

# A Glance on Trade and Industry in Ancient Karnataka

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**Introduction:** The collection, distribution and exchange of goods is called trade. It is a process which depends on a number of factors such as the nature and quantity of production, facilities of transport, safety and security of traders, the pattern of exchange, etc. It also involves different strata of society including traders, merchants, peasants and artisans. In a somewhat indirect manner, even political authorities have a stake in it as taxes on the articles of commerce imposed by them constitute an important source of revenue of the state.

**Media of Exchange:** Karnataka was ruled by many important dynasties between A.D. 600 and 1300. These include the Mahabhojra in Western North-East Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh in North-Eastern Karnataka and the Tamilnadu in the Deccan. All had the distinction of having been served by some of the most powerful kings of the day, many of whom had very long lasting reigns. It is astonishing that their available coins are very few and in no way compare either in quantity or quality with the coins of earlier centuries. Since money plays an important role in the trade and purchase of goods, the paucity of actual coins and the abundance of coin-moulds in archaeological finds lead us to believe in the shrinkage of trade during the period under survey.

Urban economy can be studied with reference to trade industry. Information on trade and industry is meagre and we have to be content by giving the names of trades and industries that were flourishing. In most cases our information is derived from the names of the taxes which give us an indication of such industries. One thing that we notice in the inscriptions is the mention of guilds of trade. From this we can reasonably conclude that traders had organised themselves into well knit guilds and these guilds looked after the interest of their members

The following are some of the merchant guilds that are mentioned in the inscriptions of the period. Nānādēsis, Baṇajus, Settiguttas, Nakaras, Ayyavole 500, Mummuridanda Gavare, etc.

It is difficult to explain the exact connotation of these Nānādēsis and Ubhayanānādēsis literally mean merchants of various countries and on this basis it has been explained that they represented a body of merchants who traded in other areas such as Chōla, Maleyāḷa, Telunga and other regions. Some of them are described to have gone to distant areas for trade. Hence we may presume that the guild of Nānādēsis or Ubhayanānādēsis represented the merchants who went out of Karnataka to neighbouring areas and also to distant places like Kamboja. The head of the Nānādēsis is called Mukhya.

Settigutta was another flourishing and popular merchant guild of the times. The word Setti is the tadbhava of Sanskrit word Śresthi which means a merchant. They were Vaisyas by caste and generally followed the profession of trade and commerce. The Settis are considered to be the cream of the Vaiśya community. But the exact meaning of the term Settigutta is not known though we know that it is a guild of Settis. Whenever Settiguttas are referred to in inscriptions, they are normally mentioned within the districts of Karnataka. Thereby we may presume that the sphere of activity of the Settigutta was local- A large number of donations have been given by the Settiguttas and so we can think that it was a rich guild of merchants. While describing

these Settiguttas, often we see phrases Setṭi- guttas of four towns, or Setṭiguttas of eight towns etc. From this it could be said that the merchants of the towns constituted the guild of the Setṭiguttas.

Mummuridanda is another difficult term to explain. On the basis of the word danda in this term it has been interpreted as bearers of Mummuri danda or staff. This is how Barnett explains the term. Saletore explains this as an exclusively commercial guild, the membership of which was open only to the active trading merchants. Perhaps it was an advance guard consisting of soldiers who had a danda or flag of three colours. These merchants who carried luxurious goods, gold and other precious stones had to take the help of advance guards. In course of time it became permanent with the guild. This explanation seems more became permanent with the guild. plausible because many inscriptions refer to the valour of the Mummuridandas. Hence it could be construed that in addition to their quality as good merchants, they were able soldiers too. Hence they were entitled to the staff or danda which they proudly associated with the name of their guild.

