



FOREGIN TRADE IN COASTAL AREA

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ABSTRACT

The Pearl Fishery Coast situated on the Gulf of Mannar has a long history from the Sangam Age to the present. Whoever ruled the Tamil country – from the early Christian era to the end of the fifteenth century – enjoyed monopoly over the pearl fisheries and the pearl trade was a link between the East and the West. There are evidences to prove that several foreign travellers visited this coast for its valuable commodity, the pearls. Not only pearls, but trade in other items was also carried out in and through the Pearls Fishery Coast. Pearls were brought from the deep sea to the shore by a courageous fisher folk caste called the Paravas who are natives in most of the villages of the Pearl Fishery Coast. Not only pearl, but trade in other items was also carried out in and through the Pearl Fishery Coast. The spread of colonization had a great impact on this coast and for the first time a European power i.e. the Portuguese, dared to control it after the Mass Conversion in 1536.

Key words: Colonization, tonnage, monopoly, vessels, compensate, abundant

INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese began their trade activities in the Fishery Coast with marine products like pearls and chanks, but widened their horizons later. In the second stage, they

began trading in essential commodities like rice and textiles. Finally, they moved from intra-region trade to intra-Asian trade by bringing west Asian horses and Sri Lankan elephants to the Fishery Coast and carried

saltpeter to Lisbon from the hinterland of Thoothukudi.

The Portuguese displayed a strong interest in trade of war animals. The import of war horses dates from the thirteenth century both in the north and south India and the Portuguese indulged in this lucrative trade as the situation favoured this extensively. The lust for war animals by the Vijayanagar emperors and their governors, the local disputes between them and the Hindu-Muslim rivalry and the absence of a regular supplier resulted in the Portuguese monopoly in horse trade.

HORSE TRADE

The Delhi Sultanate in the North, the two arch rivals in the Deccan (the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate) and also local powers in the far south were interest in the regular overseas supply of war horse for strengthening their respective cavalry units. The long drawn hostilities between the two caused a steady demand for war horses which now began to be regularly disembarked at the Konkan harbour. The strong presence of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and the emergence of a powerful Portuguese centre at Goa soon paved the way for their as a force to be reckoned with in this trade.[1]

In the initial stage, Kilakkarai provided an opportunity for the Portuguese to supply horses to its chieftain. TumbichiNayak, who held a few coastal villages like Vembar, Vaippar, and Kilakkarai under his control and defied the authority of the Vijayanagar ruler Achyuta Raya and joined hands with his opponents. He also rebelled against the Madurai Nayak, captured several towns and built a fort which he called Paramakudi.[2] ThumbichiNayak therefore needed horses to fight his wars.

The trade in horse began to flourish in concrete terms during the period of MartimAffonso de Souza (1542-1545) the Portuguese viceroy of Goa. He issued instructions to the Portuguese captain in Ormuz in central Asia to send a minimum of twenty horses to the ports of the Bay of Bengal, as there was a lucrative trade on the east coast of India. Therefore, the Portuguese on the Fishery Coast requested the Portuguese viceroy of India to arrange for the supply of horses, which came from Ormuz to the ports of Goa and Cannore.

Some casodos like Pedro Alvaro de Mequita and Diogo de Lisboa who had specialized in horse trade with the Coromandel ports stayed at Kanyakumari

for the convenience of knowing in advance the arrival of horses from west Asia to the western ports from where the animals were taken to the buyers. The casados made frequent visits to Ormuz and brought horses to Cochin also. The horse trade continued to flourish even after the fall of the Vijayanagar kingdom. The casados maintained their commercial controls between Cochin and Ormuz, either through Gujarat or Goa.[3] Their trade contacts were so strong and expansive that the trade continued to be profitable even after the demise of the Vijayanagarempire.

Apart from the casados, the native merchants and Portuguese captains were also involved in the distribution of horses and earned a good profit from it. Cosme de Paiva supplied horses to Vettumperumal who fought against Unni Kerala Varman and harassed the new converts the Paravas. Though the sale of horses by Cosme de Paiva was opposed by his own men, he did not give up his lucrative trade for which he was censured by Francis Xavier. Paiva was later imprisoned for undermining Portuguese interests by aligning himself with VettumPerumal.[4]

The knowledge about the transportation of the horses is very scanty.

