

# Winds of Spices

Essays on Portuguese Establishments in Medieval India  
with Special Reference to Cannanore

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## Portuguese Relations with Local Kingdoms in Karnataka: A Case Study of Sonda

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The Portuguese in Goa had political, economic and cultural relations with their neighbouring rulers like the Marathas, Adil Shahis, Vijayanagara, Keladi, Mysore, and a host of minor chieftains. These relations emerged out of a historical necessity for the different political powers involved therein. The Portuguese, in order to pursue their twin objectives, namely, trade and proselytisation, had to deal with their immediate neighbours in an atmosphere of diplomacy and cordial relations. The Indian rulers also desired amity with the Portuguese primarily for economic reasons, that is, for trade by which they could get the merchandise they wanted or sell the surplus produce such as spices and grain. Hence a large number of treaties were signed between the Portuguese in Goa and the local rulers. Most of these treaties invariably gave emphasis on political friendship, movement of missionaries and trade. The Portuguese, and the Indian rulers - sovereign or feudatory - were interdependent in many areas and both had gained from their prolonged historical relations.

Many scholars have studied Portuguese relations with the major political powers like the Marathas, Adil Shahis, Vijayanagara, Keladi and Mysore. The writings of historians like P.S.S. Pissurlencar, Henry Heras, Robert Sewell, K.D.Swaminathan, N.K.Sinha, Mohibbul Hasan, B.S.Shastry,

K.N.Chitnis, K.G.Vasanthamadhava, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and others have thrown light on the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the Portuguese relations with their neighbouring Indian rulers. As far as Portuguese Goa-Karnataka relations are concerned B.S.Shastry had carried out an original research work on Portuguese relations with the rulers of Keladi. Extensive research on the Portuguese relations with the minor chieftains of Karnataka is a desideratum. This is an attempt in that direction.

### **Portuguese-Karnataka Relations**

The Portuguese in the East from 1498 to 1961 had to interact with the rulers, chieftains and the Government of Karnataka from time to time. Among the major rulers, the emperors of Vijayanagara, the Bahmanis, the Adil Shahis of Bijapur, the Nayakas of Keladi and the rulers of Mysore were prominent. The minor rulers and chieftains included the kings of Sonda, the chiefs of Gerusoppa, Bhatkal, Bangas of Bangavadi, Choutas of Ullal and others.

The Portuguese had obviously assigned priority to occupy a large number of strategically located ports such as Mangalore, Basrur, Barkur, Gangolli, Bhatkal and Honnavar on the Arabian Sea coast of Karnataka.<sup>1</sup> These ports were crucial to both economic and defence purposes. The hinterland and *balaghat* regions were also conspicuous as they produced and supplied the spices, grains and other goods with which the ports and commercial centres on the coast were flooded. The Portuguese considered Kanara as their granary for the supply of rice. Goa being grain-deficit pocket of India was heavily dependent on Kanara. By a Charter of 21 October 1522, the King of Portugal granted exemption to the merchants of Bhatkal, Honnavar, Mangalore, Mirjan and Basrur from the entrance duty of 4.5 per cent, which continued to be collected in respect of the articles coming into Goa from territories other than Kanara. This was an encouragement given to the merchants of Kanara.<sup>2</sup> This concession was extended to the Kanarese merchants who supplied rice from coastal Karnataka to the Portuguese in Goa.

The Portuguese always endeavoured, either by force or by agreements with the Indian rulers and chiefs, to exclude from the Kanarese trade their enemies and rivals, particularly the merchants of Calicut, the Arabs, the Dutch and the English. They followed the “factory-fortress system “ in Kanara as in some other parts of the East.<sup>3</sup> Even when they were weak in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they continued their efforts to control the overseas and coastal trade of Kanara in keeping with their notion that they were the lords of the seas and therefore one could carry on sea trade only with their permission. They tried to impose their power on the Arabs and other non-Europeans by pursuing the system of *cartazes* or sailing permits.<sup>4</sup> This was another mechanism by which the Portuguese strove to safeguard their trading monopoly in the East.

The Portuguese relations with the neighbouring local powers underwent changes as dictated by historical circumstances such as the intervention of the Dutch, the English and also rivalry among the Indian rulers. The power of the Portuguese vis-à-vis the Indian rulers also influenced and shaped the destiny of their mutual interaction in the political, economic and social fields.

