

## The Portuguese and the Little Kingdoms of Kanara

Nagendra Rao  
Goa University, Goa, India

BY THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, the Portuguese had firmly entrenched in western India, particularly the southern region. In the process, they had to deal with different regimes—both substantial and insignificant—thereby finding themselves compelled to devise appropriate strategies. The Portuguese proved generally aggressive in dealing with the ‘little kingdoms’, relatively smaller political powers, which did not possess the ability to challenge Portuguese naval supremacy.<sup>1</sup> However, they did not use the same strategy while dealing with the larger political powers such as the Vijayanagara and even the Keladi Nayakas of Karnataka.<sup>2</sup> It is important to analyse the nature of the Portuguese relationship with the little kingdoms that seemed to be vulnerable yet possessed sufficient political and economic clout to respond to the Portuguese challenge. The present paper is an attempt in this regard.

---

<sup>1</sup>See for example the narrative of the Portuguese attack on Barkur, which maintained a trade relationship with Calicut, in Gerson da Cunha, “The Portuguese in South Kanara,” *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bombay* 19 (1896): 254. Also see Henry E. J. Stanley, ed. and trans., *The Three Voyages of Vasco da Gama and his Viceroyalty* (London: Haklyut Society, 1869), 404. Regarding the Portuguese aggression against Mangalore see George M. Moraes, *Mangalore A Historical Sketch* (Mangalore: J. J. Rego, 1927), 6-7.

<sup>2</sup>For a study of Keladi Nayakas see, B. S. Shastri, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations, 1498-1763* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2000); K. N. Chitnis, *Nawabs of Savanur* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2000); Radha Krishnamurthy, *Sivatavaratnakara of Keladi Basavaraja: A Cultural Study* (Keladi: Keladi Museum and Historical Research Bureau, 1995); Keladi Gunda Jois, *The Glorious Keladi* (Karnataka: Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Karnataka, 2011); K. N. Chitnis, *Keladi Polity* (Dharwar: Karnatak University, 1975); Glenn J. Ames, *Renascent Empire? The House of Braganza and the Quest for Stability in Portuguese Monsoon Asia, 1640-1683* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000).



*The Portuguese and the political economy of Kanara*

Even though, in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese established a formidable maritime state encompassing the regions of India, West Asia and South-east Asia, they still had to interact with little kingdoms, not only in the Decan but also Kanara. Examining the relationship between the Portuguese and these kingdoms sheds useful light on the strategies that the Portuguese used to establish their domination over the West Coast of India.<sup>3</sup> The present study pertains to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese dominated trade in the Kanara and Malabar. By the seventeenth century their power declined, but the pepper trade remained extremely important for them even into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and they were prepared to sacrifice their religious and political agenda for the sake of commerce.<sup>4</sup> Each different challenging phase required that the Portuguese adjust their empire-building strategies. One such set of strategic adjustments hinged on dealing with the little kingdoms of Kanara.

The present study focuses specifically on the Portuguese ways of handling coastal principalities, described as little kingdoms, that wielded comparatively weak military authority but had considerable access to pepper and other spices significant for the Portuguese. The latter simply could not avoid dealing with the kings and queens of coastal Karnataka. Thus, in the sixteenth century they secured the support of the ruler of Gersoppa.<sup>5</sup> In the southern part of Kanara, they had to contend with the Bangas and the Chautas of Ullal, who were locked in a protracted mutual struggle. Bangas and Chautas had been traditional enemies even in the pre-Portuguese peri-

---

<sup>3</sup>To achieve this goal, the Portuguese invested in an armada that monitored the activities of traders on the Kanara coast. See Teddy Y. H. Sim, *Portuguese Enterprise in the East Survival in the Years 1707-1757* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 92; Surendranath Sen, *Studies in Indian History: Historical Records at Goa* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1993), 28.

<sup>4</sup>The Portuguese depended on the Hindus, such as Azu Naik, Krishna Sinai (Shenvi) and Ramogi Sinai Kothari, to negotiate with enemies on the Konkan coast and in Kanara. The Portuguese were compelled to alter their laws concerning the conversion of orphans in Goa to encourage Hindu traders to associate with the Portuguese in trade and diplomacy. See Panduranga Pissurlencar, "Agentes Hindus da diplomacia Portuguesa na India," *O Oriente Portugues* 5 (1933): 1-2.

<sup>5</sup>Afonso de Albuquerque, *The Commentaries of the Great Afonso Dalboquerque, Second Viceroy of India*, Vol. 3 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1880), 2.

od, and this enmity persisted during the Portuguese era.<sup>6</sup> The conflict reflected a family feud, and the rulers of the chiefdoms were embroiled in it for many years.<sup>7</sup> As the Portuguese were interested in obtaining pepper, they found the Bangas to be more suitable for their purposes, and thus decided to oppose the queen of Ullala who had joined the competitors of the Portuguese such as the Nayakas of Keladi or Ikkeri and the traditional enemy, the Muslims of Malabar.

*The Portuguese strategy*

The Portuguese differentiated between formidable powers and relatively weaker political authorities. They attempted to secure trade concessions from both major and minor powers.<sup>8</sup> With formidable powers, however, such as the Vijayanagara, the Mughals, and the Keladi kings, they negotiated for concessions. With the minor powers they attempted to use violence and sought to negotiate only later.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, they preferred situations where Indian political authorities fought each other. For example, amity between the Adil Shah of Bijapur and the Nayakas of Keladi would have adversely affected Portuguese domination along the Kanara coast. Similarly, harmony between the Chautas of Ullala and the Bangas of Bangawadi would have affected Portuguese prospects in Kanara.