The Chinese used term “Machuan”, literally meaning horse ships to denote ships with the capacity of carrying about a hundred horses from Ormuz. AbdurRazak (1470) observed that ships from Ormuz carried both horses and men. According to Morland’s estimation, a ship around 125 tonnes could carry seventy war horses, besides one hundred men, including soldiers, crew and passengers. [5]

These horses, on payment of 40 ducats as customs to the Portuguese in Ormuz, were sold in southern India at a price varying from 300 to 1,000 ducats. Some of the ships arriving at Goa carried 80 horses, and some even 124 horses, as observed by Caesar Frederick and Ralph Fitch in the records of their voyages from Ormuz to Goa. Though the approximate tonnage of the horses taken to Cochin is not known, it must have been a significant proportion for the voyage would otherwise be a loss.

The fresco found at the entrance of the Sri AzhahiyaNambiRayar temple, Thirukkurungudi is an elaborate depiction of the horse trade. The other fresco at SriNArumbuNathawami temple at TirupudaiMARuthur depicts a sea going ship sailing at sea carrying merchants and horses

must be a reference to the active participation of the Portuguese in the import of horses to India.[6]

The Kudiraichettis and Muslim merchant groups who conducted horse trade during the period of the Pandyas seemed to be absent in the sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries. The Portuguese must have favoured the new Christians and casados and encouraged them as they considered them to be more reliable. The Kudiraichettis continued to flourish in the Coromandel Coast and promoted overseas trade with Malacca they traded in several other items too.

EXPORT OF SALTPETRE

The international rivalry particularly between the Portuguese and other European countries in establishing their colonies in the newly discovered areas and the involvement of the Portuguese in the Thirty Years' War (1618 – 1648) spiraled the export of saltpetre from India to Portugal. This (saltpetre) was used mainly in preparation of gunpowder, a vital item in every coloniser's armoury. The Portuguese were interested in exporting saltpetre from 1630s onwards for an economic reason too: they were on the look out for other trade items to compensate the declining pearl trade. They

located areas where saltpetre was abundant and entered into a series of contracts into a series of contracts and agreements with the local rulers to obtain it.

The Portuguese demand for gunpowder for use within India was locally met by the gunpowder factory at Goa. But since the demand increased at a steady pace, and as the factory at Goa was unable to produce as much quantity as was needed, the shortfall had to be compensated by the output from the gunpowder factory at Lisbon. Therefore the Portuguese authorities at Goa sent enormous quantities of saltpetre to Portugal on the annual carracks to feed the Lisbon factory.

The Portuguese officials collected saltpetre from Sindh., Palaghat (Palakad), Thoothukudi and Madurai and it was believed that the substance obtained at Madurai was better than those got at other regions – it required only two washes for purification.[7]

The viceroy at Goa sent Pero Soares de Brito from Cochin as captain of Thoothukudi in 1630 to procure saltpetre from Madurai. The Portuguese needed a representative at Thoothukudi for the collection of saltpetre since Madurai region

produced enormous quantities of saltpeter.[8]

The Portuguese through their viceroys entered into numerous agreements with the Nayak of Madurai to procure saltpeter. But none of them could monopolise this trade as the Nayaks supplied it to every European power that was willing to pay a good price and aid them (the Nayaks) in their local conflicts. The Dutch and the Danes too were customers of the Nayaks. The rush for the procurement of saltpeter in Madurai region created and intensified the rivalry between the Portuguese and the Dutch.

ELEPHANT TRADE

The Portuguese were not the pioneers in the introduction of elephant trade to the Tamil kingdom. The Marakkayars were already importing elephants from Sri Lanka to Kilakkarai which were on sale in various places in the Fishery coast. Since the Portuguese were in need of saltpeter they traded elephants in return for saltpeter with the Nayak of Madurai. The merchants who traded in elephants procured them in Sri Lanka and sent them to the Fishery Coast – as they did to several other countries where the animals were sold at varying prices determining by the height of the elephants.

The efforts taken by the Portuguese to procure saltpetre in lieu of elephants was successful. The first agreement was made between the Nayak of Madurai and viceroy Conde de Linhares on 3 Feb.1633. The Nayak promised to sell all the saltpeter only to the Portuguese and the Portuguese also agreed to sell elephants only to TirumalaiNayak of Madurai. He (the Nayak) agreed to sell one bhar (local weight) of saltpetre at the rate of twenty seven and a half xerafins to the Portuguese for each elephant delivered at the port of Thoothukudi at the price of 662 xerafins.[9]

Diogo de Mello, the Portuguese captain at Sri Lanka and AmaroRoiz, the revenue official at Sri Lanka considered the agreement unevenly balanced and disadvantageous to Portuguese interests. So he delayed the sending of elephants to Thoothukudi. The officials put forward two reasons: first, the price of saltpeter was high and of the elephants every low; second, during the dry season, the elephants would take a longer time to move to Mannar from Colombo and again to disembark at Thoothukudi.[10] This delay created a lull in the trade.

