounds”.

The other important mines in Godavari and Krishna districts were Mallepally and Gollapally. According to Streynsham Master, nearly 30,000 to 40,000 labourers were engaged in Mallapally and Gollapally diamond mines. Streynsham Master visited Golconda kingdom during Abul Hasan Tanishah’s period and said that Mallepally and Gollapally diamond mines were given on lease for 60,000 pagodes (2,40,000 rupees) per annum.

Paritala diamond mine was another biggest diamond mine in Krishna district of Andhradesa, which produced the famous pits diamond. The mine engaged nearly 6000 to 7000 labourers.

The diamond mine at Rajipenta was a lush green beautiful valley. Rich green meadows surrounded this place, spread far and wide and merged in the distant celestial blue horizon. The ten miles extent between Rajipenta and Mustabad was a fascinating scenic beauty. Government got annual revenue worth 60,000 *varahas* from Rajipenta. Rajipenta produced thousands of valuable diamonds during Qutb shahi period.

Gandikota mine produced small diamonds. It is a part of Karnataka. In this mine 1200 labourers worked for digging of diamonds. The large sized diamonds were sent for the Qutb shahi rulers, while the smaller sized diamonds were exported to other states.

The workers had acquired such expertise that they could trace out diamonds just by means of the nature, smell and colour of the mound. When Mohammad Sayeed, the *Mirjumla*, conquered Cuddapah, Siddawot and Kandikota, new mines were discovered and diamonds worth millions of rupees were unearthed. The abundance of diamonds was so high that they were counted by bags and not by numbers. Sayeed had earned a large number of diamonds worth millions of rupees, which he had presented to Shahjahan along with a big diamond which weighed 360 carats. All these diamonds were collected from Karnataka. It was no exaggeration to say that most of the big diamonds now extant in the world, were mined from Golconda kingdom. Abdullah Qutb Shah and his successor Abul Hassan Qutb shah both possessed innumerable diamonds weighing not less than 300 carats in their jewellery storage. Abdullah's crown was studded with the best of diamonds.

Bills of exchange in Agra, Golconda, Bijapur and preferably Surat were accepted in lieu of ready cash. If a buyer could not pay immediately, interest was charged at the rate of 1½ percent per mensem. All the merchants had to submit a register of the sales to the Governor of the mine that could calculate and receive the royalty. For weighing the diamonds accurately men were appointed by the king at the mine who did that job without charging anything. Tavernier was surprised to see that children "From the age of ten years up to the age of fifteen and sixteen" were trained in the art of purchasing diamonds from the mine and disposing them off later.

The magnitude of the trade at this mine can be appreciated from the fact that Tavernier, during his few days' stay at Ramallakota, purchased diamonds worth 40,000 pagodas. Tavernier remarks that some ignorant Europeans were under the wrong impression that Indians were barbarians and that trifles like tobacco, mirrors and spices could be bartered for diamonds at the mines.

Thevenot says that many jewellers and diamond cutters lived in the fort of Golconda, being exclusively engaged for the king's work. They were given free lodging and were expected to the extremely secretive of their work lest Aurangzeb should come to know of the big diamonds possessed by the Golconda Sultan.

Diamond mining industry was not a seasonal one in Andhra but was carried on throughout the year, and the diamonds were obtained in different ways according to the opinion of the travellers. During rainy season diamonds were extracted from the beds of torrents after the rains. In summer, diamonds were extracted from the mountains and the immense heat of the season made it scarcely possible for the visitors to go there. All the diamond mines in the kingdom of Golconda and Vijayanagara were said to be owned by the king and these places were converted as protected towns.

