



“Ayyahole-500: An ancient Merchant Guild of South India”

DR.MANJUNATHA T

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

GOVT FIRST GRADE COLLEGE

TARIKERE. CHIKKAMAGALURU DISTRICT

KARNATAKA. POSTAL PIN CODE 577228

Introduction

The expansion of Trade and commercial activities and the increase in Agriculture production and goods manufacturing from the eighth century A D led to the emergence of many merchant guilds or organisations in South India. According to Romila Thapar, the inscriptions refer to these organisations often as samaya, i.e. an organisation born out of an agreement or contract among its members to follow a set of rules and regulations. The most important merchant guilds of South India during ancient times were The Ayyavole -500, Manigraman, Nagarattar, Anjavannam and Valanjiyar. Geographically, the area of their operation corresponded to the present day state of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala, Goa and Andhra Pradesh. Ranabir Chakrabarti states that the Chola kings from the tenth century onwards made a concerted effort in trade and commerce through trade missions, maritime expeditions, abolition of tolls, etc. It greatly increased the activities of these guilds which were involved in not only inter-regional but also inter-oceanic trade across the Bay of Bengal.

Trading organisation and nature of Ayyahole-500

The merchant guild called Ayyavole-500 was also known as the guild of “the 500 Swamis (seers) of Aihole” (this place situated in Karnataka and famous for rock cut temples of Badami Chalukyas) or Nanadeshi. The organisation might have had an initial membership of 500. However, K. A. N. Sastri states that there is no denying the fact that with the growth of trade and commerce, the Vira Banajgas (representing the trading guild of Ayyavok) operated on a trans-regional plane and had developed deep socio-economic interests between the ninth to fifteenth centuries.

The commercial influence of Ayyavole-500 spread even beyond South India. It is indicated by the inscriptions found at Burma, Java, Sumatra and Sri Lanka. As the mercantile activities of Ayyavole-500 increased, some of its members became quite rich and powerful, and acquired the title of ‘samayachakravarti’ i.e. the emperor of the trading organisation.

They spread from Bhalvani (in Maharashtra) in the north to Kayalpattinam (in Tamil Nadu) in the South. The number “five hundred” also became conventional as the guild became a much larger body and drew its members from various regions, religions and castes. It is in this context that the term Nanadeshi came to be used for this organisation. This merchant guild of South India not only led to Oceanic trade, but also enabled the growth of urban Centres in the South Indian region.¹ economy, no scope for trade whatsoever. The self-sufficient village economy indicated would be fallacious to presume that there was, as a result of the self-sufficient village its religion too went out of circulation tied to and with the Just as currency, the trader's medium for accumulate interests. take place, but the existence of

not hermetically sealed villages. Trade did exist. barter did the reproduction significant formation of the mode. Further, what little trade did take place during this period did not intrude and barter were on a low key, they were in no way last two centuries of any way contradict the feudal order as it did, for instance, in the feudalism in Karnataka. Thus trade under feudalism only served to reproduce and early perpetuate feudalism, it was trade feudalised, and therefore may be called feudal trade. Writing in the German ideology, Marx and Engels expressed this aspect quite counterpart ownership had its sufficiently when they said "This feudal structure of land the towns in the shape of corporative property, the feudal organisation of trades, ²This may serve as a good reference in our study of the merchant guild called Ayyahole 500. This guild was, as Marx and Engels said, "corporative" in terms of its property and was a feudal organisation of trade" reflecting therein, the "feudal structure of land ownership The merchant guild of Ayyahole 500, a name that is derived from its proximity to the seat of Badami Chalukyan power, came into existence in the eighth century "towards the close of the period of the Chalukyas of Badami or in the opening years of Rastrakuta rule The Ayyahole 500, commencing its existence from the eighth-ninth century A D. ready began to lose its esteemed position by the end of the twelfth century. The maximum inscriptional activity undertaken by this guild comes from the eleventh and the twelfth centuries³ The Ayyahole 500 guild was the biggest of merchant guilds of not just peninsular India but of India itself of that time. Its operations were concentrated "more or less to the territory of the present day states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, as well as present Andhra Pradesh. particularly the Coromandel strip. ⁴Through the various ports, the Ayyahole 500 also carried on an overseas trade with Sri Lanka, China and the countries of south Asia. The continental proportions of its trade has led certain historians to compare it with the Hanseatic League of Germany.⁵ But such a comparison is unhistorical and can only lead to muddling several vital questions. The Hanseatic League had its heyday in the mid fourteenth century by which time the Ayyahole 500 was already scattered and had declined The Hanseatic League represented the maturing forces of commodity production and signalled the weakening of the feudal mode of production while the Ayyahole 500. on the contrary represented the feudal organisation of trade and the feudal mode of production at its zenith.⁶In 1150 AD two important Kalamukha priests met at Balligave in Shikaripura taluk of Shimoga district in Karnataka, and presided over a meeting of the Ayyahole 500, the proceedings of which have been thus recorded: ".the earth as their sack; the eight regents at the points of the compass as the corner tassels; Vasuki as the girth; the serpent race as the cords; the betel pouch as the secret pocket; the horizon as their light; a sharp sword as their wood knife; the invaluable articles in their bags as their wealth; visiting the Chera, Cola, Pandya, Maleya, Magadha, Kausala, Saurashtra, Dhanushtra, Kurunbha, Khamboja [Cambodia), Gaulla (Sri Lanka), Lala [Marwar), Barvvara (Baruch or Basra), Parasa [Iran], Nepala, Ekapada, Lambakaranna, Stri rajya (women state) (Kerala?), Gholamukha [China?] and many other countries and by land routes and water routes penetrating into the region of the six continents; with superior elephants, well bred horses, large sapphires, moonstones, pearls; rubies, diamonds lapis lazuli, onyx, topaz, carbuncles, coral, emeralds and various such articles cardamoms, cloves.⁷sosandal, camphor, musk, saffron...and other perfumes and drugs While the spread of this trading guild appears quite impressive, the goods it traded in were by every count meant exclusively for kings, queens and noblemen. The goods it traded in affected in no way the Ayyahole 500 being a Sreni or guild accommodated various castes. But the daily life of the feudal economy. prize of lakh belonged undoubtedly to the Brahmanas of Karnataka. As Meera Abraham who has made a wide study of this guild says: "The tradition of emigrants from Ahichatra who are Bramans is a recurring theme in Karnataka

