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TRADE AND POLITICAL ECONOMY BETWEEN VIJAYNAGARA AND THE PORTUGUESE:1400-1600 A.D.





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Short Profile

Khushboo Kumari is a Ph.D Research Scholar. She Has Completed B.A., M.A., M.Phil. and Ph.D.



ABSTRACT:

The aim of the article is to study how trade was used as a tool to bolster the relations between the Vijayanagara and Portuguese Empire. The Portuguese and the Vijayanagara rulers realized that the vitality of their power edifices depended very much upon their ability in pumping wealth from various regions to the core heart of their power through a circulatory process. The arteries of trade

happened to be the blood vessels of their economies and the nodal centers of such circulation process evolved as supportive markets emitting forces to sustain their political activities in differing degrees. The Portuguese developed a chain of trading bases along the western coast of Vijayanagara kingdom for the purpose of facilitating their trade, particularly for procuring rice and food materials that their settlements were in dire need of. On the other hand the Vijayanagara rulers and their power-sharers happily conceded these commercial bases, as the Portuguese supplied horses to them through these trade bases. Thus leading to widening of their cooperation from political to economic. The forces emitted by trade cemented the linkage between the two and produced dynamics for sustaining the political processes and both the power houses benefited out of the resultant commercial vibrancy that fetched for them enough returns to sustain the battles of expansion of the Portuguese and the wars of consolidation of the Vijayanagara.

KEYWORDS

Vijayanagara, Portuguese, Bijapur, Trade, Political Economy, warfare.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the power structures of the Portuguese in special and the Vijayanagara Empire partially were sustained by the wealth generated from trade, both the power holders looked at trade to be integral to their political processes. Right from the fall of Jerusalem in 1187, the Muslims had monopolized the eastern trade controlling the Egyptian and Syrian ports through which goods from the east had to pass on to Europe. Spices particularly pepper, were in universal demand in Europe but the price was steep and made exorbitant by the Muslim rulers of Cairo and Persia. The Portuguese of the fifteenth century were aware that any European nation which would discover the sea route to the East, and to India, and would use that route for bringing spices direct to Europe, would become economically prosperous. This aim of the Portuguese was fulfilled with amazing speed within a decade or two after the arrival of Vasco da Gama in India.

Being emboldened by the discovery of the sea route to India, the main aim of the Portuguese was to obstruct as much they could the trade between India and the Red Sea as well as Persian Gulf. Besides, they cherished an ambition to canalize the trade of the East with Europe through Portugal. To attain this end, they strived hard to build up Goa as a commercial entrepot and port by reassuring Indian traders to run their business there. On the Indian soil, they had realized that they had to be in good books with the Indian potentates such as those of Vijayanagara, Cannanore, Calicut and Cochin to expel the Arab traders.

The new route enhanced the importance of Goa as well as of Lisbon which completely overshadowed the ports of Levant and the Mediterranan Sea. This obviously boosted the morale of the Portuguese to such an extent that apart from laying claim on the use of the new track as a sole right, besides unchallengeable command of the Eastern Seas they monitored the navigation of other traders under the system of issuing authenticated permits i.e. cartazes. The trade and commercial activity of the Portuguese at the source either depended upon the buying in retail at different coastal ports frequented by their ships or on the contractual arrangements made with the native potentates or rich merchants at Honavar, Barcelor, Mangalore, Cannanore, Cochin, Crangamore, Quilon etc. The collected merchandise was dispatched from Goa annually to Lisbon in their fleet. The trade in spices to the tune of 30,000.00 kgs per year fetching the profit of £ 45,000 was exclusively monopolized by the king of Portugal himself. The other commercial goods accrued annual profit of atleast £ 150,000.

The next year we come across a letter of Afonso de Albuquerque to the king of Portugal recommending him to send annually 2000 horses from Arabia and Persia to satisfy the needs of the kings of Narsynga and Daquem (Deccan). He felt that this business was more profitable than that of mining. Within the next decade, it is observed that the Portuguese consolidated their position on trade front even in Hormuz. In the contractual agreement that was signed on 15th July 1523 by governor Dom Duarte de Menezes with king of Hormuz, Muhammad Shah, it was stipulated that the horses should be given to the Portuguese factor at a secured and advantageous place for the merchandise. Secondly, the Portuguese goods- laden ships would not pay the duties at the port. In turn, the Portuguese offered security and defence to ships and merchants from Hormuz. Eventually these developments were furthered to evolve a system of commercial circuits between Hormuz, Goa and Hampi, in which horses routed through Hormuz became the major value-intense cargo of trade.