Five hundred svamis of Ayyavole was the most important and affluent merchant guild of ancient Karnataka. It was something like the present day Chamber of Commerce. As they had Aryapura or Ayyavole as their headquarters, they are known as Svāmis of Ayyavole. The number five hundred attached to them is only a conventional number, as perhaps in the beginning their number was five hundred. In course of time the number became permanent and conventional. The inscriptions describe these Svāmis of Ayyavole in glorious terms.<sup>5</sup> They were the supreme lords of Ayyavole which was similar to the great city Ahicchatra (Ahicchatramenisuva Ayyavole puraparamēs varamappa Ainoorvar svamigal). They had their own conduct (Viraśāsana) which was famous as they always upheld truth, purity and good conduct (Sa- masta bhuvana vikhyāta Panchaśata Viraśāsanalabdaḥ anekagunata- mkta Satya śauchachāra charucharitra nayavinaya Vijñanasampannar). They were born in the illustrious lineage of Baladeva, Vasudeva and Mu- labhadra (Baladeva vasudeva Khandali Mulabhadra Vamśōdhavarum). They were graced by the boon from Padmavati or Bhagavati (Pad- mavati Bhagavati devilabadha Varaprasadarum). They were the protectors of Virabaṇanjudharma (Virabaṇanjudharma pratipalakar). They were great heroes and also adorned by Lakshmi (anunasahasa Lakshmyālimgita Vaksasthalabhuvanaparakramōnnatarum). They had their own flag called gudd idhvaja (guddadhvaja virājamānar), and their sastra was guḍḍaśāstra. (Trailōkyamam Sadhisuva gudda- śāstradanvayalak ṣaṇamgalanaridu). These people visited many countries like Chōla, Chera, Pandya, Maleya, Magadha, Parasa and Kambhoja. They used both land and sea routes during their sojourn (Pādamarga Jalamargadolu Satkhandamandalagalām pokku). The articles of trade dealt with by them are also mentioned in inscriptions. They traded in high quality elephants, well bred horses, precious stones and gems, many kinds of spices, perfumes and drugs. Most of these merchandise were sold to foreign merchants. They sold these merchandise both in retail and wholesale. They used donkeys and buffaloes to carry their goods.

The earliest mention of Ayyavole Svāmis is seen in an inscription of 735 A.D.". In this record we read that Bennamma Sōmayāji made a gift to the Chaturvidya Samudaya of Ayyavole five hundred, for annaprāśana, Pumsavana, Upanayana, Vivāha, Samavartana and Yajña. It is very difficult to associate this guild with any particular religion. Padmavati, one of their deities was Jaina but Mahiṣāsūramardini is also described as the deity of this guild. Further more they worshipped Brahma, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara. Thus they are seen as the worshippers of all deities and gods, From the reference to these guilds we can easily say that Bellary, Bijapur, Hassan, Mysore, Shimoga, Chitradurga, Bangalore had centres of Ayyavole five hundred, An inscription helps us to know the respect these people enjoyed in a meeting. The local people before making a gift prostrated before the svamis of Ayyavole. (Srimadayyavoleya Ainoorvar Svamigalige Saṣṭāṅgaveragi podavaṭṭuikka Hasumbeyan midusasiyam kuḍusetti Śrīmadayya- voleyā ainoorvara svamigalge talige dembulamamhoyi).

Another point which is worth considering in this connection is whether the five hundred referred to are the same as the Mahā janas. Usually the number 500 is also associated with the Mahajanans and hence scope for this doubt. But the Mahajanans are the Brāhmaṇas who were engaged in the field of education and they are never described as moving into foreign lands either by land or sea route. But the five hundred of Ayyavole are stated to have been the followers of Bananju dharma, which is the dharma of the vaiśyas. Hence it becomes clear that five hundred of Ayyavōle were different from Mahajans of Agraharas: the former were the merchants while the latter were educationists and religious men.