The second agreement was made the following year between Miguel de Noronha,

the viceroy of Goa and the Nayak of Madurai. Both of them agreed to exchange elephants with saltpeter. But since the Nayak reserved a significant quantum of saltpeter for the Dutch, the Portuguese captain refused to send elephants.[11]

In 1635, the Nayak promised to supply saltpeter to the Portuguese at the price of twenty five xerafins each bhar. The Nayak also invited the Portuguese to exchange not only elephants with saltpeter but with other precious commodities as well.[12]

The uneasy relationship between the Nayak and the Portuguese deteriorated due to the arrest of the Portuguese captain Antonio de Meireles by the Nayak in 1635. It was followed by a severe retaliation by the Portuguese and in the Council meeting held in June, the same year, they (the Portuguese) drew the following regulations:

- If the Nayak of Madurai needed elephants, he should appoint a factor, or his own man in Sri Lanka to record the measurements of the elephants.
- The price would be fixed as per the contract and accounts would be settled as soon as the measurement was over.

- Elephants would be sent to Thoothukudi by ship at the risk of the viceroy.
- If the nayak wished to have horses by the same contract, he could keep another factor in Goa; After the price was fixed, the viceroy would put them at the port of Thoothukudi.
- If the Nayak wanted to have gold, gold jewelery, silk or any other clothing he would come to the port of Thoothukudi with the help of the factor or Mudaliar (head man) and they would decide the price as per the then value prevailing in the region.[13]

MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE

The monetary arrangement of the sixteenth century in the Portuguese colonies was not acceptable to the colonizer. Instead they used gold, silver and copper in their transactions with their colonies so that the absence of the common measure of value in these settlements was not adverse to their financial interests: they preferred to transact with their own currency. In 1500 the Portuguese brought 60,000 cruzados to the Malabar Coast which increases to 80,000 cruzados in 1506. This was increased further upto 10,00,000cruzados in 1524. Coins were

issued in the sixteenth century from Diu, Bassein and Daman to cater to the needs of maritime trade. Besides the coins of Indo Portuguese origin, there were other acceptable coins too in circulation along the coastal regions of India, especially for trade and commerce.[14]

In the Fishery Coast, fanao or fanam (rupee) was much in use. The teachers, catechists and sacristans were paid in fanam during the stay of Francis Xavier.[15]Pardau was in use among the Portuguese officials and captains. Other coins like ashrafi, reis, xerafin, pagoda, pattacus were also in use in collecting revenue and in buying and selling goods.

CAUSES FOR THE DECLINE OF TRADE IN THE COASTAL REGION

Though the Portuguese and the Nayak of Madurai signed contracts and entered into arrangements for trade of elephants and salpêtre, both of them were suspicious and apprehensive of each other. Since the Portuguese were in dire and constant need of gunpowder they made numerous attempts repeatedly to procure saltpeter from Madurai and Thoothukudi and paid exorbitantly high rates to the Nayak. Yet the Portuguese were unable to fulfill the demands of their king, who was

continuously asking them to send more and ammunition and the Nayak was not obliging.

The disputes between the Tamil rulers added to the uneasiness thereby endangering the trade. TirumalaiNayak created the Marava kingdom under the Sethupathis of Ramnad as a buffer to prevent the intrusion of any foreign power through the Pamban Strait and also to check the Portuguese power in the east coast.[16]In 1635, in the civil war between SadaikaTevar II and his brother ThambiTevar in the Maravakingdom, TirumalaiNayak supported the latter. As TirumalaiNayak sought the help of the Portuguese, SadaikaTevar was backed by the Dutch, who were biding their time to enter into the east coast. In return for the assistance, TirumalaiNayak permitted the Portuguese to propagate Christianity, to build churches and to occupy a fort within his jurisdiction.[17] Though this improved the commercial relations between the Luso-Nayak powers temporarily, it paved the way for the Dutch involvement in the east coast. Soon the Marava power was on the rise and the ruler became more autonomous in his dealing with other political freeing himself from the influence of his progenitor the Madurai Nayak.

