

THE PORTUGUESE IN KARNATAKA

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Vasco-da-Gama had reached the Indian coast in 1498 while searching for a sea route between India and Europe. During the second trip in 1504, he had landed at Anjediv island near modern Karwar. He had an encounter with “Timoja” (Thimmayya), the naval commander of Vijayanagara, whom the Portuguese call a pirate. Gama defeated the Vijayanagara subordinate of the Saluva family at Bhatkal. The next year, the Portuguese Viceroy to India, Almeida attacked and burnt Honavar (‘Onor’ as the Portuguese call it). Thimmayya met the Viceroy and negotiated for friendship. The Arab traders had been dominating over the trade in the Arabian Sea. They enjoyed monopoly of the trade in horses being brought from the Middle-East. Thimmayya was very keen on cultivating friendship with the newcomers in the interest of Vijayanagara empire. The Vijayanagara Empire was very keen on securing horses from the co-religionist Sultans, like those of Bijapur, who were enemies of Vijayanagara. The Portuguese were allowed to trade at the ports of the empire, but their request to have a factory at Bhatkal was turned down.

The Portuguese, claiming to be the “masters of the seas”, collected tribute from the ports in Karnataka with whom they traded like Bhatkal, Kundapur, Basrur, Manjeshwar, Kumble, Mulki, Karnad, Chittakul, Ankola, Gokarna, Mirjan, Honavar, etc. When any port refused to pay tribute, they attacked and even burnt it as they did in Mangalore in 1515, and again in 1530 and 1532. As the Vijayanagara Empire did not have a strong navy, the empire could not prevent such high-handed Acts.

But, these newcomers had challenged the monopoly of overseas trade enjoyed by the Arabs, and their competition was beneficial to the Vijayanagara empire. In 1542, the Portuguese burnt Bhatkal town. A new town, Mudbhatkal, came up as a result.

In 1547, the Portuguese Viceroy Castro concluded a treaty with the Vijayanagara empire by which the empire secured monopoly of buying all Arabian and Persian horses

landing at Goa. All merchandise from the empire to be exported was to be through Honavar and Kundapur ports where the Portuguese factors were to buy them. But, in the long run, Ramaraya of Vijayanagara who found the Portuguese to be mischievous and unreliable, did not the East Coast. But, the not-so-loyal subordinate princes of the empire on of Haduvalli and Gersoppa, etc., could not put up a united front against the Portuguese, nor secure help from the empire whom they tried to defy. It was only after the Keladi Nayakas secured the power to administer the coastal territory from the empire in around 1550 that they could do something in the long run.

The Portuguese continued to trade with coastal merchants, though dictating their own terms to them. The exports from the coastal ports included rice, iron ore, textiles, spices like pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, civet, myrobalan, and other forest products, sandalwood and wooden logs, mainly of teak, and diamonds and pearls. Imports included horses, clover, saffron, mercury, guns, date fruit, opal and bullions. During the 18th Century copper, lead and opium became the new items of imports. Earlier there were Jaina and Muslim traders on the coast, and slowly Konkani-speaking Brahmins coming from Goa also came to play a major role in the trade with the Portuguese. Some of them, who migrated from Goa during the 16th Century, knew the Portuguese language also and could easily communicate with these Europeans. The Portuguese insisted on the port towns trading only with them. If the local people sent their ships overseas, they had to secure permits from the Portuguese by paying them heavy fees. This was resisted by the Chauta queen, senior Abbakka from Ullala, in 1558 and she even defeated the Portuguese. But, the Portuguese later humiliated her.

After the fall of Vijayanagara in 1565, the empire's connection with the Portuguese became weak. Goa also lost much of its trade it enjoyed with the prosperous city of Vijayanagara. But, the Portuguese began to make full use of the empire's weakening hold over the West Coast. In 1567 they secured a foothold at mangalore and built a fort (St. Sebastiao) and a church there. Similarly, they built a fort at Honnavar (Onor) in 1569 and at Kundapur in 1570. Basrur (Barcelore) and Gangolli (Cambolim) also had their factories. There was combined effort by the Adilsha his of Bijapur, Channabhairadevi of Gersoppa

and the Zamorin of Calicut to oust the Portuguese from Goa in 1570. But, it failed. Near their factories in Karnataka the Portuguese raised churches.

The Dutch traveler Linschoten who visited the West Coast in 1598 says that the Portuguese were so powerful that “neither the Moors (Muslims)” nor the Indians were allowed to travel in the sea without the passport of the Portuguese”. Pepper weighing 8000 khandis was exported from Honavar and rice was also taken, he says.