Bananjus or Virabaṇanjus literally refers to merchants and there exists a caste called banajiga. As these banajigas followed a code of conduct or Dharma of either a code of conduct or Dharma of their own, they organised themselves into a guild called bananjus or Viraba nanjus. The word also occurs as an adjective to describe many influential merchants. That is to say Kunjanambi was an ardent follower of bananju dharma, which means Kunjanambi was a banajiga by caste who followed trade as his business. In other words Vira bananju is a term of wider connotation which included all merchants in general or those merchants who engaged themselves in trade and commerce. Because these Virabaṇanjus were rich and affluent, they had become highly influential in administration. According to an inscription these Virabaṇanjus were the Mūlastambhas of a Kingdom.<sup>8</sup> Hence we find many of them becoming ministers and officers during the early medieval period. These merchants were highly enlightened in their outlook and generously contributed to the development of cultural activities, educational centres and such other charitable works.

The word Nakara means a city or a town and in the meaning of a trade guild it occurs frequently. From this it may be stated that Nakara is a merchant guild of a city or town. Their activities were confined to the town only and they did not go out to other towns and distant places, Hence they were a smaller organisation of merchants. They also followed the bigger trade organisations in other matters. In fact when the nakaras built a Jinālaya at Puligere, they took pride in calling it Nakara Jinalaya. Unfortunately more details about them is not seen in the contemporary inscriptions.

It is not easy to mention the articles of trade of the period for lack of source material. However, taking the taxes that were levied we may presume that the following articles were sold and bought: They are Paddy, rice of different varieties, spices like pepper, cardamom, clove, ginger, garlic, cummin, mustard, jaggery, oil, oilseeds, menthya, coriander, asafoetida, musk, kesari, cotton, cloth, Woolen rug, sapphire, pearls, diamonds, rubies, topaz, corals, emerald, gold jewels, sandal, arecanut, betel, coconut, myrobels, turmeric, plantain, palmfruit, perfumes, bhaje, bhadramushte, elephants, horses, goat, sheep and buffalo, baskets, fruits, ghee and butter, pots, vessels, utensils, instruments and various types of words.

These items were carried in carts is proved by the expressions like dadasadabandi, belladabandi meaning cart of grains and cart of Jaggery etc. That betel leaves were made into a bundle and carried on the head is suggested by the expression Vileya talehore. Perfumes were carried in small cups (baṭṭalu) whereas asafoetida was carried in small boxes (Pettige).

There were different types of shops called Devarangai (temple shops), manyadangadi (recognised shops), Karadangadi (credit shops) and angadimane (wholesale shops). These are only literal meanings and the exact connotation of these terms is not known. Besides these regular shops, weekly fairs (Santhe) were held at each village and town where most of the articles were sold. The temples derived income from taxes on the articles sold on such fairs.

Now we may refer to industries of the period. Here again our sources are highly limited and they do not supply all the information that we require to make an estimate of the various industries. In fact we should not attach

the modern connotation of the word industry to these that flourished in the period with which we are concerned. They may even be called crafts and they were in the nature of small scale or home industries of the present day. We get references to them by way of taxes that are mentioned in the contemporary inscriptions. More than mechanisation, handicraft was the common feature of all these industries. There were no separate factories or industrial estates but these industries were generally located in or near the dwelling houses. As castes were formed on the basis of the occupations, the knowledge of these techniques were passed on from father to son. It is also likely that these industries also had their own guilds.

The oilmill industry was a major industry of the period as seen from the large number of references to it in inscriptions. Perhaps the area around Chamarajanagar in Mysore district was the centre of this industry because the area was known as Enṇēnādu in inscriptions. As the Oilmills were generally taxed, the gift of that income was generally given to the temples, as the temples required oil in large quantities. for food and, for burning lamps. The oil mills were generally made of stone and were drawn either by hands (Kaigāna) or by bullocks (eṭṭugāna), Some temples maintained their own oilmills which were operated by okkalu. (deva gāṇada Okkalu). These people who followed this industry are referred to as Telligar and their families are sometimes referred to as fifty, five hundred and even one thousand. Perhaps it referred to their guild. Telliga nakhara is also referred to in the sense of a guild of oil producers. Though Oil was extracted from many seeds, Sesamum alone is mentioned in our records, and Lōkōpakāra also mentions; it.<sup>18</sup> However, ghee is frequently mentioned in Lōkōpakāra,