### **EXPORT OF DIAMONDS AND DIAMOND TRADE:**

The Portuguese traders came to India in 1498 and established trade centres at Calicut, Goa, Diu, Daman and Malacca with the permission of the ruler of Calicut Zamorin. They maintained good relations with the Vijayanagara kings. The Portuguese, the Dutch and the English companies were induced to serve the demand of European markets into which they had ventured when long distance trade conducted between India and Europe expanded continuously during 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. They played a vital role in trade and commerce. The diamond mining industry provided an opportunity to widen the range of their purchase of commodities like diamonds in Andhra besides pepper and spices in Malabar and textiles in Coromandel. It is evident from the European accounts that the Europeans viz., Germans and Portuguese traders had diamond trade relations with Andhra region ever before the Qutb Shahis came to power. The German merchants particularly the Welsers who extended financial help to the Portuguese to send fleets from Portugal to India invested considerable sum of



money through their agents to buy diamonds in the kingdom of Vijayanagara. Lazarus Nürnbergger who hailed from Neustadt a der Aisch in Germany reached India in AD 1517 and during his stay at Bhatkal, he collected information about diamonds and their trade in the kingdom of Vijayanagara and this news stimulated the desire of other German business houses to begin trade with India in diamonds.

Hirschvogel another German merchant and financier sent his agent to Southern India in AD 1520 for diamond trade. The Portuguese who had made Cochin as the capital of Portuguese India during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, purchased diamonds at the city of Vijayanagara. The king of Portugal appointed a member in the capital city of Vijayanagara for purchase of diamonds and gems for the crown of Portugal during the year AD 1521. There was also a writer called Jeronimo de Rego, who was appointed for maintaining relations between Cochin and Vijayanagara. According to the royal order, the king of Portugal instructed the members who stayed in Cochin, to visit Vijayanagara city as frequently as possible and make purchases of diamonds and precious stones. These measures helped in export of diamonds from Andhra to Europe. The poor quality and medium precious stones, topazes and other stones were exported to Ceylon, but not to Lisbon. According to the order of the Portuguese Viceroy in India, Alavaro Mendez, a goldsmith had been specially engaged for selling these poor quality precious stones and there was a clerk sent along with him carrying necessary funds who helped in the purchase of diamonds at the city of Vijayanagara. They purchased superior quality diamonds and gems for the king of Portugal from the central *bazar* of precious stones, a separate locality for profitable marketing of diamonds in Andhradesa.

After the battle of Tallikota, diamond mining and trade was encouraged by the Muslim kingdoms of Deccan. Diamond mines in the Vijayanagara territory at Marmur, Malavelli and Ramallakota during the early 17<sup>th</sup> century passed into the hands of Qutb Shahi rulers and

Ramallakota mine was the chief source of income for the Golconda treasury. Further research for new diamond mines became an endeavour of the Golconda Sultan and the discovery of new mines at Coastaconda, Cuddapah, Duaneguti, Nueva and Pali yielded additional revenue to the kingdom. Kollur diamond mine located in the kingdom of Golconda was newly discovered in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as described by William Methwold and diamonds came to be extracted from Kollur for a very long time and it become one of the prime mines of Andhra. There are some striking differences in the policy adopted by the Vijayanagara rulers and the Muslim rulers of Deccan in the diamond mining industry and mining allotments and access to mining rights had been forbidden to foreigners during the Vijayanagara period, but the Qutb Shahis leased out mining rights to the Dutch in 17<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the Qutb Shahis had created a special economic and political system where by the yield of the diamond mines was utilised according to their own requirements and also owing to circumstances, besides keeping it under their custody. Later, the Muslim rulers entrusted the diamond mines to individuals who acted as mine controllers and they would generally appear to be merchants who formed a company. These merchant capitalists invested large sum of funds and they carried out mining operations with Government license. Thus, the diamond mining industry had developed on commercial lines during 17<sup>th</sup> century. Whatever may be the differences that existed in the policies of the Vijayanagara rulers and the Qutb Shahis, all diamonds more than a fixed size were declared as royal property and had to be handed over to the treasury of the king.

