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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DURING THE VIJAYANAGAR EMPIRE – A HISTORICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Vijayanagar or city of victory was the name of a city or an empire which flourished many centuries. It is remembered for great wealth, power and magnificent architecture. Today, the monuments of Vijayanagar speak of magnificent past and glories of the empire which paved the way for the research. The empire was founded in the fourteenth century. In its heyday it stretched from the river Krishna in the north to the extreme south of peninsula. In 1565 the city was sacked and subsequently deserted. Although it fell into ruin in the seventeenth century, it lived on in the memories of people living in the Krishna –Tungabhadra doab. The Vijayanagar empire reached its zenith during the reign of Krishnadevaraya when Vijayanagar military were consistently emerging as victorious. The empire had efficient administration and they had a good trade contacts on overseas which was proved by introducing new technology in irrigation. The empire was great patrons of art and architecture. At Hampi itself monuments were spread over 70 sq.km. Beside this the region influenced a development in the stream of Music and Literature. Empire created a significant footnote

for itself in South Indian history by transcending regionalism and making Hinduism the unifying factor.

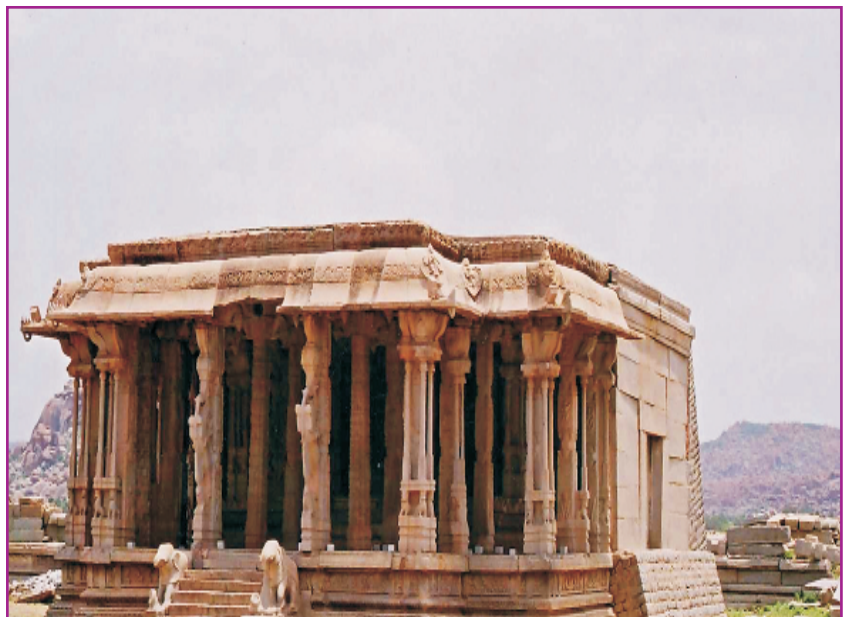
KEYWORDS: Economic Development , great wealth, power and magnificent architecture.

INTRODUCTION:

With the decline of Sultanate during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq, there emerged a number of new kingdoms in various parts of the country. Of these kingdoms, that arose in the Deccan & south were the Vijayanagar and the Bahamani kingdoms, which dominated the political scene for more than 200

years. The source material for the study is ample. There are as many as 7000 inscriptions and the accounts of foreign travelers, literary works, Monuments.

The Vijayanagar Empire was a land of peace and prosperity. The foreign travelers who visited the Vijayanagar Empire have paid tributes to its wealth and splendour. According to Nicolo Conti, "The circumference of the city is 60 miles; its walls are carried up to the mountains and enclose the valley at their foot, so that its extent is thereby increased. In the city there are estimated to be 99,000 men fit to bear arms". Almost all travelers who visited the Vijayanagar empire have spoken highly of the economic, cultural, political and social life of the empire.



