



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE VIJAYANAGARA EMPIRE

HARSHITHA B L

FACULTY, HISTORY DEPARTMENT

KODAGU UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT:

The empire of Vijayanagara was very rich. The foreign travellers who visited the Vijayanagara empire have paid tributes to its wealth and splendour. The Vijayanagara empire was in a state of prosperity for over two hundred and fifty years. It was the saviour of Hindu culture. The prosperity of the Vijayanagara empire was due to the growth of agriculture, industries, trade and commerce. The state followed a wise irrigation policy. Industries were also encouraged by the state. Commerce was inland, coastal and overseas. Calicut was the most important port on the Malabar coast. If Abdul Razak is to be believed, there were as many as 300 sea – ports in the Vijayanagara empire. There are commercial relations with the islands in the Indian Ocean, the Malaya archipelago, Burma, China, Arabia, Persia, South Africa, Abyssinia and Portugal. The exports from the Vijayanagara empire were cloth, rice, iron, salt, petrel, sugar and spices. The imports were horses, elephants, pearls, copper, coral, mercury, China silk and velvet. The coins of the empire were those of Gold, copper and silver. There were emblems of different gods and animals on them. Import was very much less than export during the Vijayanagara times, for the kingdom was autonomous.

INTRODUCTION:

The Vijayanagara Empire referred to as the Kingdom of Bisnaga by the Portuguese, was a South Indian empire based in the Deccan Plateau it was established in 1336 by Harihara I and Bukka belonged to a family of five brothers. The economy of the Vijayanagara empire was essentially unchanged from that of the Chola period. The economic power of merchants' guilds considerable and they began commanding political influence as well. Any taxation policy would first have to be cleared with the guild leaders, who were also to some extent representatives of public opinion. Archaeological excavations at Vijayanagara have revealed the empire's power and wealth. The rulers of the Vijayanagara empire maintained the well-functioning administrative methods developed by their predecessors, the Hoysala, Kakatiya and Pandya kingdom, to govern their territories and made changes only where necessary. The King was the ultimate authority, assisted by a cabinet of ministers. Kannada, Telugu and Tamil were used in their respective regions of the empire.

ECONOMIC LIFE:

Economically the Vijayanagara empire was prosperous. It clears from the writings of foreign travellers and the availability of the gold coins. The economy of the Vijayanagara empire was essentially unchanged from that of the Chola period. Blacksmiths and carpenters were now in great demand and hence occupied a higher social scale. Meanwhile the guilds continued to have a considerable influence on the economy. The guilds themselves were hierarchical with artists guilds working under merchant guilds, who were now powerful distributors who could influence the of the artists guilds considerably. The temple was often the single largest land owner and consumer of a village, the hub of village economic activity, providing various employment opportunities. Their economic influence forged a closer link between them and the monarchy. Trade continued to remain an important part of the economy, with both foreign and domestic trade doing extremely well. In fact, so important was trade to the economic, and consequently to the stability of the empire, that one of the major concerns, of all kings was to control as much of the trade as possible. The constant competition amongst the kingdom led to many incentives given to early European traders who began establishing themselves in the country. They charged lower duties and provided various facilities. The general prevailing customs duties at that time were subjected to higher duties to discourage their import so to boost the local industries in these sectors. The main imports were gold, silver, elephants, horses', spices and certain types of textiles. The main exports were rice, sugar, coconut, millet, dyes, sandalwood, teak, pepper, cloves and cotton textiles. However, the South was no longer the facilitator of Asian-European trader, with the Portuguese and Arabs controlling most of this trade. Sea trade was active with ships visiting Indian ports regularly. The Indian shipping industry did not command as much of a influence in trade as it once did, with countries like China now leading with some of the finest and reliable vessels.

ECONOMY HISTORY:

The empire's economy was largely dependent on agriculture, Sorghum (jowar), cotton and pulse legumes grew in semi-arid regions, while sugarcane, rice and wheat thrived in rainy area (for chewing), and coconut were the principal cash crops, and large-scale cotton production supplied the weaving centres of the empire's vibrant textile industry. Spices such as turmeric, pepper, cardamom and ginger grew in the remote Malnad hill region and were transported to the city for trade. The empire's capital was a thriving business centre that include a burgeoning market in large quantities of precious gems and gold. Prolific temple-building provided employment to thousands of masons, sculptors and other skilled artisans. They are lived a city.