### **The Portuguese and the Nayakas of Sonda**

From around 1400 to 1764, the Nayakas of Sonda ( in Sirsi *taluk* ) ruled over major parts of Uttara Kannada along with certain regions of Goa.<sup>5</sup> The Sonda kingdom included four *taluks* of Kanara, namely, Sirsi Murdgod, Yellapur, Halyal and Supa. This chiefdom had 16 *Simes* and 52 *Hallies*. The Sonda kingdom flourished on the Malnad region with a coastline from Goa to Kumta on the west coast of India and with the same parallel extending along the crest of the Sahyadris. It was an area of mountains and impregnable forests with a coastline. The whole of Malnad was a forest where the best spices were available and they found markets in foreign countries.<sup>6</sup> Thus the hinterland and the coastal regions of the Sonda kingdom provided merchandise for internal and overseas trade.

The Portuguese settlement in Goa in 1510 opened their eyes to the vast possibilities of the trade in spices from the Sonda kingdom. The Portuguese took early advantage of this trade and realised enormous profits. Severine Silva has pointed out that there existed four trade routes from Dharwad district to the coastal regions and that each of them connected that district with Goa, Sadashivgad, Ankola and Kumta.<sup>7</sup> Porters and pack animals like horses, bullocks and asses were the usual means of transport. Navigation was used wherever it was possible, like the Kali River. On the Kumta track considerable quantity of cotton was taken to Kumta. Mangalore, Ankola and Karwar on the coast, and Supa, Hulikal in Sirsi and Hubli above the Sahyadri ghats were major centers of trade. Sirsi had a customs house also. In 1547 the Portuguese concluded a treaty with the king of Vijayanagara on the salt trade of Hubli. Some *Dalals* of Hubli used to purchase the muslin cloth woven at Hubli and sold to the English at Karwar.<sup>8</sup>

The Sonda kings assumed the title of Nayakas, and followed Jainism. There were numerous Jain overlords in the Sonda kingdom. The Honnehalli Math in Sonda set up in C.1556 belonged to Shaivism. Land grants were made for its maintenance and the Havyak Brahmanas also paid their homage to the Swamis of this Math. Vira Shaivism and Vaishnavism also flourished in the country.<sup>9</sup> The Sonda kings ruled as subordinates of the Vijayanagara Rulers. They might have come under the political sway of Vijayanagara from the very beginning of their existence (sometime towards the end of the fourteenth century or the beginning of the fifteenth century). From the Portuguese side, Lapig Vaz was the first to contact Sonda in the year 1526 or thereabout. Later on, Francisco D'sa and Hurique Lima were also sent to Sonda. The first trade agreement was drawn up on 22 January 1532.<sup>10</sup> This inaugurated the trade relations between the Portuguese and Sonda. While dealing with the Sonda chiefs, the Portuguese had kept another objective uppermost in their strategy that was to establish their monopoly by ousting the Moors from the scene of operations. However, the Portuguese could not make much headway in this venture.

After the fall of Krishnadevaraya in the battle of Talikota (1565), the Adil Shah of Bijapur occupied the northern parts of the Sonda kingdom. Nevertheless, the Sonda king and the Bijapur Sultan jointly attacked the Nayakas of Ikkeri. Consequently the Sonda-Ikkeri relations began to be strained. By 1582, the Sonda king was able to eliminate the influence of the Sultan of Bijapur from his kingdom. In the 1630s, there was a war between Sonda and Keladi. Though initially Sonda lost, with the intervention of Bijapur, finally Sonda was returned to its own king.<sup>11</sup>

The Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, entrusted the lands of Ponda, Sanguem and Canacona to the care of the Nayaka of Sonda in 1693. But when the Mughal control over the Konkan weakened as Aurangzeb moved farther away from the area, the Nayakas had to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Marathas in place of the Mughals.<sup>12</sup>

The lands to the north of Ponda, namely, Pernem, Sankhali and Sattari were captured by the Bhonsles of Sawantwadi who became neighbours and rivals of the Nayakas of Sonda. The Bhonsles were more powerful than the Nayakas. Therefore the Portuguese preferred the Nayakas as neighbours. They often assisted the Nayakas to preserve Ponda against the Bhonsles. There were occasions on which Ponda was taken over by the Bhonsles, but was recovered by the Portuguese for the Nayakas.<sup>13</sup>

