



THE TRADE AND TRADE-GUILDS IN VIJAYANAGAR EMPIRE

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ABSTRACT

The Vijayanagar Kingdom was founded by Harihara and Bukka who belonged to a family of five brothers. The efficient administration of the Vijayanagar rulers giving powerful impetus on commerce, trade, industry and craft resulted in the increase of wealth and subsequent general economic prosperity of the people. The Merchants and traders of this period export their goods to foreign countries and imported the commodities, they need for their business the exported goods included pepper, ginger, cinnamon cardomon, Myrobalan, precious stones gold and silver list of vehicles used for transport purposes of the commodities. They were the “Kavadis” head-loads, pack-horses, pack-bullocks, asses Barbosa also observes that goods were carried by means of buffaloes, oxen, asses and ponis. The inscriptions and literary works of this period evidence several trade guilds which included Pekkandru, Virabanajigas, Nakaramu, Paradesi.

Key words: Kavadis, Pack horses, head – load Nakaramu, Commerce, Trade, Craft.

INTRODUCTION

The Vijayanagar Period in the History of India in general and in south India particular has a unique place. Owing to the Muslim onslaughts, the kingdom of the kakatiyas in Andhra region collapsed and chaotic Conditions prevailed for sometime in 1323 A.D. with the help of the Surviving Kakatiya generals, the Nayakas of Musunuru could regain parts of Andhra country from the Muslim Conquerors of Delhi Sultanate.¹ The Nayakas of Musunuru and their successor, the Reddis of the Kondavidu revived to a considerable extent the prestine glory of the Hinduism Like wise, a small kingdom was founded in 1336 by two brothers Harihararaya and Bukkaraya in Karnataka region with Capital of Vijayanagar on the bank of the river Tungabhadra. The kingdom grew into a formidable empire and lasting for almost three Centuries as the dominant power in South India.

The position of the Empire: The Vijayanagar rulers strengthened their position in South India and consolidated their empire. The empire consisted of mainly three regions such as Karnataka, Tamil and Telugu Countries in general and entire South India in particular. It acquired prosperity because of the rich resources of revenues through agricultural lands, rivers, forests and mines of minerals and also Tributes from feudatories.² Therefore the purpose of the present paper is to focus on the trade and trade guilds of the Period – a study.

Economic Prosperity of the Empire: The Vijayanagar empire was a densely populated and economically well flourishing state. The efficient administration of the Vijayanagar rules giving powerful impetus on Commerce, trade, industry and Craft resulted in the increase of wealth and subsequent general Economic Prosperity of the People. The

Hindus constituted the majority of the population although, a large number of muslims and jews merchants enjoyed happy and comfortable lives under the rulers.³ Besides in the ports on the sea – Coasts and in the cities of the empire, there were considerable numbers of foreigners including Arabs, Persians, Chinese, People from Malaya and the people from European Nations.⁴ The foreigners who visited the Vijayanagar court recorded the wealth of the empire in their works, These included Nicholo – de- Conti, an Italian traveller visited the empire in 1420 A.D during the regin of Devaraya – I (1406 A.D – 1420 A.D), Abdur razzak a Persian in 1443 A.D at the time of Devaraya – II (1422 A.D – 1446 A.D), Alhanasius Nikitin, a Russian Merchant in 1468 A.D – 1473 A.D when Virupaksha – II (1465 A.D – 1485 A.D) was the ruler, Varthema, an italian traveller visited the Court between 1502 A.D – 1508 A.D during the period of Virasimha (1505 A.D – 1509A.D), Fernao Nuniz, a horse trader of Portugal in 1553 – 37 A.D at the period of Achyutaraya (1529 – 1542 A.D).⁵ Duarte Barbosa a Portugnese navigator in 1504 A.D – 1514 A.D and Domingo Paes (1520 A.D -1522 A.D) at the time of Krishnadevaraya (1509 – 1529). These foreigners records relected the economic conditions of the period. According to their accounts the wealthy people lived in buildings in cities while the poor people lived in thatched houses in rural areas, The rich classes comprised nobles, feudal chiefs and high government officials led a luxurious life.⁶ Thus it seems that there was great disparity between the Economic status of the rich and the poor in the society. Besides these, their main occupation was agricultural and agro – based cultivation.⁷ The lands were provided irrigation facilities for constructed tanks and channels. The cultivation include important crops like rice and cereals spices, fruits, vegetables flowers and so on.⁸ Thus, Their accounts informs the growth of trade and trade guilds in the Period of Vijayanagar empire.