But, Keladi Venkatappa (1586-1629), a powerful ruler, not only conquered Gersoppa and Bhatkal (Whose queen was called the “Queen of Pepper” by the Portuguese) but subdued all recalcitrant subordinate princes on the West Coast and tried to regulate Portuguese activities on the West Coast. Chautta Abbakka (The Junior) of Ullala even defeated the Portuguese in 1618 and also their ally, her own husband, the Banga prince on Mangalore with the help of Keladi Venkatappa and the Zamorin of Calicut. Conquest of Gersoppa by Venkatappa deprived the Portuguese of a free market for pepper.

After the death of Venkatappa (who refused to give any concession to the Portuguese) in 1629, the Portuguese encouraged the coastal princelings to revolt against Keladi. They even supported a rival claimant to the Keladi throne named Veerappa who died in 1631. The succeeding Nayakas also did not agree to any unreasonable concessions to be granted to the Portuguese. They sent an embassy to Shivappa Nayaka’s court in 1651 without any gain, and in 1652 their fleet at Gangolli was destroyed.

Their fort at Kundapur was taken over by Keladi in 1652 and they were forced to quit Gangolli the next year. Mangalore was taken by Keladi and Honavar was also encircled by them. The Portuguese abandoned Honavar in 1654. In 1671 they took permission from Somashekhara Nayaka to trade at Honavar, Mangalore and Kundapur. But, the Arabs were not barred from trading at Keladi ports. By another agreement with Keladi in 1677 they secured permission to trade at Mirjan, Chandavar and Kalyanpur. But, many fights with Keladi followed due to the high-handed acts of the Portuguese. Thirteen Keladi ships at Kumta port were destroyed by the Portuguese officer Brito in 1713. They even attacked the ports of Basrur, Kalyanpur, Kumta, Gokarn and Mirjan in 1714 and

burnt the famous Gokarna temple. An agreement followed recognizing the trade rights of the Portuguese, but they could not get full rights to trade at Honavar.

The Sonda (near Sirsi) ruler allowed the Portuguese to build a Church at Siveshwar near modern Karwar in 1735. The Maratha navy came to challenge the Portuguese position. The Portuguese had to even shift their Mangalore factory to the interior (Adyar now also called Parengipet) as a result. This was out of fear of the Marathas. In 1752, the Portuguese conquered Sadashivgad from Sonda.

After the conquest of the Kannada coast by Haider in 1763, he allowed the Portuguese to trade in his realm. But, the English, the French and the Dutch came as competitors to the Portuguese.

The Portuguese showed the way to other Europeans who competed with the Portuguese in trading with the Kannada coast. The Dutch founded a factory at Honavar in 1658 and also at Basrur and the English at Kadwad on the banks of the Kali in 1638 with the permission of Bijapur.

RESULTS:

The contact of the Portuguese followed by other Europeans was beneficial to Karnataka. The overseas trade increased in leaps and bounds. India's rice was in great demand in the Middle-East and Goa and so were the spices and teak wood in Europe. The received a further fillip and plantation of spices, areca and coconut expanded. The word Ferengi (Parengi) stood for the Portuguese and thus came words like Parengipet (Adyar), Parengi fruit (for papaya and pineapple) and Phirengi also meant huge guns. 'Parengi' also meant venereal diseases which they brought with them. Around the factories of the Portuguese at Mangalore, Honavar and Kundapur, Christian population grew. Churches were built at these places in European Renaissance style. Goan Brahmins and goldsmiths migrated to Karnataka due to their harassment by the missionaries in Goa. Famines, epidemics, Inquisition during the 16th Century and fear of Maratha invasion forced Christian converts from Goa to migrate to Karnataka, says Prof. George Moraes. As they were hardy agriculturists, the Keladi Channamma leased a piece of land to build the

Milagres Church at Mangalore. Carmelite friar Spinola States that there were 6,000 Christians settled down in the kingdom of Shivappa Nayaka in 1651.

New techniques in carpentry, metal work and agriculture were introduced by the Portuguese. Flora of American origin like potato, groundnut, cashew nut, onion, chilies, tomato and tobacco were also introduced by them into India. Cultivation and use of tobacco became widespread during the 17th Century itself. Other items too soon became popular and groundnut has become a major oil seed crop, grown mostly in Western India. The Portuguese were harbingers of European civilization to India. They introduced many modern devices like printing to the West Coast. They also introduced European Renaissance architecture by building Churches.