In a letter dated 5 July 1735, Dnyanalinga Navaru of Sonda informed about his inability to visit Goa due to his ill-health and his anxiety over the wide spread of small pox in Goa which took away lives of many people.<sup>14</sup> Basavalinga, who ruled over Sonda in the early decades of the eighteenth century had friendly relations with the Portuguese in 1742, Kalappayyanavaru of Sonda kingdom requested the Portuguese Governor at Goa, Luiz Caetano da Almeida to supply ammunition to him in order to capture the fort of Supem. Again in a letter dated 25 February 1745, Krishnarao Gurkar, Subedar of Sonda at Ponda requested the Portuguese Secretary at Goa to send a contingent of 300 persons to accompany him in the expedition of Sambranem.<sup>15</sup>

In a letter of 9 April 1747, Dyanalingayya Navaru, Subedar of Ponda, informed the Portuguese General, Pedro Magalhães, that he visited Zambauli and Supa in connection with his official work and expressed his desire that the friendly relations between Sonda and the Portuguese should last for ever.<sup>16</sup>

A Modi document of the year 1748 reveals the existence of the barter system. It reveals that the people from Portuguese Goa used to import bajra from the Sonda kingdom in exchange for boiled rice.<sup>17</sup> A letter of 8 November 1748, written by KrishnaRao Gurkar of Sonda kingdom at Ponda informed the Portuguese Secretary of State at Goa that he had kept ready a contingent of 300 men to be dispatched to Sanquelim for helping the Portuguese men.<sup>18</sup> In a letter dated 18 October 1750, KrishnaRao informed the Portuguese Secretary of State, Louis Afonso Dantas, about the movements of forces from Khanapur, Zamboti, Usapa, Satara, and Pandharpur.<sup>19</sup> Further on 5 October 1750, KrishnaRao wrote to Dantas and informed him that he was returning a Portuguese man who was arrested while he tried to run away from the forest after molesting a woman. He further requested the Portuguese Secretary of State to pass necessary orders banning the entry of Portuguese men in the Sonda territory without permission in order to stop the recurrence of such incidents.<sup>20</sup> A Modi document of the year 1750 refers to a Negro who had run away from the Portuguese territory to the Sonda kingdom.<sup>21</sup>

Subsequently the Portuguese were at war with the King of Sonda. The Portuguese disliked the King of Sonda for giving permission to the English to establish a factory at Karwar, for his failure to give religious freedom to Christians in his lands and for his attack on some Portuguese vessels. In May 1752, the Portuguese entered Ponda and Zambaulim. They looted and burnt several villages and confiscated cattle and other provisions of the natives. When they intruded Canacona, the Sondekar sued for cessation of hostility. He sent his envoy to Goa to carry out negotiations for peace. The viceroy gave an ultimatum that he



would begin hostilities once again if his terms were not accepted within twenty days. He insisted on three terms : (1) expulsion of the British, (2) religious freedom for Christians in Sonda, and (3) dismissal of Krishna Rao, Captain of Ponda who had defied the Portuguese. As the king of Sonda failed to achieve these within the stipulated time limit, the Portuguese attacked Sadashivgad and Kurmagad (Ximpi) and occupied them in November 1752. Hostilities continued until a truce was signed in 1754. Later in November 1755, a treaty was concluded. The conquered territories and forts were returned to Sonda, who in turn agreed to cede to the Portuguese three villages adjoining Portuguese territories. Besides, the Portuguese were to receive a war indemnity of 4,00,000 *Ashrafis*. However, the villages in question were not handed over and the hostilities continued.<sup>22</sup>

In a letter dated 16 May 1755, Dyanalinga Navaru of Sonda informed the Portuguese Secretary of State at Goa that the ryots from Chittakula near Sadashivgad had gone to plough the fields so that they could sow the seeds. But the Governor at the fort sent them away as they did not have permission from the Governor of Goa to work in the fields. Therefore, he requested the latter to get necessary order from the Governor so that the ryots would not be forced to leave the place starving and go back to Karnataka.<sup>23</sup>