and the linking of Avavale . Ahichatra in guild prasastis is therefore a possible indication of the presence of Braman the Ayyavole association in Kannada areas, from its inception in Aihole, till about the mid-12th century was closely associated with the Further, more she says ,Agrahara and Agrahara Bramans. Kannada Ayyavole settlements or markets were frequently located in agraharas and there is frequent evidence of the actual participation of Bramans in trading ventures. One concludes that the controlling interest in much of the trade handled by ayyavar merchants in what is now modern Karnataka was drawn from Braman groups. These included elite members of the sedentary society which flourished in the rich doab close to the royal establishments of the Rashtrakutas and Chalukyas."⁹ Inscriptions of the Aihole 500 in the eighth and ninth centuries in Aihole, 1113 AD at Davangere, 1142 AD at Arasikere, 1167 AD at Huilgol in Dharwad. 1185 A D at Honnali, in the same year at Konnur in Bijapur, in 1203 AD at Koppal . in 1218 A D at Mudnur in Gulbarga, in 1245 AD in Sorab have all been found in agraharas. The one from Balligave in 1150 AD from which we quoted was again obtained from the matha (monastery). The Ayyahole 500 was itself known to have made land grants. The Ayyahole 500 was therefore not just associated with but managed chiefly by the Kalamukha Brahmanas of Karnataka and could there be a better word than feudal to describe the Brahmanas of the time?¹⁰ Y Gopala Reddy further describes the feudal features of this guild: "The development of feudal relations between the state and the guilds which characterised the Rashtrakuta polity also continued to exist during the

Western Chalukvas of Kalyan.¹¹ A large number of guilds are referred to in the inscriptions of Karnataka and some of them are the 500 Swamis of Ayyahole 500 The titles and designations like Rajasresti (RoyalMerchants), Vaddavyavahari (The Great Merchant), Samyachakravarti (President of theMeeting of the Guilds known as Mahanadu).¹²Nadapergade (Head of the District),Pattanaswamy [lord of the city],etc, enjoyed by the prominent settis betray a feudal relationship between the state and guilds. It is likely that the royal merchants enjoyed the insignia of royalty such as the white umbrella, the great drum, the flywhisk, etc. The guilds like the feudal lords might have supplied feudal militia to their sovereign. The titles assumed by these guilds would yield the impression that they were very brave and had mercenary troops of their own.¹³..

Conclusion

In this study I have find out several features of Ancient south Indian Merchants guilds they are

A)Since eighth century onwards trading activities were rapidly developed in south India because of increasing agriculture production. result of this surplus production took place in south India this led to such kind of trading.

B)In addition to this increased in manufacture sector and several articles were produced in large scale therefore, different forms of traders were emerged.

C)In Ancient times so many Merchant Guilds name called 'Srenis' came into operation such as Manigraman, Nagarattar, Anjavannam and Valanjiyar.Sankarappadi guild and SaliyaNagarattar guild NakaraMummuridandas

D)Ayyahole 500 was a biggest Merchant guild among the Ancient Merchant guilds.which was established by swamis or seers of Karnataka later its branches were opened in all over south India as well as some of the Asian nations

E)Ayyahole 500 was workings as modern financial Institutions,for the purpose of security they possessed their own militia and weapons

F)Ayyahole 500 guild was trading most important goods such as with superior elephants,well bred horses, large sapphires, moonstones, pearls; rubies, diamonds lapis lazuli, onyx, topaz, carbuncles, coral, emeralds and various such articles cardamoms, cloves.sandal, camphor, musk, saffron...and other perfumes and drugs

Foot notes

1The Merchant Guilds of SouthIndia History notes.WordPress.com 27th march 1921

2. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels:The German Ideology.

3. Meera Abraham:Indian feudalism,p 45.

4. ibid, Pp 183-242.

5. ibid, p1.

6. ibid, p 120.

7. ibid, p 42.

8. ibid, p 79.

9. ibid.

10. ibid Pp119-120.

11.. Y Gopala Reddy, op cit, p 125.

12.. RS SharmaIndian feudalism., p 105.

13.. B Sheik Ali,:History of Western Gangas, Pp 238-22

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4.SAKI: **Making History: Karnataka people and Their Past**. VimukthiPrakashana,Shimoga.1998

5. Sharma R S: **Indian feudalism**.Macmillan company ,Mew Delhi .1974

6.Sheik Ali B: **History of Western Gangas** , University of Mysore . 1976