Though the Portuguese maritime explorers turned towards India primarily in search of spices, which were in great demand in the entire Europe, eventually they were also fascinated by its several

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other items of trade such as silk, musk, furs, resins, gum, embroidered woolen fabrics, cotton textiles varying from coarse canvas to calicos and muslins of exquisite texture. Equally, attracted they were towards the oils, salt drugs, assafoetida, indigo, dyes, aromatics, saltpeter, sugar in liquid form and the precious stones such as onyx and chalcedony, lapis- lazuli and jasper.

As we have seen, Vijayanagara Empire gained its prominence mainly because of its ability to convert profit from internal as well as external trade, along with the profit from secondary production, for political processes. It was the convergence of Vijayanagaratrade in the various ports of southern India that made the Portuguese intervene in their trading activities of these ports either directly by erecting their own urban units and arrangements of trade in the vicinity of existing towns or indirectly by entering into commercial partnerships. This event marked the beginning of direct European involvement in the social, economic and political order of South Asia.

The growth of trade during the period between 1336 and 1565 involved two distinct developments: Firstly, the expansion of intra- local trade networks linked various established productive core zones with mobile groups outside these areas. Mobile groups, particularly those from forest tracts, supplied rare goods in small quantities for internal consumption and export. Secondly, there is plentiful evidence to indicate that complex patterns of extra- local and foreign trade emerged in this period. The lucrative practice of taxing high value trade goods in transit is assumed to have provided a major revenue source for all kingdoms in South India, particularly Vijayanagara.

The extensive temple construction programmes of the Vijayanagara rulers ushered in the process of convergence of local trade around temples, which were also the core areas of craftsproduction. Temples had a central place in the dominantly agrarian economy of Vijayanagara. In fact Vijayanagara was a regal- ritual centre and an administrative centre, besides being a commercial centre. The goddess Pampa, consort of Siva continued to be protector of the city and its kings even under the post Sangama rulers who were devoted to Vishnu deities. All the great shrines of Vijayanagara ritually focused upon powerful royal benefactors and thus the city was a greatly enlarged. In the process of its expansion, its market potential also got enlarged. The Vijayanagara monarchs used to encourage different forms of Hinduism, which included promotion of Vedic and other studies, support of Brahmans, generous patronage extended tomathas, and temples, pilgrimages to religious places and celebration of public rituals, along the expansion of which the wheels of commerce also moved in the process of meeting the needs of these cultural developments. The various emperors and their co-sharers of power built hundreds of new temples, repaired or made extensive additions to several old ones, settled disputes among temple servants and endowed the temples richly with lands, money, taxes due to the state and jewels for the daily worship or for new festivals that were instituted. These processes emitted forces so as to convert temple-centered settlements as the grass root level units of their trading activities.

The import of war horses into southern India is said to have begun in the early centuries of the Christian era. But this trade assumed importance during the Chola period when the cavalry started to play a more important role. The continuous conflict between the Vijayanagara and the Bahmani kingdoms generated a considerable demand for Arabian and Persian horses from Aden and Hormuz, particularly as the climate of southern India was not suitable for the rearing of good quality horses. Horses remained among the most important items traded in the city during the time of Sangama (1346-1485), Saluva (1485-1505) and Tuluva (1505-1565) dynasties.

As warfare during these times depended upon effective cavalry, the import of horses from

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Arabia and Central Asia was very important for rival kingdoms. This trade was initially controlled by Arab traders. From 1498 onwards, other actors, particularly the Portuguese appeared on the scene who arrived on the west coast of the subcontinent and attempted to establish the military stations. The Portuguese found a world which was not totally unknown but which was distinct. This was a world explored and controlled by Arab, Persian, Tamil and Gujarati merchants among others. The Portuguese policy was essentially a maritime one and two strategies were used as argued by Subrahmanyam; one was the Christianization of the local people and other was the establishment of good relations with local rulers to counter- balance the military disadvantages of the Estado da India. Subrahmanyam links the second strategy in order to understand Portuguese relations with Vijayanagara. According to the Portuguese, the Vijayanagara society was formed in opposition to expanding Islamic influence in South Asia. They both have mutual respect for each other which led to a natural development of lines of communication. These lines of communication were eventually developed as a mechanism to make their politico-commercial activities mutually dependent and supplementary.