In April 1756, the Peshwa sent an army to collect the arrears of tribute from the Sondekar. As the latter could not pay the entire amount of arrears, he agreed to give Ponda to the Peshwa as a security for the payment of the remainder. When the Viceroy, Conde de Alva (1754-56) came to know about this, he marched against Mardangad, in June 1756, with a view to occupying it before it fell into the hands of the Marathas, but the viceroy failed in his attempt.<sup>24</sup>

In 1762, the Portuguese signed an agreement with the Bhonsle and requested the latter to co-operate with the king of Sonda to invade and seize Ponda from the Marathas. The Portuguese also supported the Sondekar. Thus the combined attack on Ponda was

launched in May 1763. The Allies defeated the Marathas and hoisted their flag at the fort of Ponda on 1 June 1763. Thereafter, the Portuguese recognised a nominal sovereignty of Sonda over Ponda. The Sondekar was to maintain a Portuguese contingent at Ponda at his own cost. In the second half of 1763, the principality of Sonda came under Haidar Ali's attack. In the beginning of 1764, Haidar captured most of the territories of the Sondekar. In January 1764, the Sondekar took shelter under the Portuguese in Goa. He entered into a treaty with the Portuguese whereby Ponda, Zambaulim and Canacona were to remain with the Portuguese until he recovered his kingdom from Haidar. The Sondekar failed to recover his territories from Haidar. The defeated king received a subsidy from the Portuguese and stayed first at Old Goa and later at Bandora in Ponda. In January 1771, he signed a treaty with the Portuguese, which further weakened his position because Ponda, Zambaulim and Canacona were handed over to the Portuguese. In lieu of this the Portuguese were to give 20,000 *Ashrafis* as pension to the rulers of Sonda annually, and to continue the grants and *inams* in the latter's kingdom, donated for the maintenance of temples and *agraharas* as before. The territories lost by the king of Sonda to the Portuguese formed a part of the region termed as the New Conquests in Portuguese Goa.<sup>25</sup> A letter dated 2 May 1781 of Sivayya Navaru of the Sonda kingdom at Bandora informs that during that time the Chief of Sonda functioned from Bandora.

In 1784, Savaee Basavalinga, the Sonda king informed the Portuguese Governor at Goa that he would visit Gadag and other adjacent temples.<sup>26</sup> In the 1780s, the Sonda king requested the Portuguese Government in Goa for his special needs like transport, arrangements for wedding, repair of the bucket wheel mechanism used for lifting water etc.<sup>27</sup> Again a Modi document of 20 April 1798 refers to the celebration of the festival of Shri Manguesh and that the festival included the ceremonial dancing by the *Kalavants* (dancing girls).<sup>28</sup> The historical fact that Goa had been a centre of pilgrimage to some devotees in Karnataka is proved by a Modi document of 29 September 1798. It informs us that one

Aye Navaru had visited Goa for religious ceremonies along with 25 devotees, three horses and 5 bullocks through the Vinai Ghat.<sup>29</sup> There were a few other local chieftains in Kanara who were loyal to Vijayanagara. These chieftains and the Portuguese entered into treaties. Prominent among them were the chiefs of Gerusoppa, Bhatkal, Bangavadi and Ullal.

### Gerusoppa

The principality of Gerusoppa or Nagire extended from the south bank of the Kali river to Gerusoppa on the south bank of the Sharavati river. The Portuguese called it as the kingdom of Honnavar. Anjedive, Mirjan and Honnavar were its principal ports. The rulers of Gerusoppa followed Jainism. They had matrimonial relations with the Bhirarasu Odeyas of Barkur. The Saluvas of Haduvalli or Sangitapura in Bhatkal *taluk* were a collateral branch of the Saluvas of Gerusoppa.