---

<sup>6</sup>K. V. Ramesh, *A History of South Kanara* (Dharwar: Karnatak University, 1970), 217.

<sup>7</sup>For a comprehensive study of this power struggle refer to Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*.

<sup>8</sup>For a study of the Portuguese trade in Kanara see A. R. Disney, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire: Portuguese Trade in Southwest India in the Early Seventeenth Century* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2010); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce Southern India 1500 to 1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Afjal Ahmad, *Indo-Portuguese Trade in the Seventeenth Century, 1600-1663* (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1991).

<sup>9</sup>For example, the Portuguese signed treaties with the Keladi Nayakas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The treaties contained a provision to protect the interests of Christians and to secure rice and pepper from Kanara. See Fr. Claudio da Conceição, *Gabinete Histórico, que a Sua Magestade fidelissima o Senbõr rei D. João VI. em o dia de seus felicissimos annos 13 de maio de 1818 offerece Ex-Definidor; Examinador Synodal do Patriarchado de Lisboa, Prégador Regio, e Padre da Provincia de Santa Maria dArrabida ...*, Tomo VI (Lisbon: Na Impressão Regia, 1820), 203-07; Julio Fermimo Judice Biker, *Collecção de tratados e concertos de pazes que o estado da India portugueza fez com os reis e senhores com quem teve relações nas partes da Asia e Africa Oriental desde o principio da conquista até ao fim do seculo XVIII*, Tomo IV (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1884), 205.

The Keladi kingdom figured as a significant player both before and after the fall of the Vijayanagara. After the war with the Muslim kingdoms of the Deccan, Vijayanagara shifted its capital to the eastern part of South India, thereby allowing the Keladi kings to control the western part, between Goa and Malabar. Unlike the Vijayanagara, the Keladi kings had an interest in maritime trade, and in this sense the Keladi state can be considered a maritime polity.<sup>10</sup> The little kingdoms that fought with the Keladi kings also pursued maritime interests. While the Ullala queen controlled Mangalore, the Bangas had a fortress in Bantwal near Mangalore. All these political players were at the same time ship owners. In a sense, they were portfolio capitalists.<sup>11</sup> As they harboured maritime ambitions, they simply could not avoid interacting with the Portuguese, a major maritime power on the western coast of India.

The conflict between the Bangas and the Keladi is interesting because it involved unequal rivals. The Keladi kings had enormous resources and aimed to centralize administration by controlling the southern part of Kanara, which was known for ports such as Mangalore and Basrur.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the little kingdoms attempted to maintain their autonomy in the post-Vijayanagara phase. It is in this context that one ought to situate the power struggle between the Portuguese, the Keladi kingdom, the queen of Ullala and the king of Bangavadi. Interestingly, the little kingdoms used different strategies to achieve their economic goals. The queen of Ullala decided to seek the support of the Muslim traders of Malabar and of the Keladi

---

<sup>10</sup>Interestingly, despite the attack on Vijayanagara-controlled ports by the Portuguese, the Vijayanagara did not initiate punitive action against the latter. For a study of such attacks, on the ports in question, see Gerson da Cunha, "The Portuguese in South Kanara," *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, Bombay Branch* 19 (1895-1897): 254. Also see F. C. Danvers, *The Portuguese in India, Being a History of the Rise and Decline of the Eastern Empire*, vol. 2 (London: W. H. Allen, Co., 1894), 423. The Keladi king accumulated an enormous amount of money and precious resources. However, he did not spend the same on activities such as the construction of fortifications and building a formidable navy.

<sup>11</sup>Regarding portfolio capitalists see Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C. A. Bayly, "Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 25 (4) (1988): 401-424. Accordingly, portfolio capitalists performed different roles as landlords, traders, investors, revenue collectors and administrators.

<sup>12</sup>According to Pietro Della Valle the port of Mangalore was situated between two rivers. The river on the northern side was controlled by the Banga and the river on the southern side was controlled by the queen of Ullala. G Havers, ed., *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1892 [orig. 1664]), 149.

king. In response, notably, the Banga king decided to take the side of the Portuguese while opposing the Ullala ruler and the Keladi Nayakas. The friendship between the Portuguese and the Banga king endured into the seventeenth century.

While the Portuguese desired to attack the Keladi kings, their need for the quality pepper of Kanara prevented them from doing so. On the other hand, they could afford to be aggressive with the Ullala queen.<sup>13</sup> Yet at the same time, they needed support from local powers. Such support emanated from the Banga king. In the process, the Portuguese had to adopt flexible decisions. Self-interest was the guiding policy in relationships between the Portuguese and the local principalities. It is worth pointing out that the Banga territory could usefully function as a buffer zone between various principalities along the Kanara coast.

#### *Little kingdoms of Kanara*

It is quite legitimate to consider principalities such as Ullala and Banga 'little kingdoms'. According to Zoltan Biedermann,

... a little kingdom is small polity, often geographically marginal, near the bottom of a hierarchy descending from the imperial to the local. ... little kingdoms function as the units of a wider system based on a non-linear relationship between kingship and territory, allowing for flexible personal interactions between rulers in a hierarchically complex, multi-polity networks ...<sup>14</sup>

Chiefdoms such as the Chautas of Ullala and the Bangas indeed operated in a multi-polity setting, negotiating a hierarchical political system where claimants to higher political authority demanded subordination from rulers deemed lower in political status. However, the little kingdoms always attempted to enhance their power in this hierarchy, thus fuelling conflict

<sup>13</sup>The conflict between the Portuguese and the queen of Ullala has been documented in B. A. Saletore, "The Queens of Kanara," *The New Review* 5 (17) (1943): 343-357; retrieved from <http://www.southasiarchive.com/Content/sarf.120030/205734/004>, p. 347.