Till the beginning of the sixteenth century the horse trade was largely a monopoly of the Muslim merchants of Ormuz. But early in the 16th century the Portuguese, who entered the commercial world of Indian Ocean practically drove out the Arabs and the Muslims from the markets and snatched different strands of Indian trade. The return of Vasco da Gama to Portugal made the king D. Manuel to send the good news to the neighboring monarch of Spain, in which he included information regarding Vijayanagara, the riches and splendor of its imperial court, and the enormity of its army, with special attention to the number of horses and elephants used. This was the kingdom which the contemporary notices designated as the kingdom of Narsinga or Bisnaga.

In 1514, Krishna Deva Raya proposed to Albuquerque to send him ten thousand horses annually for twenty thousand pounds which was however rejected by the Portuguese governor on the ground that such an agreement would adversely affect their trading interests in the country. But some time later he offered to the Raya that he would refuse the supply of horses to the Adil Shah if he would pay him thirty thousand cruzados per annum for the supply and send his own servants to Goa to take the animals. In course of time due to the high demand of horses in Hampi, this animal became the bridge through which the ties of interdependence and mutual linkages got emerged, cemented, periodically adapted and reinforced.

Burton Stein is of the view that the importation of war- horses, which was known from the time of Marco Polo in the late 13th century, increased in volume and value during the Vijayanagara period. These war animals were paid for by the Indian exports and bullion according to the information given by trade accounts of the times. The trade in horses provided Portugese with the good economic base as well as many factories and forts along the Indian coast. They used to bring horses to Goa from all the kingdoms in Arabia Petrea, from Ormuz, from Persia and from the kingdom of Cambay; and from Goa they were sent to the kingdoms of the Deccan and of Narsinga. After Goa was taken from the Moors Narsinga got its horses through Bhatkal, the supply lines changed with the coming of the Portuguese. The latter controlled the traffic in horses in such a way that the political processes of the Vijayanagara rulers were to a great extent made to get depended on the commercial and political policies of the Portuguese. From the early sixteenth century onwards the Vijayanagararayas and the Portuguese entertained mutually cordial relations. This obviously served their own respective interests, which ensured horses for the Vijayanagara rulers and expansion of maritime trade for the latter. Besides, both had a common enemy in the AdilShahis of Bijapur, containing whose forces became the core aspect of

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their political endeavours.

ShaykhZaynud- Din, a Muslim writer has given a good description in his book about how the Portuguese drove out the Muslims from active commercial activities of the west coast. Immediately after the entry of the Portuguese in India, they established relationship with the coast of Karnataka, ruled by Vijayanagara kings. The Vijayanagara rulers managed to divert the Portuguese trade in horses successfully to their kingdom to the exclusion of the AdilShahis by way of their diplomatic skills and trade agreements. In return for the horses, the Vijayanagara rulers agreed to exclusive supply of such items as iron, salt- petre and textiles only through the Portuguese merchants who were required to proceed to the Vijayanagara ports to purchase them. From Goa, the Portuguese started intervening in the political affairs of the neighbouring states aggressively; but they maintained a relationship with Vijayanagara maintaining its integrity and political pre-eminence in the region. In fact Vijayanagara was the dominant political force on the west coast though the Bahamanis gave them stiff competition. Taking advantage of this situation, the Portuguese started selling horses to both the Vijayanagara; however they supplied horses to the successor kingdoms of the Bahamanis, as well. The Vijayanagara kings wanted the Portuguese sale of horses to be stopped and this war animal to be supplied exclusively to themselves, for which diplomatic negotiations were initiated with the Portuguese. As long as the Vijayanagara dynasty survived, the Portuguese were able to make a huge profit on the sale of horses (alive or dead). The Portuguese private traders transferred proceeds from this trade in horses for erecting magnificent edifices and mansions in Goa, augmenting the process of urbanization of Goa, for feeding which a lot of food materials, particularly rice, was carried regularly from the ports of Canara.

The Portuguese developed a chain of trading bases along the western coast of Vijayanagara kingdom for the purpose of facilitating their trade, particularly for procuring rice and food materials that their settlements were in dire need of. On the other hand the Vijayanagara rulers and their powersharers happily conceded these commercial bases, as the Portuguese supplied horses to them through these trade bases. The Portuguese had identified Mangalore, Basrur, Barkur and Honavar as the major rice supplying centres in the Vijayanagara Empire and they established trading bases in these rice ports for ensuring regular supply of food materials to their various enclaves in the Indian Ocean. Though the Portuguese tried to keep Mangalore as their main rice base in coastal Karnataka from the time of Albuquerque, this port, which had absorbed many of the Muslim traders earlier ousted by the Portuguese from Calicut and northern Malabar, continued to supply a large volume of pepper and rice to Calicut regularly through these mercantile intermediaries. The Chautas of Ullal, the local principality chieftain near Mangalore, resisted the Portuguese making their trading activities tougher in Mangalore. In 1530 Nuno de Cunha crossed the river of Mangalore that flowed through Ullal territory and having devastated Ullal's barricade, he fortified Portuguese positions in the attempt to capture Muslim merchants who maintained commercial activities with Calicut. The ruler of Ullal was required to pay tribute of rice annually to the Portuguese and in 1556, when its queen refused to pay this tribute, Dom Alvaro de Silveyra pillaged the city of Mangalore and ensured that the rice -tribute was paid annually.