OBJECTIVES

To know the life of the people lived during the given period

To through light on the socio, economic, cultural life of people of the said period

METHODOLOGY

By studying the secondary sources thereby refereeing to primary literature the study is undertaken

ECONOMY

The Vijayanagar Empire was one of the wealthiest kingdoms of the south. Land revenue and Trade were the two main sources of the state income. Land was assessed and land revenue was fixed at one-sixth of the produce. According to tradition, land revenue was paid in kind in the proportion of half the produce, and this half was converted into money at a price most unfavorable to the cultivator.

Taxes on certain types of niraramba or wet fields were assessed and collected in cash, because of the perishable nature of their yield, while on kadaramba or dry plots, taxes were collected in kind. Land possession rights were enjoyed by women too as observed from the contemporary epigraphs. An epigraph dated A.D. 1401 from B asur mentions that one Tuluva Heggaditi, the daughter of belonging to Jadar Bali was enjoying landed property yielding 106 mudis of rice.

Regarding the land revenue assessments, Nuniz says that the peasants were allowed to retain only a tenth part of their produce, the remaining was squeezed either by the government or the feudatories as their share. Land revenue was mostly paid in kind.

AGRICULTURE

It was in a flourishing condition. Agriculture was the main base of the economy. The empire enjoyed self sufficiency in all matters of food articles. It was possible only due to the liberal irrigation policy followed by the rulers. The state realized the importance of the irrigation, canal system, dams and provided irrigation facilities for agricultural improvement.

One method the state followed to improve the produces by deforestation and forming new villages and the other by affording greater facilities for increasing production in existing villages.

Irrigation may be done by storage works or tank irrigation, river or canal and dam works and well and lift works. The Vijayanagar rulers attended to all these works. Instead, they encouraged private individuals to undertake such works by giving and remissions in the matter of taxation on the lands so irrigated.

The most striking feature about the location of Vijayanagar is the natural basin formed by the river Tungabhadra which flows in a north-easterly direction. The surrounding landscape is characterized by stunning granite hills that seem to form a girdle around the city. A number of streams flow down to the river from these rocky outcrops. In almost all cases embankments were built along these streams to create reservoirs of varying sizes. As this is one of the most arid zones of the peninsula, elaborate arrangements had to be made to store rainwater and conduct it to the city. The most important such tank was built in the early years of the fifteenth century and is now called Kamalapuram tank. Water from this tank not only irrigated fields nearby but was also conducted through a channel to the "royal centre". One of the most prominent waterworks to be seen among the ruins is the Hiriya canal. This canal drew water from a dam across the Tungabhadra and irrigated the cultivated valley that separated the "sacred centre" from the "urban core".

The state had the two objects for the construction of canal work they were one was to increase the revenue of the state by taxes on such works and the other was to encourage the farmers to grow commercial crops such as sugarcane, cotton, arecanut, betel leaves, Pepper, cardamom and other spices which fetched more income not only to the government but also to the agriculturists. In turn the growth of cash crops increased foreign trade. The state helped the people in maintaining such irrigation works in proper condition, remitting certain Many provisions were made to supervise them.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

With regard to the Industrial position of India & Europe in the 16th century Mr. Moreland says “it is still to my mind indisputable that in the matter of industry, India was more advanced to western Europe than she is today”. In middle times India was self sufficient. Its agricultural wealth was supplemented by numerous industries related to agriculture, mining, metallurgy, weapons of war, perfumes, handicrafts, textiles, and fisheries were some of the important ones.

The empire was quite self sufficient and did not depend much on imports. The exports included cloth, rice, iron, saltpetre, sugar and spices. The imports include certain luxurious items like horses, elephants, pearls, copper, coral, mercury, vermilion, china silks and velvet.

Generally, the raw materials were available in the locality itself. The traditional castes who were attached to their professions in most of the occupations related to Industry. Next to agriculture, Industries fetched most of the revenue for the state exchequer. The life of the common people were in no way affected by the foreign imports.