Economically the Vijayanagara empire was prosperous. It is clear from the writings of foreign travellers and the availability of the gold coins. But the foreigners might not have paid any attention to the life of the common man. The sources of revenue were land tax, professional tax, fines booty brought during the times of war, tributes from the Governors, house taxes on the factories, commercial tax, taxes on imports and exports. Some of the collections were spent on religious, military and public welfare affairs. The land tax could be paid either in kind or cash. Payment in the form of money came into practice during the time of Harihara I. the tax was fixed, depending upon the fertility of the land. The land lords had to pay grass field tax and marriage tax to the government. Nearly 16% to 50% of the yield was collected as the and tax.

TRADE

Trade was mainly carried on the Portugal, Persia and Ceylon. Rice, Spices, Sugar-candy, gold sandalwood and iron were being exported from Vijayanagar. From Portugal Horses, from Ceylon Elephants, coral and pearls from China Silk and makmal from Pegu and Ormuj, copper, pearls velvets, corals and mercury from others were being imported. Vijayanagar, Anegondi, Penugonda, Chandragiri, Udayagiri, Kalahasti, Madurai, Tanjore, Mangalore, Bhatkal and Ankola were the chief trade centres. Bhatkal and Mangalore. Barakur, Baidur, Basrur and Karwar were the main harbours. The main export during the reign included clothing, spices, iron, iron ores, sugar, and others. Ships were the most common transporters used for overseas and coastal trades. It is said that the people of Vijayanagara knew the shipbuilding art, which helped them to carry out trade. Barbosa evidenced the art of shipbuilding by quoting those ships of Vijayanagara that were initially built from the Maldives Islands.

In Vijayanagar, grain, pearls, emerald were being sold openly without any fear. The Golconda mines were noted for their diamonds and emeralds. Foreign travellers, like Niketin, Abdul Razak, Nuniz, Nicolo Conti, Barbosa have often expressed their administration for Vijayanagara market. In the markets, fruits like Lime, Orange, Grape,

Pomegranate and Roses were beings sold in heaps. Abdul Razak while speaking of Roses says that “people perhaps could not live without roses. It had become as necessary to them as food itself.”

Gold coins (Varaha, Honna, Gadyana and Pagoda), silver coins (Tara) and copper coins (Pana, Duddu, Jital, Kasu) were legal tenders. The coins bore the names of Vijayanagara Kings in Kannada and Devanagari and the images of Shiva, Parvathi and Vishnu on the obvers. The merchant guilds, rich temples and mathas did the money lending business.

Another traveller from Persia named Abdul Razzak mentions the location of the same trade shops. Shops trading the same thing were built close to each other, creating intense competition among the players. Flourishing of trade attributed to inland, coastal, and overseas trading Exports could be considered familiar sources of prosperity and growth. In addition, the exports were supported by more than 300 seaports which eased trade and transportation.

ARGICULTURE

Agriculture was the main occupation of the people. All the rulers had adopted policies for encouraging agriculture in different parts of Vijayanagara additionally, wise and efficient irrigation policy further supported agricultural sector. Once, A Portuguese traveller named Nuniz mentioned dams and canals’ presence and ongoing construction. This made the region self- sufficient and prosperous in the agricultural sector. It was responsible for the economic development of the country. It was the primary duty of the King to the take care of agriculture. The Kings, Governors, rich merchants, villagers and temple care takes dug wells and built tanks. The Vijayanagara Kings paid special attention to irrigation. Krishnadevaraya has discussed this matter in his book “Amukta- Malyada”. Agriculture. The chief agriculture products were cotton, Ragi, Jowar, saje or pearl millet, sugarcane, wheat, paddy and dhals.

THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM

The irrigation system had been given priority. The Thungabhadra water was passed through canals to Raichur and Bellary districts and the agriculture was rendered easier. Embankments were built here and there. When the new Thungabhadra reservoir was built, old dams and old embankments at Hospet Vallabhapura and Koregal were submerged in it. The canals of Vijayanagara times – Koregala canal, Bellanaale, Raya canal, Basavanna canal, Shivapura canal, Anegondi canal Kalagatta canal, Siraguppa canal, Ramasagara canal, Kampli canal, Belgodu, Halenaale, Siraguppa canal, Ramasagara canal, Ganagavati upper canal, Gangavathi lower canal and bijal canal. These seventeen canals are in Karnataka. The rest are in Andhra state. Nearly 20,000 acres, of Hospet and Siraguppa in Bellary district in total about 30,000 acres are brought under cultivation through the Vijayanagara canals.