In Basrur (Barcelor), eventually the Portuguese managed to bring under their control the local chiefs and the merchants. They had to pay a tribute of 500 loads of rice to the Portuguese. Some of the Portuguese casados had their own rice-fields outside their settlement in Basrur in later period. The settles of Basrur, supplying rice to the Portuguese figured very much in their documents. The settlements of these merchants were often known as Keris. The pattanaswamikal, who were

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merchants appointed as the heads of port-town looked into matters of the trade in the native quarter of the city.

Right from the days of Afonso Albuquerque, the Portuguese made frequent efforts to dissociate Barkur from the commercial orbit of Calicut. As Barkur used to supply lot of rice, the Portuguese wanted it to be under their influence and control. Though in the initial phase the Vijayanagara governor RatnappaOdeya resisted the Portuguese interventions, later during the time of his successors, particularly VitharasaOdeya the Portuguese manged to cement their base in Barkur and procure rice for their settlements. Another major centre for Portuguese trade in rice was Gangolli located on the mouth of PanchaGangavali River and referred to in their source as Cambolim. Bhatkal, Baindur, Mulki and Kumbla were other rice ports from the Vijayanagara Empire that the Portuguese banked upon for fetching food-materials.

Textiles formed another important cargo that the Portuguese procured from Vijayanagara. In the earlier agreement signed between Afonso Albuquerque and Krishna Deva Raya's envoy it was agreed upon that "all the cloths of the kingdom of Vijayanagara will not be brought over to the ports of Adil Shah, but either to Ankola or to Onar (Honavar); and in the same way the governors will bind the Portuguese merchants to go there to purchase them, and to exchange them for copper, coral, vermillion, mercury, China silks and all other kinds of goods which come from the kingdom; and he, the king of Vijayanagara, will order his merchants to purchase them.

......Both parties agree to wage war with Adil Shah; and all the territories taken from the latter shall belong to Vijayanagara, except lands to the West of the Ghats from Banda to the Chintakora River, which lands did long ago belong to the ownership and jurisdiction of Goa and will remain attached for ever to the crown of Portugal."

As the Portuguese were depending on the Vijayanagara ports for food materials, whereas the latter depended on the former for ensuring regular supply of war horses, the evolution of a politico-commercial rapport between them was something that emerged out of their existential exigency. Later with a view to preventing the attacks from Adil Shah in Salcete and Bardez, the Portuguese governor in 1547 signed treaties with the king of Bisnaga (Vijayanagar) and InizaMoxa (Nizam Shah) with stipulations of commercial tie-ups. In the treaty of 19th September 1547 with the king of Bisnaga (Vijayanagara), it was specified that he could take all the horses that came to him from Persia and Arabia; but he should not pass on anyone of them to Adil Shah. He was also disallowed to permit any provisions or supplies to Adil Shah through his areas. In the treaty of 6thOctober 1547 with the InizaMoxa(Nizam Shah), it was agreed upon that they should help each other in items of need against all the rulers of India except that of Bisnagá(Vijayanagara). The Portuguese were neither to make peace with Adil Shah without prior intimidation to the InizaMoxa.

CONCLUSION:

In the foregoing article an attempt has been made to look into the meanings of relationship that evolved between the Portuguese and the Vijayanagara rulers at different time points of the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The relationship which initially began as a political relationship between Vijayanagara and the Portuguese eventually developed into a type of alliance that stimulated the economic process of the region. The relationship between the two was reciprocal in the sense that the Vijayanagara rulers depended on the Portuguese for the regular supply of the war-horses while on the

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other hand Portuguese depended on the food materials from the rice ports of Viajyanagara for feeding the Lusitanian enclaves. The complex processes of circulation of wares and political collaboration between the two virtually converted Vijayanagara and the Portuguese enclaves into two different politico-geographical expressions of one and the same economic process. The forces emitted by trade cemented the linkage between the two and produced dynamics for sustaining the political processes and both the power houses benefited out of the resultant commercial vibrancy that fetched for them enough returns to sustain the battles of expansion of the Portuguese and the wars of consolidation of the Vijayanagara.

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