

**THE PORTUGUESE AND URBANIZATION
IN SOUTH COASTAL KARNATAKA¹
1500-1763**

by

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The First Phase: 1500-1600

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to enter South Asia and they established a strong trade network on the west coast of India through their fortress-factory system. They were also the first to show a political interest in this region and among the different dimensions of Portuguese presence, an important aspect was the creation of urban space through the process of construction. The advent of the Portuguese marked a new phase in the history of South Coastal Karnataka since the Portuguese introduced new trading methods, a new urban culture, new urban communities and contributed to the construction of new kind of structures like ports, forts, factories and churches. For these, they had to spend heavily but this was compensated by the prosperous trade on the western coast. The Portuguese had firmly entrenched themselves in Goa which became the centre of their political and economic activities. In the strict sense, they did not establish colonies as did the English and other Europeans. Hence, the nature of Portuguese colonialism was indeed different from that of the English.

From Goa, the Portuguese started intervening in the political affairs of the neighbouring States. 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 and the Bahamani kings. But, later the Vijayanagara kings were able to establish close diplomatic and trade contacts with the Portuguese. As long as the Vijayanagara dynasty survived, the Portuguese were able to make

1. Instead of South Kanara, a district of Karnataka, the term used is South Coastal Karnataka. South Kanara, which emerged as a result of colonial administration is, at present, divided into two districts - Dakshina Kannada and Udupi. On the other hand, South Coastal Karnataka was a permanent territorial entity both during the historical past as also in present times.

a huge profit on the sale of horses (alive or dead). This was invested in the urbanization of Goa, which became a major trade centre linked to all the trading ports of south coastal Karnataka.

From 1500 to 1600, the Portuguese had maintained close political and trade contacts with the Kerala coast. There they had established their forts and factories, built churches, signed treaties with the local kings and promised them help in case of any threat from their enemies. But the local kings resented the insistence of the Portuguese on the fixing of a particular price for commodities to further their own interest. The Portuguese were also oriented towards the propagation of their Christian religion and looked with hostility at followers of the Islamic faith. Thus they opposed the existence of the Arab and Mapilla traders on the Kerala coast which led to conflicts between the Mapillas and the Portuguese officials giving rise to a series of naval wars. Thus Portuguese trade in Kerala was affected and they did not get supplies from the Malabar coast.

According to B. S. Shastry, the mercantile scheme of the Portuguese had the following characteristics: (1) Keeping control over of the sea trade in the Indian ocean littoral by means of a system of *cartazes* (sailing permits); (2) Imposition of monopolistic practices in certain merchandise like pepper, horses and tobacco in deals with the eastern rulers and merchants; (3) Exploitation of the local state of demand and supply, war and peace, lack of concord among local rulers and so on to garner commercial advantages; (4) Waging wars or entering into peace treaties or trade contracts; (5) Organization of trade through their Fortress-Factory system, brokers, agents, linguists, etc; and (6) Exploitation of missionaries for the expansion of commerce in the region.²

The Portuguese had always depended on Kanara for their supply of rice. It is said that in 1498-99. Vasco da Gama came to the coast of Kundapur, where he collected goods like fish, eggs and fowls³ from the local people. But after 1600 (approx.) till 1763, till the fall of the Keladi dynasty, they depended on the coastal ports of Karnataka not only for the supply of rice, but also for commodities like pepper, iron, saltpetre and other articles. This change in trade policy had an important effect on south coastal Karnataka and led to the urbanization of the region with new institutions and the emergence of new trading communities.

2. B. S. Shastry, "Commercial Policy of the Portuguese in Coastal Karnataka: Sixteenth Century", in B. Surendra Rao et alia (eds.), *Essays on Indian History and Culture* (New Delhi, 1990), p. 109.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

In the beginning of 16th century, there was a general exodus of Muslim chiefs from Malabar to south coastal Karnataka. They organized the pepper trade and supplied Calicut with rice from Mangalore and Barkur.⁴ The Vijayanagara governors turned a blind eye to this activity in spite of protests from the Portuguese.⁵ For even before the arrival of the Portuguese, Muslim traders had established close contact with Vijayanagara officials and monarchs by supplying luxury articles like precious stones and horses. The Vijayanagara Kings made use of their friendship with the Portuguese as well and tried to enter into treaties with them. But there was no concurrence on crucial issues like commercial control over Vijayanagara ports on the Kanara coast. Frequently the Portuguese carried out naval attacks on ports in Kanara under the subterfuge that these ports were providing refuge for Malabar pirates. In some cases, the Portuguese even destroyed the towns, ruled by feudatories of the Vijayanagara rulers.⁶ There are instances of misunderstanding between the Portuguese and the local traders, which led to the use of brutal force by the Portuguese.

