CHAPTER I

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The Indian sub continent is a mosaic of regional diversities. These variations are so vibrant and the forms in which they find expression are frequently so emphatic that they tend to threaten the very integrity of the larger political entities of which they are a part. The pre modern politics is occasionally expanded to virtually sub continental dimensions, which, could not have escaped these centrifugal tensions.

Notwithstanding these facts, proponents of the model of centralised medieval empire, the pre-modern Indian state must have had fewer pretensions to regulating the lives of its subject than does the state today. It was perhaps content with harmonizing the more obvious differences between itself and the region in order to prevent the emergence of political polarities. The region, conversely, while recognizing the overarching supremacy of the empire, probably retained fairly strong local traditions along with its own version of major historical developments. Many of these versions have come to be articulated through commonly accepted notions about the nature of local events and issues. These often constitute an integral part of regional histories in modern times. Whether based upon historical facts or upon legends and traditions, the presence and popular acceptance of these ideas in region often nurture a historiography which restricts the categories of questions that are likely to arise.

Scope of the Study:

The purpose of this work is to present in detail the Society and Politics in South Kanara from 1500 A.D to 1800 A.D covering a period of
about three centuries. For the purpose of study, the entire South Kanara including Kasaragod and Udupi Districts have been taken as the canvas. The South Kanara region which has evolved a distinct culture of its own is situated on the western coast of India. It is a long narrow strip of territory stretching from North to South; it is a mixture of midland and plains which spreads from the Western Ghats to Arabian Sea (known locally as *Pashchima Samudra* which means Western sea). The land is commonly referred to as *Alvakheda* (land of Alupas) and also as *Tulunadu* in historical times.

The reason for taking 1500 A.D. as the starting point is primarily on account of the availability of ample source materials then onwards. From the close of the fifteenth century South Kanara enters the later medieval period of her history under the Vijayanagara Empire. There are also copious Portuguese records. The records show a qualitative change in their nature from this period. The study closes with the end of the political influence of Tippu Sultan and the rise of the British East India Company into political prominence in this region. Although the time frame is defined on the basis of the political identities, this study seeks to assess the structure of administration as a result of political changes and analyse the role played by different chieftains in the context of the development of European power politics. Besides, it deals with different aspects of agrarian economy such as topography, land structure, types of crops, and production as they have contributed significantly to the expansion of internal as well as external trade. Different forms of tenure practices, emerging trend of commercialisation in agriculture and its impact on society have been discussed critically.
Historiography:

It is necessary for us to note that most of the early works on South Kanara are mainly descriptive and informative. History in this period largely remained *factographic* and for them change meant virtually political change. Efforts have been made by scholars from the beginning of the twentieth century to reconstruct the history of South Kanara. This has resulted in the production of quite a good number of works on the history of this region. The historiography of South Kanara begins with colonial writings. For administrative purposes manuals were compiled by British scholars and the first attempt in this direction was that of J. Sturrock. Volume I and II of the district manual of South Kanara is an attempt to write the history of this region in a systematic way for the first time. The first Volume compiled by J. Sturrock and published in 1894 A.D. discusses, such issues as history and archaeology, revenue history and administration of land. There is a brief reference to the Vijayanagara revenue assessment as well. However, it is based not on original sources but on the information recorded by Sir Thomas Munro. It is admitted in the beginning itself that the information recorded by Sir Thomas Munro cannot now be amplified or even verified as the materials from which he derived it no longer exist.