### **The textile industry:**

That the textile industry was one of the very popular industries of the period: can be understood by the large number of references to taxes on various aspects of textiles like cotton, yarn, colour loom etc. Hulagur, Somanathapura, Bellur, Kaddalagere, Ballipura, Chinmali, Oblapura, Bhogavati, Binamangala, Kellenagere, Halebid, Arasikere, Honnavura, Aigandapura, and other places were great centres of textile industry as known from inscriptions found therein. Cloth was woven from the yarn prepared out of various materials such as cotton (hatti), silk (Patte), wool (Kambali) and linen (Nāru). Cotton was cultivated on a large scale as a commercial crop and it is known that cotton was exported through Thana in later periods. Ranna, Ponna and other writers mention costly dresses worn by Kings and queens made of silk and embroidered with gold threads. Gadayuddha also mentions tailors and the fine needles used by them." (Munnamemba bajukemba janōktiyoḷāytu sūchisaktige nrpa nade dārada voladuvu rajakumararanegal). An inscription calls tailors as experts in ornamenting the clothes (vastrastngara Khan-dita chitrōdbhavar), The silk cloth was prepared of the yarn made of the cocoon of the silk-worm (pattasutra), It was also referred to as amsuka and cina, In the inscriptions we hear of the following words connected with different types of clothes such as sire, teresire, hodake, nulu, Nalpatta Rate (spinning wheel), Kadiru (spindle) and lower planks used in weaving are also referred to. Woolen blankets called Kambali are mentioned in inscriptions coming from Davanagere and Doddaballapura. Perhaps they were centres of manufacture. Naludere, maggadere and bannadere are taxes levied on cotton yarn, loom and dye used in textile industry. Nārumaḍi is described in Gadayuddha as a simple type of cloth prepared out hemp. It was usually worn by monks and priests.

### **Jaggery and Sugar Industry :**

Another widespread and popular industry of the period was manufacture of Jaggery and sugar. Sugarcane (Kabbu) was cultivated as an important commercial crop. literary texts and inscriptions refer to the beautiful standing crop of sugarcane and also refer to the damage done to these crops by elephants and Jackals. The sugarcane was crushed and the Juice was heated in large pans in alemanes. Jaggery was prepared in slabs and humps and taken to the market in carts. (Bellada bhandi). We also get references to a tax on the Jaggery

industry known as *äledere.st* Sugar is described as similar to sand grains (*malalu*) . *Lökōpa- kāra* mentions a large number of sweets prepared by using both jaggery and sugar. It even describes the method of making sugar from Jaggery.

Varnilōtpala kandama

naredavarol panchabhagadanitam gudam

berasi kudiyisido dedu

sarkareyakkum vibhudha kalpavrksanamadam

(The roots of black Neydila plant should be made into a paste and this should be mixed with five parts of Jaggery and should be boiled to get sugar). *Lökōpakāra* mentions the preparation of various fruit Juices in which sugar has to be mixed. Thus it becomes clear that both jaggery and sugar were common articles of food and hence they must have been manufactured on a large scale in Karnataka.