In 1514, the Vijayanagara emperor sent a legation at the head of one Retelim Cherim (Cheti), Governor of Bracelore (Basrur) who offered the Viceroy £ 20,000 for the exclusive right of buying 1000 horses. But Albuquerque courteously declined the offer on the ground that such a privilege would destroy trade.⁷ But in 1546, the Portuguese and the Vijayanagara ruler signed a treaty. Accordingly, "The King of Vijayanagara will compel all merchants in his kingdom trading with the coast, to send their goods through Onor (Honavar) and Barcelor (Basrur) wherein the king of Portugal will send factors who will punish them all; and the Governors of India will be forced to send the Portuguese merchants there in order to buy them. Similarly, the king of Vijayanagara will forbid the exportation of iron and saltpetre into the kingdom of Adilshah from any port or town of his own; and his merchants will be compelled to bring their merchandise to the harbours of the kingdom of Vijayanagara, where they will be quickly purchased by the Governors of India, not to cause them loss."⁸

4. Barros, *Decáda da Ásia* (Lisbon, 1945-46), III, 9-6, pp.482; Castanhéda, *História do Descobrimento* (Coimbra, 1924-1933), VI/83, p. 278, VI/91, p.292.
5. Genevieve Bouchon, 'Regent of the Sea' - Cannanore's Response to Portuguese Expansion, 1507-1528 (Tr. by Louis Shackley) (Delhi, OUP,1988), p. 20.
6. Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, "Notes on Portuguese Relations with Vijayanagara, 1500-1565", in Sanjay Subrahmanyam (ed.), *Stinners and Saints, The Successors of Vasco da Gama* (New Delhi, 1998), p. 24.
7. H.Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, Vol. I (Madras, 1927), p. 59.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

In 1530, the Portuguese under the command of Nuno da Cunha crossed the river of Mangalore, which flowed through the Ullal territory, and destroyed the stockade and fortified possessions to castigate a rich merchant of that place, who was in league with the King of Calicut against them.⁹ In the year 1556, Dom Alvaro de Silveyra was sent at the head of several vessels against the Queen for her refusal to pay the ordinary tribute. The city of Mangalore was plundered and a dazzling Hindu temple destroyed. Years later, the same Queen or her successor again refused payment of all tribute. The Viceroy Dom Antao de Noronha, with a fleet of seven galleys, two galliots and five smaller vessels, carrying in all about 3000 fighting men, proceeded to Mangalore, determined to erect a fort and bring about acquiescence of the Queen. The Portuguese assaulted the city, set it on fire and cut down its grove of palm trees. Of the Hindus, 500 were slain. The Viceroy then laid the foundations of the fort, giving it the name of São Sebastião. By the middle of March, the fortress with a Church and other buildings was completed.¹⁰ Fredrick, who passed through Mangalore a few months after the attack, states that 'there is very small trade, but only for a little rice'.¹¹ These raids and destructions had a depressing effect on trade and urbanization in the region.

In Basrur, a Portuguese fortress became the bone of contention. In 1635, there lived 35 cazados outside the fortress at a distance of a gunshot. Their habitation was encircled by a mud-wall, 3.3 metres high, with watchtowers, in the form of rampart. The cazados possessed some rice fields and palm trees outside the habitation. When there was peace they enjoyed the products of their possessions, including about 96 loads of black rice¹². Subsequent to the fortification of Basrur by the Portuguese, foreign merchants stopped trading with that port owing to the greediness of the Portuguese captains who summoned to the fortress those merchants who entered the river and constrained them to sell their goods at very low price. Many a time the merchants had to fight the Portuguese in order to free themselves from this kind of coercion. In 1583, Francisco de Mello de Sampayo the captain of the fortress, like his predecessors, worked to enrich himself. The local traders decided to retaliate and there ensued serious conflicts between the two parties.¹³

9. F. Y. Sousa, *Decâda da Ásta*, I, (Porto, 1945), pp. 283-84.

10. *Ibid.*, II, pp.435-38, quoted in Heras, *Op.cit.*, p.190.

11. Samuel Purchas, *His Pilgrimages*, Vol. X, (Glasgow, MCMV), p.101.

12. B. S. Shastry, "The Portuguese in Kanara", Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Bombay, 1969, pp.99 ff.