Drinking water was supplied to Hampi through stone and eathern canals and pipes. In royal palace complex, nearly 20 water troughs have been discovered and the excavation work is still being continued.

There was much land needed for the tillers. They often earned their living by tilling the lands belonging to the wealthy. Their life was similar to that of serfs of Europe in the Middle Ages. There were five types of contracts for cultivating the land (1) Geni (2) Guttige (3) Siddaya (4) Vaara (5) Gadi. The contract made between the owner and the tiller was called Geni. The land contractor was often called Genidara. In Guttige, the tiller had to give a fixed share to the land lord, irrespective of the yield. If the yield was deficient, he has to make good the deficiency. According to Siddaya, the rent for the land could be paid either in cash or kind. In Vaara system, both the landlord and the tenant had equal share of the produce. In Gadi system, the rent was depended upon the fertility of the land. These five systems varied from place to place. The Brahmins the Mathas received lands as gifts or donations. But they were cultivated by the tillers. Those who did military, religious and social service were given jagirs.

INDUSTRY (Work Shops)

Import was much less than export during Vijayanagara times, for the Kingdom was autonomous. Suitable measures were taken for the production of necessary things. Many types of had come into being under the patronage of the kings. The chief ones among them were sugar, jaggery oil, coir industry, liquor, charcoal, cotton industry, production of arms, aromatic industry, tanning and pottery, fishery and mining. Many small handicrafts were also being practiced. Guilds were accountable for regulating industries and crafts. People involved in the same trade commonly lived in the city or an area. Barboza, Abdul Razak and Petro and Deltaville speak of the efficiency of the jewellers in making ornaments. Kan-p-mai (Koimuttur) was famous for its cotton and silk. Budihal (Chitradurga Dist.0

and Goa manufactured the best type of cotton clothes. Emeralds were found in the mines at Vajrakarur near Gutti (Ananthapura Dist.) in Bhatkal irons ores were found in plenty.

MINING OF COINS

Mint was another important organisation in the state. Private persons used to mint with the permission of the King. Gadyana gold coins were minted at Barakur and Mangalore centres. Devaraya II issued coins in his own name. coins minted by private persons were legal tenders only in certain specified places. This ofte hindered trade and business and tradesmen who moved from place to place. Lakkanna Dandanayaka, Governor of Devaraya II had issued own coins. As Fredrik Caesar, the traveller says money often proved to be a source of hindrance and trouble while one travelled from one province to another. Even though all the governors of these provinces were subordinate to the Vijayanagara empire and the money in one area had no values in the other province.

Krishnadevaraya minted gold coins called Varahas, Gadyanas, Panas, at the time of his coronation fogures of Balakrishna, Venkateshwara were engraved on gold coins along with shaka, chakra, Makaratorana, Abhayahasta, and other symbols. The names like Sri Pratapa Krishnaraya, Sri Krishnaraya are found on the coins in Sanskrit coins in Sanskrit script called Devanagari. The biggest coin is more than 7 grams. The smallest gold coin is 0.3 gram. It has the figure of Durga and Krishnadevaraya. He offered 30,000 gold coins for the Kanakaabhisheka of Lord Venkateshwara after the conquest of Orissa. Achutharaya and later rulers also issued gold, silver coins.

CONCLUSION

The Vijayanagara empire had a strong economic condition, which owed to social and economic reforms. Equal participation from men and women helped the economy grow in all domains, namely trade, industries, agriculture, industries and commerce. However, the reign created a strong caste and cultural divide, which increased the unequal distribution of wealth and resources. Inspire, the empire being so old teaches us a lot of about our history and culture. The economic situation was the empire was extreme. It is said that many foreign travellers have visited the city and witnessed its wealth, growth and prosperity.

REFERENCE:

1. History of India (medieval period) – Palaksha
2. History of Medieval India - Dr. Kamini
3. History of Medieval India - Satish Chandra
4. History of Medieval India - V.D Maharajan