Official arrangements by the King of Portugal to buy diamonds from the city of Vijayanagara discontinued with the destruction of royal capital in A.D. 1565. Several merchants, whose names are found in the records of the later period, show that they conducted trade in diamonds. A royal order was promulgated in A.D.1616 prohibiting the resident foreigners and the new Christians in Goa dealing with diamonds and precious stones on the ground that they

attempted to monopolise the gem trade and sent their stock to Italy through overland viz. Ormuz, rather than exporting it to Lisbon in Portugal. The private and foreign merchants therefore, left Goa and reached other places for the purchase of diamonds, in most cases directly from the mines. A Venetian merchant called Bernardo de Nordona was busy buying diamonds in Bijapur during A.D. 1606 and was also purchasing diamonds at the Ramallakota mine. Some Portuguese private merchants like Jorge de Silveria had been found in the document buying diamonds at the Ramallakota mine in A.D. 1611. Vincent Ribeiro another Portuguese was buying diamonds at Bijapur between 1616 and 1622 A.D. Alvaro Mendez visited the mine at Marmur and bought quality diamonds sold by several Portuguese private merchants like Bartholome Rodriguez, Domingos de port, Alvaro de Fonseca, left Santhome of Mylapore and resided at Madras and engaged in diamond trade till as late as A.D. 1684. Some German merchants like Felipe Escudo who had initially settled down at Goa with his wife and children left the place and preferred to settle down at Santhome of Mylapore in A.D. 1620. He travelled most of his time in the hinterland of South India by buying and selling diamonds and other precious stones. In addition to foreign merchants, there is also mention of some Indian merchants like Malique Tujar in the records as important diamond merchants in Golconda. This evidence suggests that diamonds were purchased at the source place by merchants in the absence of a capital market in South India during 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Merchants came from Europe to Deccan for buying the diamonds. The prices of diamonds had not been regulated by the states of Southern Indian rulers in medieval period. Nikitin mentioned that the diamonds of different colours and value were sold at various places because of their weight and type. Diamonds were sold at the rate of five and also at ten roubles. Some diamonds were also sold at 1000 and also at 2000 pounds weight of gold. Peter Floris described in his letter that the price of diamonds went up so much that it was so dear to buy

diamonds. Thus, it may be concluded that the prices of diamonds rose sharply from time to time owing to demand and supply in the medieval period.

The Portuguese settlement of Santhome of Mylapore on the Coromandel Coast emerged as a centre of diamond trade in 1620 where many diamond merchants settled. The Dutch factory records mentioned that the port of Masulipatnam also was busy in diamonds making and it emerged as a port of diamond export under the patronage of the Qutb Shahi rulers of Golconda in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century owing to diamond production in the Deccan. Imports of some diamonds from Bantam to India can be traced in the bills of lading during this period. The fact that diamonds and precious stones, as found in the records, are imported from Arakkam to Masulipatnam indicates that gems were also initially brought to Coastal India from various parts of South Asia and South East Asia in order to meet the purchase requirements of the European trading. A receipt of AD 1541 gives details about the diamonds and gems exported to the queen of Portugal. Another unpublished manuscript describes the sale of 300 batans of diamonds in Lisbon during fifth decade of 16<sup>th</sup> century. As late as 1615, diamonds continued to be exported from India to Portugal. They were mainly transported from India to Portugal during 17<sup>th</sup> century. Later, diamonds from India also found their destination to various European diamond marketing centres like Venice, Antwerp and Amsterdam in 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The Andhradesa diamonds attracted the Dutch East India Company. The Dutch East India Company officials at Masulipatnam discovered a new diamond mine at Banaganipalli, about fifty miles from South West of the port of Masulipatnam in AD 1621. It was given on lease by the Sultan of Golconda for 30,000 pagodas per year. In this mine, diamonds weighing more than eight carats were found, which had to be compulsorily sent free of cost to the Sultan of Golconda. Later this diamond mine was temporarily closed, because the Mughal ambassador was visiting kingdom, only to be reopened and leased to four Hindu entrepreneurs for 2,60,000

pagodas per annum in 1623 after the Mughal ambassador left Golconda. Mirjumla was said to possess over 408 pounds of diamonds when he left the services of Golconda. The son of Mirjumla had also possessed several diamond mines which he had farmed out under fake names when he was the Chief Minister of Golconda. He owned the most valuable diamond named *Koh-I-Noor*, which he presented to the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan when they met in Agra. The Dutch company purchased 2993.75 carats of diamonds in three years from 1620 at Masulipatnam and they were exported to Holland.