<sup>14</sup>Zoltan Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires: Imperial Portugal, Sri Lankan Democracy, the Making of a Habsburg Conquest of Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 27. It has been suggested that a 'sharing of resources' leading to furtherance of the state authority is the principal component of the theory of little kingdoms, even though the concept is considered as non-Indian in its origin despite the fact that it makes Indian history less Eurocentric. See Dirk H. A. Kolff, "A Millennium of Stateless Indian History?" in Rajat Datta ed., *Rethinking a Millennium: Perspectives on Indian History from Eighth to Eighteenth Century* (Delhi: Akar Books, 2008), 58.

between higher and lower political authorities. There was an ongoing struggle between the various regimes for political and economic resources. One might assume that little kingdoms would eventually surrender to major political powers. However, in the present case, the little kingdoms challenged the supremacy of the major political players and strove to achieve autonomy. Yet, despite this, they also depended on each other. Consequently, relationships were flexible. For example, the Portuguese were prepared to accommodate the Keladi Nayakas to secure a supply of quality pepper in the Kanara region. This reflected in particular the inability of the Portuguese to obtain a supply of pepper from Malabar, given the conflict between the Portuguese and the king of Calicut.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, one must consider the political and economic configurations that affected the relationship between various polities. All those powers discussed here had a stake in maritime trade. On a relative scale, we can consider the Portuguese and the Keladi Nayakas as major players, while the Ullala and the Banga can be regarded as minor players. The availability of pepper in Mangalore compelled the major players to fight for its possession, and this underpinned the political configurations.

*The Portuguese, the major kingdoms, and the little kingdoms of Kanara*

That the developments in Kanara were important for the Portuguese is confirmed by the large numbers of relevant letters and documents preserved in the Portuguese archives, some of which have been published.<sup>16</sup> There was an exchange of information between the Portuguese officials and the metropolitan authorities. In addition, one also finds references to local polities attempting to interact with the Portuguese. The Portuguese fully realized the importance of the Kanara coast in the sixteenth century, as attested in a letter dating to 1598 which mentions that the Portuguese had established a relationship with the king and the chiefs (*ballalas*) of Kanara. This highlights the value the Portuguese attributed to the region in terms of facilitating their trade.<sup>17</sup> Kanara namely offered large quantities of good quality pepper,

---

<sup>15</sup>Kenneth McPherson, Holden Furber and Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 43, 44, 60.

<sup>16</sup>See V. T. Gune, *A Guide to the Collections of Records from the Goa Archives, Panaji* (Panaji: Historical Archives of Goa, 1973); Panduranga Pissurlencar, *Roteiro dos Arquivos da India Portuguesa* (Bastorá [Goa]: Tipografia Rangel, 1955).

and the Portuguese generally advanced money to procure the same from the traders.<sup>18</sup>

In local power struggles, the Portuguese played the role of the mediators. In the process, they attempted to bargain in order to obtain pepper and to secure other economic gains. The local powers, on the other hand, were interested in obtaining Portuguese licenses (*laissez-passer*, *cartaze*) to send their ships to Muscat and to other West Asian ports.<sup>19</sup> The Keladi and the queen of Ullala also maintained trade relations with the Muslims of Malabar, including Calicut and Cannanore. Furthermore and quite ironically, the king of Banga, the ally of the Portuguese, had to seek shelter in Kerala to protect his autonomy from the Keladi king Venkatappa Nayaka.

The Portuguese established a friendly relationship with the Bangas in the sixteenth century. In 1570, they attempted to solve the dispute between the Bangas and the queen of Ullala. However, they were unsuccessful in this endeavour.<sup>20</sup> In 1591, a Portuguese document again refers to the conflict between the king of Banga and the queen of Ullala, while stressing the fact that the region is capable of providing sufficient quantities of pepper for the Portuguese merchant vessels. The queen of Ullala gained upper hand over the Banga king, whereupon he secured the support of the Portuguese captain in the Mangalore fortress, Antonio Teixeira de Macedo. The Portuguese then correspondingly decided to strengthen the defence of Mangalore.<sup>21</sup>

A document dated 1598 mentions the importance of the relationship between the Portuguese and the king of Banga. In case of a dispute with any other political power, the Banga king was required to inform the Portuguese regarding the same.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the Portuguese extended certain

---

<sup>17</sup>*Arquivo Portuguez Oriental* by J. H. da Cunha Rivara (henceforth APO-CR), tomo III, part II, 815.

<sup>18</sup>APO-CR, tomo III, part II, 854.

<sup>19</sup>See Historical Archives of Goa, MS no. 1363, *Livro dos Cartazes*; Nagendra Rao and P. K. Sudarsan, "Statistical Analysis of Historical Data: A Study of a Portuguese Document – *Livro dos Cartazes*," *Portuguese Studies Review* 12 (1): 117-128.

<sup>20</sup>Nicolas de la Clède, *Histoire générale de Portugal*, Tome VII (Paris: Chez Pierre-François Giffard, 1820 [1735]), 13.