The Condition of Trade and Commerce : The efficient administration of the Vijayanagar rulers giving powerful impetus on trade and Commerce and its Prosperity depends largely on its business. The accounts of the foreigners give some glimpses of its various trade in the Vijayanagar Period. Besides facilities for easy transport to external and internal give an impetus to trade, while harbours, either natural or artificial encourages foreign trade and good and safe roads, river routes encourages the growth of internal and external trade. The coastal belt of the Vijayanagar empire was dotted with ports of various siges.⁹

External trade or trade on overseas: According to Abdur Razzak, there were 300 ports on both the coasts in the Vijaynagar empire and the external trade carried out through the ports by the Merchants and traders of their Period. The western sea ports related to Vijayanagar were divided into three groups such as (1) Konkan group (2) Tulunadu group and (3) Malabar group.¹⁰ The konkan group of Ports Consits of Mirjan, Honovar, Bhatkal, Basrur, Bakanur, Mangalore and Kumbola and the Malabar group of ports consisted of a greater number of ports as many as 25 lying between Mount Delhi in the North and Cape Comrin in South. The Chief seaports of this group were Cannanore, Dharmapattanam, Calicut, Coachin and Quilon.¹¹ Likewise, the Eastern coast ports are divided into (1) The Coromandal group and (2) Telingana group. The Cormandel group included Nagapatnam, Tirupamalai Raja Patnam, Tranquebar, Portonova, Devanam Patnam, Mailapur and pulicat.¹² The Telingana group consists of only two ports such as Motupalli and Masuli Patnam. These ports were dealt with trade and commerce in this Period. The Ports also had trade contacts with Persian, Arabia, South – East Asia Contries, Maldives, Ceylon and pegu and exported and imported articles needed by the people.¹³ Besides the Coastal

trade in connection with Sea – Barne trade, the traders and Merchants of the Period carried out their trade on land routes and river routes connected to the sea – Ports also.

Internal Trade or Trade on Land Routers : The Rays gave more importance to internal trade particularly on land than to ocean trade. So the Rayas tried to contribute to the maintenance of an active Commercial life in the empire. The accounts of foreign Travellers, inscriptions and literature speaks about various land routes connected to important cities in the empire there were seven highways connected to the Capital.¹⁴ The first highway connecting Goa with Bankapur; the second with Sri rangapattanam via Sivasamudram; the Third with the Cochin, and the Malabar regions, the fourth joining it with Dhanushkoti via Chandragiri, Tirupati Kanchi, Chidambarum, Madhurai and Rameswaram.¹⁵ The fifth connecting with kondavidu via Udayagiri the sixth joining it with Raichur and other Town in north beyond Raichur.¹⁶ Besides these, the cities were connected to main Towns in the empire and were to be used to develop to trade and commerce and safe guard the traders and Merchants carrying on Merchandise by there routes.

The Exports and imports of the trade: The Merchants and traders of this period export their goods to foreign countries and imported the commodities they need for their business. The exported goods included pepper, ginger, Cinnamon, Cardomon, Myrobalan, Tamarind, Precious stones like seed – pearls, Musk, aloes, Cotton Cloth, Iron, Steel and Procelain to West Asian Countries and the ports on both eastern and western – coasts. They also imported articles like copper, quick silver, vermilion, coral, saffron, coloured velvets, rose – water, knives, colored camlets, gold and silver.¹⁷ Besides these, the other imports also included spice, dye – woods, Metals other than iron, camphor, and silk goods from Burma, Ceylon and Pegu.¹⁸

Mode of Transport:

The inscription of the time of Krishnadevaraya gives an exhaustive list of vehicles used for transport purposes of the Commodities. They were the ‘Kavadis’, head – loads, Pack – horses, Pack – bullocks. Asses, Barbosa also observes that goods were carried by means of buffaloes, oxen, asses and Poin. Oxen and Sumpter – Mules as beasts of burden are referred by Paes and Nuniz also.¹⁹ The bullock – carts and horses were given for rents by owners of the traders and Merchants to Native peoples.²⁰ In addition to this, all the river routes were employed as means of communication and transport, carrying goods in vessels of different sizes depending upon the depth and breadth of the rivers.²¹ The vessels were big and strong that they could carry 15 or 20 persons and even horses and oxen also cross in them if necessary and chased the river to reach the sea – coast.²²