TEXTILES: Kan pa mai (Coimbatore) was a great centre of cotton manufacture. In and around a cloth called chit-li was made. It was sold there for 8 or 10 gold pieces. The next great center of textile of manufacture was Pulicat. Abundances of printed cotton cloths, worth much money in Malaca, Pegu, Sumatra & Gujarat and Malabar were manufactured. Very fine cloth was made near Goa.

MINING & METALLURGY:

Diamonds- Much of the Diamonds in Vijayanagar came from Vajrakurur about 20 miles south west of Gooty. The governor of Gooty was to give all Diamonds which exceeded 20 mangelins weight to the king. GARCIA DE ORTA, who came to India in 1534 says that there were 20 or more rocks in Vijayanagar which yielded many diamonds. He also located another Diamond mine in the Deccan. False Diamonds, Rubies, Topazes & white sapphires were fabricated & were good imitations of the true ones. Sapphires were found near Calicut.

METALS: In Vijayanagar city both wrought & unwrought metals, copper in abundance & silver were found. Loads of Iron was exported from Bhatkal. Metal work consisted in making 1. jewellery 2. weapons of warfare 3. household articles.

Jewellery.. Krishnadevaraya was lavish in presenting jewellery to the temples. He gave to Kalahasthieshwara a necklace set with precious stones & a golden prabhavali set with precious gems. The dancing girls attached to court were fabulously rich. They wore ornaments made of gold, emeralds, diamonds rubies pearls from head to feet. The idea of decorating the persons was so strong that soldiers & even horse & elephants were decorated with silver & gold plates set with many huge precious stones. The amours of cavaliers were gilded both inside & out.

Weapons The weapons were swords, battle-axes, javelins & shafts. The Muslim soldiers in Krishnadevaraya army had javelins Turkish bows with many bombs, spears & fire missiles. The bows were plated with gold silver & the arrows were very neat & feathered. The army was usually a million strong & could be increased on occasions to two millions we can imagine the work it provided to the Metal workers.

Household articles Barbosa says that much copper was used for cooking pots & other vessels by the people. Metal vessels were used in worshipping gods.

Perfumery : of the minor industries the most important seems to have been production of “scents”. Rose water, camphor, musk & scented materials were available in Vijayanagar. The people of this period would appear to have had an insatiable love for perfumes and flowers.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Trade and Commerce stood as an important economic activity after agriculture and industries. They followed an effective commercial policy. Merchants from south Africa, Abyssinia, Arabia brought articles to Malabar port. Ships from Pegu & Malacca on this way to the Red Sea halted at Calicut & took Indian goods for distribution in various directions. Thus Malabar was great commercial centre. The whole of this trade was in the

hands of the muslims who had settled in all important ports of the Indian ocean Madagascar to Malacca . with the coming of portuguese in end of 15th century the monopoly of the carrying trade was broken. As movement of goods from place to place required lot of protection and step was taken to see that there was no disruption in the flow of goods.

The well known maxim laid down in the Amuktamalyada testifies that-A king should improve the harbours of his country, and encourage its commerce. Horses, elephants, precious gems, sandal wood, pearls and other articles should be freely imported into his country. He should also arrange that the foreign sailors who land in his country on account of storms, illness or exhaustion are looked after in a manner suitable to their nationalities.

Portuguese trade received a great blow at the battle of Tallikotain A.D 1565 and since then the centre of gravity shifted to the east coast which is dominated by the Dutch, the Danes and in spite of the fact that foreign trade was largely in the hands of foreign merchants, the native merchants as the or cettis of Karnataka, Tamil and Andhra regions took a large share and generally traded in pepper, precious stones and costly wares. They followed the practice of buying in advance and acted through the middlemen . Prices were determined to the traditional practices. This is testified by Varthema's account which gives a detailed description of the procedure followed in the determination of prices., From the quantitative side, exports exceeded imports and the balance of payments position was in favour of the state trade policy.

INLAND TRADE

The rulers believed that the prosperity of the empire depended upon the expansion of trade. Trading communities were Banajiga, Salumule Banajiya, Settis, Settiguttis, Mummaridandas etc., The introduction of variety of coins like gadyana, hana, pana, honnu, kasu apart from gold, silver and copper coins facilitated internal trade. .