13. *Ibid.*

Andrè Furtado, commander of the Portuguese, sent some ships up the river to launch a continuous assault on the merchants of Basrur in all the villages along the banks. The native camp was attacked and subjected to much damage. On the following day, Andrè Furtado assaulted a temple inside which some native soldiers were congregated. It was set on fire and those who were inside were burnt. Furtado re-intensified his attacks on Basrur, shattered and burnt its habitations. He spent the whole of that rainy season in these disparaging activities. Later on upper Basrur was attacked twice; its habitations were burnt and palm-trees were cut down. Thus being subjected to continuous onslaughts and atrocities the merchants of Basrur finally sought peace.¹⁴ Such acts, must surely have had a negative impact on the urban nature of these towns.

In 1530, the Portuguese caused great destruction to Mangalore. In that year, the Governor Nuno da Cunha learnt that a rich Hindu merchant of Mangalore had commercial dealings with the Zamorin of Calicut. The Portuguese ransacked the fortress. A lot of copper, coral, mercury, grains, velvet, many articles of trade from Mecca, as also much explosives and provisions were gathered. A major part of this booty was burnt along with the city. The gardens were ruined and reduced to ashes. All this were done in such a manner that it appeared that there was never a habitation in Mangalore.¹⁵

Mangalore experienced another devastating fury of the Portuguese in 1555. Alvaro da Silveira burnt the city and killed many residents. A rich temple with its idols was also destroyed.¹⁶ Again in 1558, Luiz de Mello da Silva, Captain-major of the Portuguese fleet of the Malabar Coast, learnt that a ship belonging to Muslims of Cannanore was anchored at Mangalore. De Mello entered the city and put to the sword all those whom he confronted, without discriminating between men and women, old and young. The Portuguese probably thought that these atrocities were necessary to intimidate their enemies.¹⁷

In 1565, the Vijayanagara dynasty collapsed. The way was now clear for the Portuguese to conquer cities along the coast of Kanara. Late in 1568, Mangalore was annexed. In 1569, Honavar

14. *Ibid.*

15. Castanheda, *História do Descobrimento e Conquista da Índia Pelos Portugêses*, VIII, pp. 213-14.

16. B. S. Shastry, "Commercial Policy of the Portuguese ...", p. 115; Sousa, *Ásia Portuguesa*, III (Porto, 1946), p. 267.

17. B. S. Shastry, "Commercial Policy of the Portuguese ...", p. 115; Diogo da Couto, *Decâdas da Ásia*, VII, Pt. II (Lisbon, 1778), pp. 61-63.

and Basrur were added - critical cities for the *Estado da India* in that they supplied foodstuffs, rice in particular. After the decade of the 1560s, these cities also supplied pepper produced in that region and traded by private Portuguese merchants as an alternative to that from Malabar.¹⁸

The Portuguese fortress or factory was accompanied by the construction of a chapel or church. The Portuguese authorities used priests and missionaries in their diplomatic negotiations and commercial dealings.¹⁹ In the 1520s, the Franciscans managed to establish a mission in Mangalore with three churches in the region: Nossa Senhora do Rosario (Our Lady of the Rosary) in Mangalore, Nossa Senhora das Mercês (Our Lady of Mercy) in Ullal, and São Francisco de Assis in Farangipet. This evangelization was tolerated because it was on the edge of the Vijayanagara Empire and those who were converted were generally members of the lower castes.²⁰ After 1560, the persecution in Goa forced many local Christians to find refuge in towns along the Kanara coast.²¹

During this period, Kanara supplied rice along all the western section of the *Estado da India* as far as the forts along the east coast of Africa. The trade in rice also financed the fleets to Hormuz, which on their return voyage brought horses which were in great demand.²² The Portuguese were notorious for their malpractices and ill-treatment of the Kanarese merchants and ships. It was common for them to forcibly take articles of trade from local merchants.²³ There were captains who levied and collected illegal imposts from merchants at Basrur. A document of 1591 informs us that 5 *larins* were collected illegally from Muslim merchants for every *korji* of rice purchased by them at Basrur.²⁴

During this period the following features can be noticed:

(1) The Portuguese tried to maintain a balance of power by supplying horses to both Vijayanagara and the Adil Shahis. But they were friendlier towards the non-Muslim State of Vijayanagara:

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18. Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, *Op. cit.*, p. 29.
 19. B. S. Shastry, "Commercial Policy of the Portuguese ...", p.120.
 20. Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, *Op. cit.*, p. 30. Also see, Pius Phidelis Pinto, *Karavali Karnatakada Kraistara Itihasa* (in Kannada) (Mangalore, 1989).
 21. *Ibid.*
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
 23. B. S. Shastry, "The Portuguese in Kanara", p. 305; Gaspar Correa, *Lendas da Índia*, Tomo IV, Pt. I, pp. 257-58.
 24. B. S. Shastry, "The Portuguese in Kanara"; Cunha Rivara, *Arquivo Portuguese Oriental* 3, pp. 335-6.