**DIAMONDS PURCHASED BY THE DUTCH AT MASULIPATNAM ON 23<sup>RD</sup> AUGUST 1623:**

Pieces (in No.)	Carats	Price (in Pagodas)
25	64	231
51	88½	250
44	86 ½	304

The English East India Company also was interested to receive diamonds from Andhra through the port of Masulipatnam. They sent corals from London for exchange of the Andhra diamonds. Some Portuguese merchants like Antonio Martins and his brother Diogo Martins attempted to receive money annually from England in return for diamonds of Andhra. This arrangement was chiefly made because of the fact that diamond trade by private Portuguese merchants was prohibited. The Portuguese government had laid heavy penalties on those who engaged in private trade in diamonds. The Portuguese Viceroy of Goa had prohibited the sale of diamonds by Portuguese in 1675 and the merchants of Goa preferred to bring the diamonds to the port of Bombay. The English ships were available for export of diamonds at Bombay. According to sources, the English also undertook expeditions to Golconda diamond mines near Ellore in AD 1679. Hamilton and other Englishmen have described the diamond mines of

Golconda. They have also availed the services of Portuguese diamond traders and some of these Lusitanian traders also sought permission to settle down in the English port of Madras. Some merchants like Salvador Rodrigues visited the port of Masulipatnam on 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1683 and established business for diamonds.

The English, on behalf of the traders of the English East India Company took precautions to prevent the Portuguese merchants from harassing English diamond traders. A group of Portuguese traders like Bartholome Rodriguez, Diogo deporto, and Alvares de fonseca residing at Kovalam, near Mahabalipuram were trading in the diamonds of Golconda in 1683 and were encouraged by the English at Madras.

The diamonds that were exported from the mines of Golconda had a great demand outside the country. They were exported to Achlin, Ormuz, Persia, Allepo and other European countries.

During Vijayanagara and Golconda Sultans' regimes, Muslims, Gujaratis and other natives participated in diamond trade. Europeans like the Portuguese, Dutch and English traders, who came to India and established trading centres in Coastal regions, participated actively in the diamond trade in Andhradesa. They exported diamonds from Andhradesa to Europe through Masulipatnam, Petapoli, Pulicat and Porto Nova ports. The Masulipatnam port played an important role in diamond trade during Qutb Shahi rule. Diamonds worth 1,91,000 pagodas were sent from Kollur mine to Goa (70,000 pagodas), Surat (80,000 pagodas), Masulipatnam (18,000 pagodas) and Madras (23,000 pagodas) and an equal amount sold in Golconda. However, the Andhradesa diamonds occupied great position in trade and also had great demand worldwide.

From all the mines, the Golconda state received a revenue of Rs.1,03,61,660 per annum. However, there is no statistical report to show the revenue received by the state from each

diamond mine in Andhradesa. The revenue from the mine near Masulipatnam was 3,00,000 pagodas, while 1,60,000 pagodas were received from Karnataka, 60,000 *varahas* from Rajipenta, 3,00,000 pagodas from Kollur diamond mine and from Mallavolu and Gollapalli 60,000 pagodas per annum.

**Conclusion:** The Vijayanagara and Golconda states received lots of revenue from the diamond mines. They encouraged diamond industry, diamond export and imports. Some of the diamond mines were in the control of the rulers and some were on lease. Thus, in Medieval Andhradesa, the diamond mines played a significant role in State revenue and in exports and imports.

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