<sup>21</sup>APO-CR, tomo III, part I, 243. The volumes of AOP-CR were published during the period between 1857 to 1876 by the Imprensa Nacional, Nova Goa.

<sup>22</sup>*Documentação Ultramarina Portuguesa*, tomo I (Lisbon: Centro dos Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1960), 142.

concessions to the 'king of the mountain' (*serra*), who was granted one *cartaze* (passport or laissez-passer) to carry on trade with Mecca. However, traders who brought horses from Mecca were required to pay duties to the Portuguese factor at Mangalore.<sup>23</sup> The 'king of the mountain' in turn suggested that the queen of Ullala was under his protection and that it was important to protect her interests.<sup>24</sup> Faria Sousa criticises the Portuguese government for wasting their resources to accommodate the demands of the Banga king, who wanted to attack the forested lands of his enemies and sought the support of 300 men from the Portuguese-controlled region of Calicut. Those soldiers, unfortunately, were killed by the enemies of the Bangas.<sup>25</sup> Yet, at the same time, the Portuguese managed to secure useful support from the Banga while fighting against their Muslim opponents from Malabar.<sup>26</sup>

In the early seventeenth century, the Portuguese attempted to achieve peace in the region. As per a document dating to 1605, they strove to promote peace so that they could access undisturbed supplies of pepper, essential to preserving their revenue levels.<sup>27</sup> Another letter dating to 27 January 1607 mentions that the Portuguese needed to juggle relations with powers such as the sultan of Bijapur (Idalcao), Xarifam Maluco, the captain of Ponda, the king of Kanara and the queen of Ullala. The document advises that the Portuguese should keep the queen of Ullala, who claimed rights over Manglore, in good humour. Such a strategy was deemed essential to preserve access to pepper from Mangalore. The letter also documents the emergence of conflicts between the Portuguese and the Dutch in the ports of Kanara.<sup>28</sup> In 1613, the Portuguese in Mangalore were advised to thwart

---

<sup>23</sup>*Documentação Ultramarina*, tomo I, 142.

<sup>24</sup>*Documentação Ultramarina*, tomo I, 142.

<sup>25</sup>Manuel de Faria e Sousa, *The Portugues Asia: Or the History of Discovery and Conquest of India*, Part III (Translated into English by Captain John Stevens) (London: C. Brome, 1695), 61.

<sup>26</sup>Sousa, *Portugues Asia*, Part III, 114.

<sup>27</sup> DRI, I, 5. DRI = *Documentos remetidos da India, ou Livros das Monções*, Vols. I to V edited by R. A. de Bulhão Pato (Lisbon: Academia Real das Ciências, 1880-1935, and volumes VI to X edited by A. da Silva Rego (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional/Casa da Moeda, 1974 to 1982).

<sup>28</sup>DRI, I, 121.



war between the Banga and the 'king of the mountain' (*serra*).<sup>29</sup> In 1616, the Banga ruler wrote several letters to the Portuguese authorities. His claim was that Venkatappa Nayaka was not the actual king of Kanara. Consequently, he requested support from the Portuguese to fight against the Keladi Nayaka.<sup>30</sup>

In 1616, the 'little kingdoms' such as the Bangas, the queen of Ullala, the king of Carnate, Ajila and Condegare formed an alliance against Venkatappa Nayaka who wanted to capture the southern part of Kanara and add it to his territory. The little kingdoms were worried that they would lose their independence. Thus they invited the Portuguese to attack Venkatappa and offered to submit to Portuguese power. They offered the fort of Mangalore and the bazar of Ullala to the Portuguese in exchange for this support. Moreover, they also promised to deliver 3,000 bags of rice to the Portuguese in Goa. The Portuguese authorities, however, decided against attacking Venkatappa, given that they depended on him not only in terms of pepper supply but also in terms of access to rice.<sup>31</sup>

In March 1617, the sources report an outbreak of war between Venkatappa and the Banga ruler.<sup>32</sup> The Portuguese were willing to support the Banga king. However, they found that it was dangerous to challenge Venkatappa, who not only had sufficient monetary resources but also controlled large stocks of pepper. The Portuguese, consequently, decided to avoid overt confrontation while giving indirect support to the Banga king. The latter also sent his ambassador to the Portuguese to obtain further support.<sup>33</sup> In the power struggles between major and minor powers, the major powers were likely to win provided they exercised control over key resources. Lack of control over resources does not mean, however, that the minor powers were not tempted to challenge the major ones within the political hier-

---

<sup>29</sup>DRI, II, 294.

<sup>30</sup>DRI, III, 478.

<sup>31</sup>Antonio Bocarro, *Decada 13 da Historia da India*, Part 2 (Lisbon: Typ. da Academia Real das Sciencias, 1876), 470-71.

<sup>32</sup>Pietro Della Valle, *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1892), 103. Della Valle visited western India in the early seventeenth century. His report matches with the Portuguese sources, and offers first-hand information regarding the relationship between the Portuguese and the Banga king.