(2) Till 1600, the Portuguese were successful in maintaining their monopoly on the sea since the English and Dutch emerged only in the seventeenth century; (3) This monopoly helped them to maintain an aggressive posture. Their response to challenges from local traders and kings was the use of violence. This policy led to de-urbanization of south coastal Karnataka. Trade dwindled due to the malpractices of the Portuguese; (4) By patronizing Christianity, they indirectly contributed to the urbanization of regions like Mangalore, where churches were built; (5) For the supply of pepper and other articles the Portuguese depended mostly on the Malabar region and it is only during seventeenth century that the Portuguese tried to procure pepper from ports of south coastal Karnataka.

Portuguese and Urbanization 1600-1763

After 1600, the policy of the Portuguese towards Coastal Karnataka changed and they began to show more interest in trade with the ports of Kanara. As a result, there was increase in the volume of trade in goods like rice and pepper. The number of *cartazes* issued to the local traders and kings during this period indicates the above development. Obviously, with more trade there was extension of urban centres. In addition to Mangalore and Basrur, Portuguese sources mention Gangolli (Cambolim) as an important trade centre. According to the estimate made by Antonio Bocarro, the value of rice carried from Kanara to Goa in the main annual convoy was worth more than 300,000 xerafins. The rice convoy was made up of ships from a large number of Kanara ports with a fair proportion coming from Baindur, Barkur and Mangalore.²⁵

In November 1627, an order for 200,000 kgs of rice was placed for Goa, and money despatched to Basrur for the purpose. In 1630, 130,000 kgs were procured from Basrur and a similar quantity from Mangalore.²⁶ Basrur even sent rice to Muscat. In 1629, a large order of over 500,000 kgs was placed by the administration with Vithala Nayak, a Saraswat merchant.²⁷ In 1631, 115,000 kgs of rice was despatched from Basrur to Muscat.²⁸

According to A. R. Disney, the acquisitions of possessions in Kanara by the Portuguese had important implications for their

25. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The Portuguese, the Port of Basrur and the Rice Trade', in *Idem*, (ed.), *Merchants, Markets and the State in Early Modern India* (Delhi, 1990), p. 36.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 37; *Conselho da Fazenda (Historical Archives of Goa) 1627-31*, fl. 4v, fls. 117v-118.
27. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Op. cit.*, p. 38; *Conselho da Fazenda, 1627-31*, fl. 89v.
28. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Op. cit.*

official pepper trade, for it widened the choice of sources available to them, making possible greater flexibility in their buying tactics of this key export commodity. Kanara pepper reduced the dependence of Portuguese buyers on Cochin and allowed the bulk orders to be shifted from one regional source to the other as political or other exigencies demanded. Until the rise of Ikkeri the Portuguese purchased Kanara pepper either from private dealers or from petty rulers in the pepper country whose goodwill and cooperation were encouraged by gifts, formal treaties and occasional show of force.²⁹

During the second decade of the seventeenth century, pepper export fluctuated between 5000 quintals to 11500 quintals per year. The average export during this period was around 9100 quintals, which meant an increase of 15 percent when compared with the last decade. Kanara pepper was about 70.5 percent as against 29.5 percent from Malabar and Malacca. The Portuguese however could not influence the prices in Kanara. It was at least 20 percent more than the Malabar pepper price.³⁰ With the rise of Venkatappa Nayaka, the Portuguese bought most of their Kanara pepper on contract from the Nayakas of Ikkeri, by force of circumstances rather than by preference.³¹ The people who acted as the agents of the Portuguese and provided finance to them were Pascoal Rodrigues, Rama da Gama, Manuel da Fonseca, Rui Dias da Cunha, Antonio Correia, Govinda and Pandya Chatim, Jasrath Parekh and Goraji Bania, Narsu Sinai, Timmappa Nayaka, Sancara da Gama, Vitula Nayaka and Rama Queny.³²

After 1630, not only did the Portuguese have to face the native powers of Malabar and Kanara but also the threat from European powers like the English and the Dutch. After 1700, these two powers proved that they were more powerful than the Portuguese who were forced to concentrate only on Goa. The European competition, in a way, helped trade in south coastal Karnataka and thus contributed to further urbanization of the region. The traders earned more profit and contributed to the development of towns. The English continued the policy of the Portuguese to encourage Christian settlements and religious structures. South coastal Karnataka and the city of Mangalore grew in prosperity during the period 1700 to 1900.

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29. A. R. Disney, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire, Portuguese Trade in South West India in the Early Seventeenth Century* (London, 1978), p. 6.
30. Afzal Ahmad, *Indo Portuguese Trade in Seventeenth Century (1600-1663)* (New Delhi, 1991), p. 78.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 161.