The relationship of the chiefs of Gerusoppa with the Portuguese always did not remain the same; it underwent changes from time to time. We find references to their relations from 1505 to 1606. The chief of Gerusoppa at the instance of his overlord Krishnadevaraya supported the Portuguese in their conquest of Goa. The chief used to pay annual tribute to the Portuguese in the form of pepper and rice. However, in 1516 and again in 1522, Immadi Devaraya Odeya, the chief of Gerusoppa, fought with the Portuguese at Margao, and on both occasions his lieutenants lost to the Portuguese. In 1540 the chief of Gerusoppa agreed to pay the Portuguese an annual tribute of 2000 bags of rice. The treaty of 1540 with Gerusoppa reveals that the Portuguese purchased every year a considerable quantity of rice from this region. According to this treaty, the chief of Gerusoppa agreed not to export any pepper on his own, and committed to supply it to the Portuguese alone excluding the Arabs and others. In 1554 the chiefs of Honnavar and Basrur bound themselves to pay annual tributes of rice in 2000 and 500 bags respectively to the Portuguese. In 1574 the Queen of Gerusoppa agreed to sell 500 *khandis* of pepper to the Portuguese at the price of 25 gold *pagodas* a *khandi*.

Soon there was hostility between the two parties in the 1570s and therefore the Queen did not fulfil her promise.<sup>30</sup>

During the time of Viceroy Luiz de Ataide (1568-71), on three occasions he had to send troops to Honnavar to subdue the recalcitrant Queen of Honnavar.<sup>31</sup> Linschoten, the Dutch traveller, noted in 1583 that the Portuguese in Goa had secured pepper on contract basis from the Queen of Gerusoppa and made cash payment six months in advance.<sup>32</sup> A Portuguese document dated 12 January 1591 noted that the largest quantity of pepper that came by the fleet was taken from Kanara. The Portuguese Governor tried to satisfy the kings of the coast to the maximum extent possible since much of the pepper came from the lands of São Carnao Botta ( the Honneya Kambali principality ).<sup>33</sup> After the conquest of the Gerusoppa-Haduvalli kingdom by Venkatappa Nayaka of Keladi in the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Portuguese failed to continue with their monopolistic position there.

### **Bhatkal**

Cordial relations between Bhatkal and the Portuguese seem to have lasted throughout the sixteenth century. In 1501 the Portuguese sold copper, quicksilver, vermillion and coral at Bhatkal by the local 'bar' meaning *bhara* or weight, which was equivalent to three quintals and a half. In 1502 the Bhatkal chief was compelled to agree that he would trade in pepper only with the Portuguese and not with any other power. In 1502 the Portuguese imposed on Bhatkal an annual rice tribute of 1500 bags, which was increased to 2000 bags in 1509. In 1526 Simao de Menezes was sent to Basrur and Bhatkal for provisions and he actually secured rice.<sup>34</sup>

In 1518, there was a skirmish between the chief of Bhatkal and the Portuguese, and in 1519 the Portuguese attacked Bhatkal and subdued its recalcitrant chief. Thereafter, for two decades they had friendly relations. Again in 1542, there was a major clash between the two parties. There were two reasons for this conflict: first, the non-payment of the annual tribute by the queen of Bhatkal, Chennadevi, for some years prior to 1542 and, second, the

protection which she gave to the pirates who used to cause damage to the Portuguese commerce. The Governor, Martin Afonso de Sousa (1542-45), sailed from Goa with a large fleet and defeated the Queen. She surrendered and agreed to pay the arrears of tribute. A treaty was signed between the two parties in September 1548. It was signed by Poka Nayaka, the Queen's ambassador and the Governor, Garcia de Sá (1548-49). According to the treaty, the Queen had to pay annual tribute to the Portuguese, including the arrears. The Queen had to monitor entrance and exit at the port and prevent the activities of the pirates in the ports within her jurisdiction. The Portuguese agreed not to attack Bhatkal as long as the Queen observed the terms of the treaty. It should be noted that the tribute to the Portuguese came mainly in the form of good quality rice and pepper. The Portuguese presence in Bhatkal along with their Factor with the right to issue *cartazes* damaged the commerce of that port.<sup>35</sup> The Portuguese also had slave trade in Bhatkal in the 1540s. The orphans who fell into their hands were sold to the Muslim merchants at Bhatkal for a price of four *Pratapas*.<sup>36</sup>

After the fall of Vijayanagara Empire in 1565, the Portuguese got a free hand to deal with Chennadevi. They forced her to permit them to build a fort at Honnavar in 1569. They conferred on her an honorary title "Pepper Queen" and exacted large quantities of good quality pepper from her principality. The suppressive policy of the Portuguese forced the Queen to seek help from the Adil Shah of Bijapur in 1570. The Portuguese army led by Dom Luiz de Atayde defeated their combined force.<sup>37</sup>