<sup>33</sup>DRI, III, 132-133. Also see Bocarro, *Decada 13 da Historia da India*, 701-2.

archy. The war between the Banga and the Ullala, moreover, resulted in a collateral conflict between the Banga king and the king of Kumbala, a feudatory of the queen of Ullala. The Banga king also secured the support of the king of Carnate and of the various *ballalas* (feudal chieftains) against the Ullala queen, who resisted this coalition. However, despite a three month war between the two parties, the coalition essentially failed to achieve its goals.<sup>34</sup>

In the meantime, Venkatappa also initiated various measures to increase his political and economic power. In March 1617, he sought permission from the Portuguese to strengthen the Mangalore fortress and to build a cistern, obviously to supply water to the local people. The Portuguese pondered this request, as it would clearly affect Portuguese interests in Kanara and also affect their ally, the Banga king. At the same time, they duly noted that Venkatappa controlled a large hinterland that could supply pepper to Ormuz and Muscat. It was also important to prevent Venkatappa from becoming a threat to Portuguese power in the region. It was ultimately decided to send seventy soldiers to Kanara. They were instructed to monitor the activities of the Nayaka, and potentially protect the territory of the Bangas. It was further decided to send gunpowder and ammunitions along with 500 *xerafins*, to create a bulwark for protecting the fortress. All these measures were intended to elicit supplies of pepper from the Kanara.<sup>35</sup> The Portuguese were willing to invest heavily in the fortress of Mangalore to control the local principalities and to ensure a continuous flow of spice.

Manuel de Faria e Sousa states that “The little King of that Banguel, or District, who was our Friend, not able to maintain it against his Enemy *Bentacanayque*, made it over to us to defend it.”<sup>36</sup> Sousa here refers to the king of Banguel as a “little king” simply because he ruled a comparatively small area. The Portuguese took on the responsibility to defend him against his enemies—the queen of Ullala and Venkatappa Nayaka. The Portuguese viceroy in Goa sent Francisco de Miranda to confront the queen of Ullala. In the battle, 4,000 soldiers were killed on the queen’s side while on the Portuguese side the casualties were 800. Miranda also captured a ship of the queen that was proceeding from Mecca. This furnished a pretext for the

---

<sup>34</sup>*Annaes Maritimos e Coloneaes, Quarta Serie* (Lisbon, 1844), pp. 375-76.

<sup>35</sup>DRI, III, 197-198.

<sup>36</sup>Sousa, *Portugues Asia*, Part 3, 279.

queen to attack the Portuguese with greater vigour and energy. Her soldiers attacked and destroyed the fort of the Banga king.<sup>37</sup> In the meantime, Venkatappa came to support the queen of Ullala with 12,000 men. Luis de Brito e Melo and Francisco de Miranda, along with 180 Portuguese soldiers, perished in this conflict.<sup>38</sup>

In 1618, the Banga king reportedly sent an ambassador to the Portuguese. The latter took measures to protect their interest in Mangalore. Nonetheless, they also decided to continue friendly relations with the Keladi Nayaka, in order to keep their ships supplied with pepper. At the same time, it became clear that the Banga ruler was waging war against Venkatappa, in which the latter gained the upper hand. Having lost, the Banga king fled to Canhoroto (Kasargod in modern Kerala).<sup>39</sup> The Portuguese sent 500 soldiers to protect the territory of the Bangas from Venkatappa Nayaka. Attempts were made to compel Venkatappa to return the Banga lands. In the meantime, reports emerged that the king of Banga was keen to obtain the help of the king of Cannanore as well as Ada Raja of Malabar against Venkatappa. Notably, the queen of Ullala had openly declared herself an enemy of the Portuguese. The latter could not negotiate with her. A decision was made to send soldiers from the fortresses of Honnavar (Onor) and Basrur (Barcelore) to attack Ullala.<sup>40</sup> In 1619, war raged between the queen of Ullala, Venkatappa Nayaka and the king of Banga. The Viceroy suggested, in a missive to the Portuguese king, that the tenure of Salvador Ribeiro Marinho, captain of the Mangalore fort, should be extended by three more years—for the Portuguese had a policy of appointing officials for three years. It was also considered advisable to establish peace between the Venkatappa and the Banga king.<sup>41</sup>

The documents dating to 1619 also offer information regarding the villages that the Keladi king was prepared to cede to the Banga king. Their value was 7,000 *pagodas*. The property comprised the village of Nandar (Nandavar) and Mogarnar, yielding an income of 2,400 *pagodas*. The village

---

<sup>37</sup>Sousa, *Portugues Asia*, Part 3, 279.

<sup>38</sup>Sousa, *The Portugues Asia*, Part 3, 280.

<sup>39</sup>DRI, III, 284; also see Panduronga S. S. Pissurlencar, *Assentos do Conselho do Estado*, vol. I (Bastorá [Goa]: Tipografia Rangel, 1953-1957), 15.

<sup>40</sup>DRI, IV, 237-238.

<sup>41</sup>*Assentos*, I, 30.

was situated on a riverbank. The value of another place, Sazapur, was 664 *pagodas*. Terpur yielded an income of 634 *pagodas*, and Veluhur an income of 473 *pagodas*. Their yield in tax income was 4,270 *pagodas*. Another village, Upparangary, produced an income of 400 *pagodas*. Assorted minor properties such as Mogarnar, Velihur, Nandabar, and Madaga yielded 70 *pagodas*, 600, 30, and 100 *pagodas* respectively. The details are mentioned in a proposed peace treaty between Venkatappa Nayaka and the Portuguese.<sup>42</sup> Venkatappa Nayaka, however, also stipulated a few conditions on his part. The first one was that the Banga king would destroy his fortress, situated within his territory, and would not be permitted to build any other fortification at any point in time. Another stipulation was that the Banga king would deliver to Venkatappa Nayaka the elephant named Padmanabha. The fortresses that the Banga king had erected in Uppinangadi and Nandabar were to be demolished. The Banga king—the “little king”—was compelled to accept the terms and conditions of the peace treaty and not violate them.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly enough, the talks regarding the fate of the Banga king proceeded in his absence, as he had fled to Kerala in order to avoid another war with Venkatappa.