### **The Perfumery Industry :**

Manufacture of a large number of perfumes of different varieties was also a popular industry. Though perfumes were very popular among the royal families and the rich people. we get good references to this industry in inscriptions and literature. In this connection it is worth mentioning that the seventh chapter of *Lökōpakāra* is devoted to the various processes involved in the manufacture of perfumes. This chapter is called *gandhayu- ktikramam*. First he enumerates the preparation of various sweet scented oils like *padari*, *kaḍava*, *Champaka* and *Neydile*. Then he narrates the preparation of detergents which keep up the cleanliness of the human body. It is highly interesting to note that he refers to the preparation of a perfume used to gargle the mouth so that the bad odour could be avoided. Then he gives the details of oils which could be used as hair oil and which have different smells, like *champaka*, *mallige*, *Karpūra*, *Mrgamada* etc. Then he refers to preparations of different types of *dhupas* or incenses which are useful to the body. A *dhupa* made of *Śri-gandha*, *agilu*, sugar, seeds of *Torehuligalu* and *kōṣṭha* in equal proportions will keep the clothes in good smell for a long time states *Lokopakara*. Then he refers to the preparation of different types of *agarabathis*, like *Sugandhavarti*, *Dhupavarti*, *Dasanga-*. *varti*, *Panchangadhupavarti* and *Srigandhavarti*. It is important to note that among the terms of taxes we do not get any which has connection with perfumes or *agarabathis*.

### **Jewellery:**

It was a highly sophisticated craft and was quite popular in Karnataka. The royal class and the rich people were the patrons of this art though the common man also had a small share in this patronage. Sculptural representations show a large number of ornaments of various types that were in use during the period. Inscriptions also rarely refer to various ornaments like necklaces (*sara*), bracelets (*tolbandi*), *Kankana*, *Waist band (kaṭisutra)* anklets (*nupura*), ear-rings (*Kundala*), armlets (*keyūra*) crown (*makuta*) pendants (*padaka*) etc.

### **Bangle making:**

This industry was also quite popular during the period. The bangles formed an essential ornament for the women and they were an index of auspiciousness. *Pampa* mentions that bangles were made of gold, silver, copper and glass.<sup>5</sup> *Balegārasthalas* are referred to in inscriptions as the centres of bangle manufacture.<sup>57</sup> It is of interest to note that the great poet *Ranna* was, born in the family of bangle manufacturers (*balegara*).

## Mining:

That mining and metallurgy have been an ancient industry in Karnataka, going as far back as prehistoric period is well known. But inscriptions do not throw much light on this industry. But many place names like Hungunda, have memories of mining operations of the ancient period. An inscription mentions a gold mine (Belgeyyim pomganiyim phalataruvimdolpayamgalim kusumara- jānilanim pagareya pariyimtarada siriballakunda nālkesedirkkum). There is reference to a tax called Jaraginatore and it was collected by an officer called Jalaginadhikaris". Etymologically it means a tax levied on a person who was gathering gold from the sands on the riverbank.

The other industries of the period of which we do not get details are weapons of war, household utensils, leather industry, metal work, pottery, wood work, Salt manufacture etc. These industries are known to us from the taxes associated with these industries.

Thus the above picture though not fully complete gives us an idea of the urban economy of Karnataka during the period of our study. The important aspects of this urban economy are the good corporate life, contacts between one part and the other interdependence of one group on the other, the guild system, marketing and transport agency and highly specialised nature of the industry.

## Conclusion :

The present study of trade and Industry during c.A.D. 600-1300 has focussed on :

The nature and extent of the use of metal coins and the role of other media of exchange in the trade network, It focused on some of the merchant guilds that are mentioned in the inscriptions of the period. Nānādēsis, Baṇanjus , Settiguttas, Nakaras , Ayyavole 500 ,Mummuridanda Gavare, etc. It is completely deals with the nature of industries like, The textile industry, the Jaggery and Sugar Industry, The Perfumery Industry, Jewellery, Bangle making, Mining etc.

contribution of expansion of agriculture industry and increased agricultural production in furthering interests of trade, and impact of trade and commerce on the condition of towns through the centuries.

The overall picture of trade and industry during the six centuries under discussion is that of feudalisation. The way in which money transactions took place, the manipulations of landed interests including those of state officials and ruling chiefs, functioning of the ruling elite in the interests of big traders and merchants and putting restrictions on artisans and craftsmen are indicators of the process of feudalisation.

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