The government policy was to provide all facilities for commerce on the highways. Maintenance of law and order was ensured. Rulers and private individuals constructed Aravattige or water sheds and rest houses. Santhes or weekly fairs flourished at local levels and promoted local trade. The policy de centralization simplified the administration and the collection of commercial taxes.

The imports included gold and silver for minting, horses and elephants for fighting, and for royal paraphernalia, spices ,brass ware and textiles . The articles of luxury catering to the members of the royal family and nobility included precious stones and pearls of special varieties

EXTERNAL TRADE

Krishnadeva Raya in his work says that “ A King SHOULD IMPROVE THE HARBOUR OF HIS COUNTRY AND SO ENCOURAGE ITS COMMERCE THAT HORSES, ELEPHANTS, PRECIOUS GEMS, SANDALWOOD, & OTHER ARTICLES ARE FREELY IMPORTED ... the articles of export were cloth, rice, iron, salpetre, sugar and spices. The Portuguese bought cloth from the Vijayanagar merchants either at Ankola or honawar. Pulicot exported a large quantity of printed cloth to Malacca, pegu, sumathra. Powdered sugar was exported to ormus from Bhatkal. Rice was exported from basrur barakur & Mangalore to Malbar, the maldiv islands, Ormus & Aden

Deva Raya II invited Abdur Razzaq, an ambassador from Persia in order to strengthen their mutual trade contacts. Krishna Deva Raya sent an embassy to the Portuguese at Goa in A D 1511. He also expressed his desire to get horses from Arabia and Ormuz. The Portuguese readily agreed to supply horses to Vijayanagara rather than to the sultan of Bijapur. This indicates how the rulers were determined to maintain good trade contact

TAXATION

Taxation Policy of Vijayanagara rulers followed an oppressive taxation policy. They collected variety of taxes ranging on the nature of lands. The villages were classified into seven types for tax purpose. They were 1) The brahmadeya villages 2) The devadana villages 3) The mathapura villages 4) The sarvamanya villages 5) The kodagi lands 6) Rakta-kodagal lands 7) Guttagi lands The rest of the villages or lands. The first four types prevailed prior to the Vijayanagar times.

Some taxes were also collected from the people who were newly settled in villages. They were: 1. Karanika 2. Talarika. There was a tax called pullari or grazing tax on the cultivators and pastoral communities who grazed their cattle and herds on pastures and woods. There was a tax on wood cutters for cutting wood in the forest and selling it in villages or towns. The talavarika

or kavalikatnam was levied on all the villagers for the maintenance of the talari or the village guard. Salt industry continued to be a state monopoly, yielded good revenue. Washermen had to pay a tax for the use of tanks or canals belonged to the state. Goldsmiths were taxed for testing the coins collected as revenue. Toddy tappers paid a tax known as levycollected from all the members of the lower castes.

Social institutions like marriage also were not exempt from excessive taxation. It affected all the castes. A tax of two panas has to be paid on every marriage. The parents of both the parties were taxed for erecting a pandal, for taking out the bride and the bridegroom in a procession etc., This tax must have affected the poor who remained unmarried for a long time.

Taxes were collected from devadasis and courtesans known as lanja sunkam. It was collected in cash. It is said that when the hand of the oppressor became very heavy and ruinous, the ryots, no longer able to put up with tyranny either formed voluntary associations to resist his exactions, or more frequently deserted their homes and migrated to a neighbouring province, where conditions governing life were less intolerable. The government made constant attempts to induce such ryots to return to their farms by offering them liberal concessions. The ryots were not also inclined to return as they had completely lost their faith in the promises made by the representatives of the government.

CONCLUSION

For 200 years the Vijayanagar Empire emerged as one of the most powerful kingdoms in the Peninsular India. The empire was so strong that four Muslim kingdoms had to come together to destroy this strong kingdom. The ruins of this great kingdom can be seen even today at Hampi which has been declared a protected site by the UNESCO.

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