In 1620, the Portuguese decided to protect the Banga king and at the same time reinforce the fortress of Mangalore. Reports claimed that repairs to the structure were required to ensure defence against enemies in this region.<sup>44</sup> Another document mentions a Portuguese setback at Mangalore, mainly due to the indiscipline of the Portuguese soldiers, which provoked disorder in the army. The culprits responsible for the mishap were to be punished.<sup>45</sup> That same year, 1620, Venkatappa Nayaka and the queen of Ullala attacked the Bangas. Many Portuguese soldiers who attempted to help the Banga king died.<sup>46</sup> Having thus supported the queen’s enemy, the Banga king, the Portuguese quite naturally became an open target for Ullala hostilities.

Lamenting that the Banga king had gone to join the Muslims of Kerala—who after all were the enemies of the Portuguese—the Portuguese

---

<sup>42</sup>*Assentos*, I, 108.

<sup>43</sup>*Assentos*, I, 109.

<sup>44</sup>DRI, VI, 331.

<sup>45</sup>DRI, VI, 336.

<sup>46</sup>DRI, VI, 336.

deemed it important to pressure Venkatappa to restore the lands of the Banga king.<sup>47</sup> In the meantime, the Keladi king offered a sum of 7,000 *pardaos* to the Banga ruler. As per the treaty between the Portuguese and Venkatappa, the latter was expected to let the Banga king return to his lands. However, the Banga king was not willing to return, for he did not trust the Keladi king.<sup>48</sup> The Banga king then wrote a letter to the king of Portugal in 1622. He complained that the Portuguese decision to sign a peace accord with the Keladi king had affected his fortress in Mangalore. Quite clearly, he desired the Portuguese to take serious action against his enemy. In the same letter, the Banga king requested Portuguese permission to send two ships to Hormuz and Persia, implicitly confirming his unabated maritime interests.<sup>49</sup> The letter also reveals the reason for the enmity between the two parties: Banga and Venkatappa. Purportedly, Mangalore had originally belonged to the Bisnaga or the king of Vijayanagara, who gave it to Venkatappa's grandfather. However, the uncle of the Banga king was hostile to the Keladi Nayakas.<sup>50</sup> The Bangas defended the Mangalore fortress and refused to surrender it to the Keladi king, thus giving origin to the feud between Venkatappa and the Banga king. The ruler of the Banga attempted to secure Portuguese support by arguing that Venkatappa hated him because the Banga king befriended the Portuguese. The Portuguese, however, refrained from using their military power to destroy Venkatappa's army, a lapse very disadvantageous to the Banga king. The latter also opposed the eventual Portuguese decision to yield the 7,000 *pagoda* land that had been offered to him as maintenance payment.<sup>51</sup> Purportedly, the Banga king kept half of his people in Mangalore and the rest in Cannanore, in obvi-

---

<sup>47</sup>DRI, VII, 129.

<sup>48</sup>DRI, VII, 381.

<sup>49</sup>DRI, VIII, 25.

<sup>50</sup>The reference here is to inheritance from the mother's side, as matriarchy prevailed in the region. The Banga king inherited the rule of his father-in-law and not his father. This system is called *aliyasantana*, where the term *aliya* means 'nephew' or 'son-in-law'. See B. Ramaswamy Naidu, *Translation of Bhatala Pandya's Law of Alyasantana* (Madras: Scottish Press, 1872). There is also a reference to the queen of Banga principality. See K. D. Swaminathan, *The Nayakas of Ikkeri* (Madras: P. Varadachari & Co., 1957), 77.

<sup>51</sup>DRI, VIII, 27.

ous preparation for further war with Venkatappa, in which Portuguese support was critical.<sup>52</sup>

Numerous documents shed light on the relationship between Venkatappa and the Portuguese. It was purely driven by the commercial needs of the latter. Thus in a letter written to the Portuguese authorities in 1622, Venkatappa offers to supply pepper, while requesting a permit or passport (*cartaze*) for oceanic trade. Advertising his friendly relations with the Portuguese, he then launches into an explanation of his entanglements with the king of the Bangas, arguing that the latter had refused him tribute. Consequently, a conflict arose between the two. Nonetheless, Venkatappa purportedly respected the Portuguese, and had allowed the Banga ruler to stay in his territory. The missive then turns to the pepper trade. In the previous year, Venkatappa could not sell pepper to the Portuguese. Nonetheless, even though the English approached him with two ships in order to buy pepper, the Keladi king refused to trade with them. Venkatappa then urges the Portuguese to send their brokers and buy pepper in Kanara, and requests passports to send three ships to the coast of Mecca and Hormuz. The document highlights a gift from Venkatappa to the Portuguese.<sup>53</sup> The gift comprised a shawl from Cambolim (Gangolli), twenty pieces of *berthane* cloth, and two gold-laced pieces of fabric. He also offers to sell twenty *kbandis* of pepper to the Portuguese.<sup>54</sup> While negotiations were in progress, the Portuguese in turn sent an envoy with a gift of horses and other items, appointing a ship to carry both the gift and the envoy's baggage.<sup>55</sup> It is quite clear that Venkatappa fully envisaged peace with the Portuguese, provided they did not raise any issues pertaining to the king of Banga. The Portuguese, after all, bought pepper from Venkatappa regularly, and he did not wish to lose an important client.<sup>56</sup>

A difference thus emerges in terms of the strategies followed respectively by major and minor powers. The major powers, such as the Keladi kingdom,

---

<sup>52</sup>DRI, VIII, 28.