Exchange system:

The Rayas regulated the minting system in their period. A uniform standard of weight was introduced in minting coins and its value was fixed. They issued gold, silver and copper coins and each coins was sub-divided in to several denominations. The gold coin was known as ‘varaha’, Ghatti- Varaha, Dodda – Varaha, Suddha – Varaha, Chakra – gadyana, Kati – gadyana and Nija – gatti - Varaha gadyana, Pon or hon, Pagoda, Madri and Mada.²³ In addition go gold coins, Tara a type of silver coin and copper coin ‘Jital’ were also in Vogue. Besides the coins the barter system also prevailed in the empire for exchange especially among the commoners.

Taxes Related to trade and commerce:

A tax called 'Mula Visam' which the Merchants paid to the state, Meant 1/6th of the capital amount. Instead of being collected in a lump sum, it was collected in the form of duties on commodities sold in the markets. Mulavisabadi, a tax on the profits of trade levied in periodically settled proportions upon the Merchants, Traders, Shop – Keepers, retail Merchantile agents and all the inhabitants of a village or town engaged in trade.²⁴

Trade or Merchant Guilds:

The trade guilds looked after inland and overseas trade. They have provided the necessary capital to the craft guilds for the production the required goods. The inscriptions and literary works of this period evidenced several trade guilds which included Pekkandru, Virabanajigas, Nakaramu, Nandesi, Paradesi and so on. The term Pekkandru literally means 'Many'. This guild existed in different Parts of South India under variety of names like Ayyavali Aivata Ainnurruar Nanadese – Tisai – Yayirattu Ainnurruvar.²⁵ Suravaram – Pekkandru,²⁶ Nanadese – Pekkanduru,²⁷ Ubhaya – Nanadese – Pekkanduru,²⁸ Chalu – Mula – Uhhaya – Nandesi Pekkandru,²⁹ Yanamadla – Sthala Penkandru³⁰ Chalu – Mula – Samesta – Yabhaiaru – desala Pekkandru.³¹ The guild Pekkandru traded with all over the important places like Suvavaram, Alampur, Tripurantakarm, Warangal in and around of Andhra Country.³² The Virabanajigas guild, an important Merchantile Corporation in Karnataka region and also called Viravalanjar as they were styled in Tamil and the were denotes Valiant Merchants. The guild flourished in some important trade centres like Vijayanagara, Dvarasamudra, Nangaluru, Hannovar, Candavaru, Tariyakallu and Singapattana in Karnataka region, Guti, Penugonda, Udaygiri Chandragiri in Andhra country, Muluvay, Kanchi, Padaividu, Caturanga Pattanam in Tamil Country.³³ The guild Nakaramu is a Vaisaya organization called a Nagaramu Nakaramu Nagara etc existed in Towns and cities through out the Vijayanagar empire.³⁴ The guild also referred as Nelluri – Nakaramu, Samasta – Nakarammu, Bala – Nakaramu (Younger Members) etc. The Nanades guild means traders coming from different countries and the guild Paradesi Means foreign Merchants included the Portuguese, the Dutch, English and the Muslims and they Promoted business Paricularly Sea – borne trade.³⁵ Besides these trade guilds, the Pattana settis or Mahanadu Settis were a rich and Powerful Merchant guild and enjoyed the monopoly of trade in their area western ghats of Karnataka.³⁶ Besides these trade guilds, the Professional Communities like Potters, basket – makers, Tanners, Weavers, Oil-Millers etc also fromed themselves into guilds to safe guard their professions and welfare of their communities. The guilds known as Kumbhalikas³⁷ (Potters), Kuruntakas (tanners), sales or padmasale (Weavers), Teliki – Vevuru or Tilaghatakas (Oil – Millers)³⁸ and so on. These trade guilds and the Professional guilds in the empire constituted a good proportion of the population and promoted the business in the empire.

The sum up, though the Rayas were basily engaged in the wars to extend their empire, they extended their support and co-operation to the various traders or Merchants and also guilds of professional communities in their empire. In the time of emergency, floods and famines, the rulers reduced taxes on Merchant – guilds and Profesionalists which relieved them from sufferings. It is also note worthy that the rulers of Vijayanagar empire never persecute the merchants, traders and the trade – guilds besides the professional guilds and provided them protection and undertook welfare measures for safe guard the trade activities in their empire.

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