A few other minor chieftains like these of Barkur and Puttige also had political relations with the Portuguese. In 1571, the Viceroy, Luiz de Ataide, secretly won over the captain of the fort of Basrur (in the Barkur chieftaincy), who agreed to surrender it to the Portuguese. However, the chiefs of Tolar and Gangolly together attacked the Portuguese who were then in possession of the fortress. Finally the Portuguese defeated these chiefs and a peace treaty was signed with the following terms: <sup>38</sup> (a) the Portuguese

could erect a fortress in a site of their choice in Basrur; (b) the chiefs had to pay a certain quantity of rice as tribute to the Portuguese; (c) all the pepper of the land had to be supplied to the Portuguese at a fixed price; and (d) the signatories had to fight against the foes of the Portuguese.

### **Portuguese Relations with the Bangas of Bangavadi and the Choutas of Ullala**

The Portuguese established friendship with the Banga chief as early as 1568. The Portuguese-Banga relations brought to the fore another chief of South Kanara, namely, the Choutas of Ullala or Puttige or Mudabidre. The Portuguese had their links with the Chief of Ullala from the second decade of the sixteenth century. It was in 1556 that a Portuguese Commander, Alvaro de Silveyra, was sent from Goa to Ullala with a war fleet to collect tributes due from the Queen of Ullala. In 1557, the Queen, Abbakkadevi, was forced to sue for peace. A little later the Queen stopped the payment of tribute. Therefore, in January 1568, the Portuguese sent their fleet to subdue her. The Portuguese army entered the city of Ullala and killed about 300 soldiers of the Queen. The palace was set on fire. Soon after this event the Portuguese with the help of the Banga chief, constructed a fortress in Mangalore. This turned the Banga chief and the Queen of Ullala hostile to each other. The Viceroy, Luiz de Ataide, went to Mangalore in 1569 to establish friendship between these two chiefs. Though the Queen of Ullala agreed in 1569 to be on friendly terms with the Banga chief, she instigated the Zamorin of Calicut to attack the Portuguese fort in Mangalore. In 1589, the Banga chief and the Queen of Ullala fell out. Then the Portuguese favoured the Banga chief. The Queen herself destroyed the fort of Ullala in 1594. After this, for sometime there was peace not only between Ullala and the Portuguese but also between the chiefs of Ullala and Bangavadi.<sup>39</sup>

The Banga chief asked for Portuguese assistance in 1612 against Venkatappa Nayaka I of Keladi, but the Portuguese did not extend any help. Nevertheless, they forged a confederacy

against Venkatappa. It consisted of the Banga chief, the Zamorin of Calicut, and the Queen of Karnad. Later the chiefs of Ajila, Condegare and Ullala joined them. The Portuguese helped the allies, but at the same time, did not antagonise Venkatappa. In 1616 war broke out between the Banga chief and Venkatappa and the former was defeated. Finally the Portuguese mediated between the Banga chief and Venkatappa to sign a peace treaty in 1620. In concrete terms the Banga chief did not get much aid from the Portuguese and he was suppressed by his immediate suzerain, Venkatappa.<sup>40</sup>

### Conclusion

The Portuguese in Goa interacted with their neighbouring rulers in Karnataka to accomplish their objectives in Goa and the *Estado da Índia*. To develop a favourable political situation they followed several methods – colonial conquest, diplomacy, and peaceful alliance. Their equations of political relationship with the native rulers and chiefs were never static, rather changed depending upon the historical circumstances. Reflecting economic dimensions, there were continuous changes in the relations between the Portuguese, and the kings of Sonda and the other minor chieftains of coastal Karnataka.<sup>41</sup> The wars and treaties between them were aimed at the realisation of political, economic and religious interests of the Portuguese. In the same way, the native rulers also tried their best to bargain with the Portuguese and meet their political and economic plans. The intervention of the Portuguese in Karnataka opened up new opportunities for international commercial ventures. Increased demand for agricultural products acted as an incentive to expand cultivation and hence the increased maritime trade facilitated the economic transformation of coastal Karnataka.