<sup>53</sup>DRI, VIII, 310-311.

<sup>54</sup>DRI, VIII, 312.

<sup>55</sup>James Talboys Wheeler, *The History of India from the Earliest Ages*, Vol. 4, Part 2 (London: Trübner & Co., 1881), 441.

<sup>56</sup>Wheeler, *The History of India*, 440.

could offer pepper as an incentive while participating in a gift-based diplomacy. The little kingdoms did not utilize such a strategy. Their relationship with the Portuguese was mostly based on informal interactions, disclosing positive and negative attitudes. Values such as resistance, friendship, loyalty and subordination become important in this instance. The Bangas showed loyalty, subordination and friendship towards the Portuguese while the Ullala ruling family displayed resistance towards the Portuguese and the Keladi kingdom. The Bangas in turn resisted the domination of the Keladi kingdom over their territory. Pepper was at the centre of the processes of negotiation and interaction between the major and minor powers. Most notably, however, the Portuguese responded positively to the Bangas even at risk of pepper trade losses, thus highlighting the non-material component of the mutual relationship.

The Portuguese aimed to restore peace in Mangalore, for this was essential to facilitate trade. The main problem they faced, however, was non-cooperation by the Banga king. They complained that the Banga king refused to comply with the treaty they signed with Venkatappa Nayaka. According to the Portuguese, such an attitude on the part of the Banga king affected their relationship with the Keladi Nayaka, and they were not prepared to challenge Venkatappa.<sup>57</sup> The Banga king, in turn, continued to take active interest in maritime pursuits, and now he began demanding a license for four ships. Secondly, he also sought permission from the Portuguese to construct a defensive structure, which was essential to protect him from enemy attacks.<sup>58</sup>

In another letter, the king of Banga refers to his father-in-law, who was responsible for challenging the Keladi king.<sup>59</sup> The father-in-law had passed this political mantle to the son-in-law. Here it is the son-in-law who inherits property and not the son. The Banga may have received this property from his mother's side. The same situation prevailed in Ullala where the queen succeeded her mother while her brother obtained the property of his mother-in-law. Consequently, daughter and son-in-law become more important than the son (as already stressed in an earlier footnote). The Banga ruler claims that along with his relatives and kinsmen he would obtain the

---

<sup>57</sup>DRI, IX, 14.

<sup>58</sup>DRI, IX, 340.

<sup>59</sup>DRI, IX, 342.

support of the queen of Bhatkal and of Adil Shah, the king of Bijapur, who would form an alliance to fight against the Keladi Nayaka. He also claims having lost eighteen fortresses and suffering a loss of 200,000 *pagodas* when the Keladi Nayaka conquered his territories. He was thus unwilling to make peace with his enemy.

The Banga king suggested at this point that he would send essential commodities and pepper to Goa. Besides, he also proposed to destroy the Mangalore fort as per the request of the Portuguese. Further, he offered to supply more than one thousand *kbandis* of pepper at a low price. He also states that he would provide cargo for the Portuguese ships. In addition, he promises to supply food to the cities controlled by the Portuguese.<sup>60</sup> Banga, in this way, deployed major economic argument to tempt the Portuguese into waging war against Venkatappa. At the same time, he attempted to appeal to Portuguese emotions, claiming he had opposed the Keladi Nayaka for generations and was committed to a friendship with the Portuguese, while intimating that the latter would gain by maintaining a friendly relationship with him.

It will be useful here to briefly revisit all the material already discussed, but this time through the eyes of Pietro Della Valle. In 1623, Della Valle mentions that the Keladi king Venkatappa was not pleased with the Portuguese, who had lost their earlier lustre of glory. According to him, Venkatappa complained that the Portuguese failed to send the appointed ship to make purchases of pepper. In addition, he did not appreciate the Portuguese policy towards his enemy the Banga ruler. Della Valle further suggests that Venkatappa did not expect the Portuguese do business with him, as they were busy dealing with their Banga ally.<sup>61</sup> In point of fact, when the Portuguese sent an ambassador to Venkatappa, the latter entirely avoided referring to the Banga ruler, to signal his resentment of Portuguese policy.<sup>62</sup> Yet Venkatappa also refused to sell pepper to the English and the Dutch, and the king of Spain sent him a letter appreciating Venkatappa's patronage of the Portuguese pepper trade.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup>DRI, IX, 343.

<sup>61</sup>Della Valle, *Travels*, 103-104. By this time the Portuguese depended on the support of Venkatappa Nayaka for obtaining the pepper supply from Kanara.

<sup>62</sup>Della Valle, *Travels*, 131.

<sup>63</sup>Della Valle, *Travels*, 131.