TirumalaiNayak realized the growing power and the potential defiance of the Sethupathi and the impending danger to his kingdom and wanted to wage a war against the Sethupathi as the latter had dared to enter into direct dealings with foreign powers without the Nayak's approval. The nayak sought the assistance of the Portuguese in this enterprise. While the Portuguese firmly declined and help to the Madurai Nayak, the Maravas won the support and alliance of the Dutch. This precipitated the breakup of the Portuguese – Nayak relationships once and for all. The nayak was not only refused to supply saltpetre to the Portuguese, but invited the Dutch to have trade alliance with him.

The Portuguese made several futile attempts to revive their contracts with the nayak. A final attempt was made on 5 March 1643 but TirumalaiNayak felt insulted by the Portuguese for turning down his request for help in his fight with the Maravas. Instead in 1645 he sent an ambassador to Arnold Heussen, the Dutch governor at Pazhaverkadu inviting him to trade at the ports of his Nayakdom. The Dutch were allowed to open a factory at Kayalpattanam, a place strategically close to Thoothukudi.[18] The Marava – Nayak issue ended in rivalry between the

Portuguese and the Dutch and it continued up to 1658.

ANALYSIS OF THE TRADE ON STRATEGIC GOODS

The Nayak in general and TumbichiNayak of Paramakudi in particular, maintained an open door policy in vogue since the Sangam Age in horse trade. The Portuguese were led by profit motive and a desire to monopolise the pearl fisheries for financial reasons. But along with the pearl fisheries, the Portuguese had strategic concerns too. They took over vantage place like Killakkarai and Vedalai located in the northern end of the Fishery Coast for their proximity to Srilanka. Their objective was to control the west coast of Sri Lanka and the Gulf of Mannar from where they could monitor their entire colonial stretch. The introduction of the cartaz system immediately after their settlement and Vedalai demonstrates the monopolistic policy of the Portuguese along with their commercial interest in horse or pearls. Therefore the open door policy was continued by the Nayak and challenged by the Lusitanians in the Indian Ocean.

Another aspect of trade in war animals is that the Estado did not conduct the entire trade all by itself. Individually and

collectively, different merchant groups (Captains and Portuguese officials, including the viceroy) had private trade affairs.

The Portuguese responded immediately quickly to emerging situations and seized whatever was advantageous to them. Two instances could be cited in this regard first, the Portuguese did not hesitate to abandon all trade with Thanjavur as soon as they discovered the possibility of exchanging elephants with saltpeter with the Nayak of Madurai; second, when the Portuguese realized the difficulty in loading and unloading of elephants in small ships of higher tonnages capacitated to carry fifteen or more elephants.[19]

The Portuguese felt that they would succeed in establishing their authority in Tamil Coast with the new political strategy through “a new fuel mix of overseas trade and gun powder diplomacy”. This diplomacy worked well in the case of Goa and Malacca. The cause of the failure in implementing such a policy in the east coast is due to the scattered settlement pattern of the Portuguese in the same coast.[20]

During the Pandya rule a large number of horse died during transportation and the loss was met by the same rulers as

per their contract. But the Nayaks entered into arrangements with the Portuguese to treat the sick horses which reduced casualties to the great extent; in case the horses died before sale, they were not paid for by the Nayaks. But Krishnadeva Raya, in his earnestness to encourage the merchants, went out of his way even to pay for those horses that died on the way from the west Asian Ports to Vijayanagar.[21]

The role of the Jesuit missionaries as catalysts in the promotion of the Estado's trade and commerce was unique, When the elephant –saltpeter agreements fell through and the Madurai Nayak was stubborn in unrelenting to the demands of the Portuguese, the Jesuits were asked to arbitrate between the two. Though the Jesuits and the Portuguese captains differed in their policies and practices towards the natives in this case, the influence of the Jesuits at the Madurai court was employed because of the fear of the Dutch on the Fishery Coast and their (The Dutch) influence with the nayak.[22]

CONCLUSION

The rise in saltpeter price abetted the Luso-Nayak conflict and their agreements thereafter had no smooth execution. After the Dutch appeared in the east coast, the

Portuguese had no comply with the rate proposed by the Nayaks. As a result the Portuguese suffered financial crisis and the fall in their income made the Fishery Coast an unprofitable and unattractive locale.

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