Della Valle describes the territory controlled by the Banga king in the following terms. It was known as 'Bangher' or 'Banghervari'.<sup>64</sup> Della Valle found the land fertile and suitable for agricultural production. The houses of the poor were no more than huts, but the king's house was in an elevated place and resembled a fortress. This house/fortress was destroyed. There was a stone bridge over a river in the area, and a bazaar or a market. Della Valle mentions the availability of cheap knives and scissors manufactured by local goldsmiths. Essential commodities and toys were also available here, and Della Valle highlights an active trade in areca nuts, an important local produce.<sup>65</sup>

Della Valle offers an insight into the origins of the conflict between the Banga king and the queen of Ullala. The queen had married the Banga king and they remained together for several years before the queen decided to leave her spouse and return the jewels her husband had given her. The king apparently sent his men and captured the queen of Ullala, who was nonetheless able to convince him to release her. After this incident, the two were involved in a major war. The Banga king solicited the help of the Portuguese, while the queen called on Venkatappa Nayaka to protect her. According to Della Valle's version of the events, Venkatappa Nayaka obtained victory against the Portuguese, which affected the allies of the Portuguese in Mangalore. Venkatappa had subjugated the queen of Karnad, an ally of the Portuguese and he wanted to capture Mangalore, but at the queen's request of the queen of Karnad he did not implement the plan. The queen nonetheless suffered at the hands of Venkatappa, who was greedy for territory and financial assets.<sup>66</sup>

In 1624, Venkatappa complained that the Banga king did not accept the payment of 7,000 *pagodas*. In addition, he stayed in Kerala, in enemy territory. The Portuguese attempted to compel the Banga king to shift to any other territory. They suggested that he could reside in the Portuguese territory of Salcete and that he would obtain protection from Venkatappa. It was also reported that the Banga king was planning to settle in a place near Man-

---

<sup>64</sup>In the local sources, it is mentioned as Bangavadi or the territory of the Bangas. See Ramesh, *History of South Kanara*, 217.

<sup>65</sup>Della Valle, *Travels*, 150-51.

<sup>66</sup>Della Valle, *Travels*, 157.

galore adjacent to Venkatappa's territory.<sup>67</sup> The latter suggested that the Banga king should live either in his territory or at Goa, so that he would not create problems for the Keladi state.<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, the Portuguese had the intention of protecting the interests of their ally in Kanara. In fact, the king of Spain had ordered the viceroy to prepare for war against Venkatappa Nayaka to reinstate the Banga king in his territory. However, the Portuguese in India could not implement this plan, as they were embroiled in a war in Ormuz and Malacca.<sup>69</sup>

In the 1630s, the Keladi king continued to complain to the Portuguese establishment regarding non-cooperation by the king of Banga, who refused to pay the Keladi king tribute, thereby compelling the latter to wage a war against him. Portuguese officials reported that the Keladi king punished the Portuguese for their friendship with the Banga king. They were also aware of the fact that the Keladi king determined the prices of pepper and he could raise prices in response to his conflict with the king of the Banga. This relationship continued under Virabhadra, the successor of Venkatappa Nayaka.<sup>70</sup> The Banga ruler continued to fight against the Keladi king. A document dated 1631 mentions that the Banga king along with his allies—the chief of Carnate (Karnad) and the “mountain king”—offered support to the Portuguese against the Keladi king Virabhadra Nayaka. They undertook to supply a large quantity of pepper, besides wood, iron, carpenters and blacksmiths to construct the fortress at Gangolly situated in the southern part of Kanara.<sup>71</sup> It is quite clear that the Banga king was not the only one in coastal Karnataka intent on fighting against the Keladi Nayakas. Most of the little kings attempted to protect their independence from large neighbours. Interestingly, the *chatins* or traders of Basrur or Barcelore, an important port of Kanara, also joined the alliance formed against the Keladi king Virabhadra Nayaka.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup>DRI, X, 45. Also see Della Valle, *Travels*, 141.

<sup>68</sup>Della Valle, *Travels*, 142.

<sup>69</sup>Della Valle, *Travels*, 142.

<sup>70</sup>*Assentos*, II, 75.

<sup>71</sup>*Assentos*, I, 126.

<sup>72</sup>*Assentos*, I, 392.

In 1640, the rulers of Ullala, Banga and Gersoppa approached Adil Shah with an offer to pay the tribute they paid to Virabhadra Nayaka.<sup>73</sup> The little kings of Kanara still steadily resented being dominated by the Nayakas of Keladi. Consequently, they sought suitable outside powers to protect their independence from the Keladi. The implication is that they would shift their political allegiance based on political conditions. In the seventeenth century, interaction between the Portuguese and the little kingdoms of Kanara ebbed as the former proved unable to successfully contend with the might of the Keladi Nayakas. Thus not only 'foreign' but also indigenous major kingdoms modulated the autonomy of local kingdoms, perennially concerned about the political and economic consequence of the conquest of their territories by major powers.

#### *Conclusion*

The present study has attempted to situate the different relevant political powers in their hierarchical relationship and to discuss the political and economic compulsions that forced them to take a particular stand concerning other political players. The Bangas continued to maintain a friendly relationship with the Portuguese, despite taking certain actions detrimental to the latter. The Portuguese, on the other hand, were moved by self-interest, namely the need to secure a continuous supply of pepper. Moreover, the Portuguese also had to deal with the major local political player, namely the Keladi kingdom. The latter aimed to enhance its revenue by expanding its territory. The little kings of Kanara suffered major economic losses by surrendering their assets to the Keladi kingdom. Consequently, they sought to form alliances against Keladi. In some cases, the little kingdoms switched their allegiance. For example, the queen of Ullala opposed in principle both the Portuguese and the Keladi king. However, due to the conflict with the Bangas, she ultimately supported Keladi. The little kingdoms of Kanara also approached the Adil Shah of Bijapur as a prospective ally against the Keladi king. The main reason for this conflict was economic. Both the Keladi king and the Portuguese wanted to enhance their income. The little kingdoms opposed such a trend, as their paramount consideration was to preserve territory.

---

<sup>73</sup>Assentos, II, 561.