Later scholars have laboured to reconstruct the political events in a chronological order. Early works like *Dakshina Kannada Jilleya Charitre mattu Bhutala Pandya Rayana Aliya Kattu* by Sheenappa Hegde and *Dakshina Kannada Jjilleya Prachina Itithasa* by Ganapathi Rao Aigal are trusted legends rather than any attempt to go into the more dependable source of history. Sheenappa Hegde’s work mostly lays emphasis on political history. This is a pioneering work and has its own importance.
However, it contains chronological discrepancies. He has failed to make use of authentic source materials in arriving at conclusions. But, Ganapathi Rao Aigal's work is supposed to be the first serious attempt to write the history of South Kanara. It deals mainly with the political history from the early times to the end of the nineteenth centuries. His reference to the politics and nature of society between the fifteenth and eighteenth century, however, is limited. Nevertheless, he made an attempt to reconstruct genealogy of the local chiefs of South Kanara. Moreover, his work is a fairly comprehensive survey of the history and culture of the region. He has given special emphasis on the political history. He has devoted enough space for the rule of the imperial powers and administration of the region under the Alupas as well as Vijayanagara rulers. A brief note on the presence of various local chiefs in different parts of the region is also included. B.A. Saletore, a historian from the region concentrated more on the reconstruction of the political history of the early period particularly Alupas in his work History of Karnataka - Volume I, History of Tuluva. Even though he has discussed political environment of the period as well as administration and agriculture, Saletore did not make use of the rich information contained in epigraphical sources, about agrarian economy, but heavily depended on the Paddanas. The problems of administration, patterns of agriculture and social impact etc., do not figure prominently in his work. Suryanath Kamath, who wrote in detail on the political history of the region under Vijayanagara in his unpublished Ph.D thesis Tuluvas in Vijayanagara times, has also tried to focus on certain aspects of economic history and administration. But he did not give enough attention to society in South Kanara after Vijayanagara period. One has to acknowledge the fact that he has made use of foreign sources quite extensively, but the epigraphical records then available on
large scale have not been fully tapped. K.V. Ramesh, undertook an exhaustive research on the history of South Kanara from earliest times to the fall of Vijayanagara Empire. His is an exhaustive chronological arrangement and discussion of epigraphical records pertaining to the history of South Kanara for he made a detailed study of the political history of the Alupas, Hoysalas and Vijayanagara. In his *Tulunadina Ithiasa* and *A History of South Kanara* he conducted detailed research only up to Vijayanagara period but the later history of South Kanara was not touched upon. One should admit to his credit that he used all the available epigraphical sources to explain History of South Kanara, although study of these is outside the scope of his work. However, he has made valuable contribution to the understanding of political history of South Kanara.

P. Gururaj Bhat in his doctoral thesis *A Political and Cultural History of Tulunadu* and his work *Studies in Tuluva History and Culture* devoted a major portion to the study of sculptures and temples as also the different religious sects. He has not fully made use of the epigraphical sources and there is no detailed discussion of different aspects of Society and Politics in South Kanara from 1500 A.D to 1800 A.D., as it fell out side the scope of his research work.

K.G. Vasanth Madhava's *Western Karnataka Its Agrarian relations 1500 To 1800 A.D* gives importance to economy of western Karnataka. He confesses in the beginning of his work that *its main source is epigraphical sources.* But with regard to South Kanara it is not only epigraphical sources that are to be depended upon but also on the indigenous and foreign literary sources, archaeological sources as well. Both Vasanth Madhava and P.N. Narasimha Murthy in their works *Religions in coastal Karnataka 1500 –*
1763 A.D\textsuperscript{10} and Jainism on the Kanara Coast\textsuperscript{11} respectively have made detailed study of the religious conditions in South Kanara. Vasantha Madhava's study covers the history of religious institutions and economy in general and P.N. Narasimha Murthy's work deals with the development of Jainism in Coastal Karnataka. While B. Vasantha Sheetty's Doctoral thesis \textit{Barakuru - A metropolitan city of Antiquity-its history and Culture}\textsuperscript{12} deals with the earlier period. A Himakara's M.Phil dissertation \textit{A History of Agricultural production in South Kanara during the eignteeth century}\textsuperscript{13} deals with only one aspect of economic history of the region, though it is a useful work relating to agricultural production and techniques. Since it is a study of the conditions of the eignteeth century. South Kanara, the agrarian economy of the earlier period falls out side the scope of this work.

Two aspects can be noticed from the above review. Firstly, one can notice that through these generations of historians the basic assumptions of historical inquiry remained rather unchanged. In the absence of serious challenge to existing frames of reference, the only change that historiography witnessed was quantitative additions of details. Naturally, historical writings on South Kanara from 1500 A.D to 1800 A.D became stereotyped. It is only recently that historiography has tried to deviate from this beaten track. Secondly, the bias in favour of political history, religion and art has resulted in the neglect of other areas particularly study of the polity, social condition and European presence and their power-politics in South Kanara. The available works on the history of this region are permeated by idealism and romanticism, particularly in the case of writings of Sheenappa Hegde, Gururaj Bhat and B.A. Saleto. In the writings of Gururaja Bhat this is the dominant frame of reference. No attempt is made to
trace the role of chieftains in the political setup of later medieval times. Though attempts were made by scholars like K.V. Ramesh, to trace, the political history of this region their works do not cover later medieval history of South Kanara.

Apart from the above mentioned works which deals with the History of South Kanara, there are a few secondary works on the economic history either of South India or of Karnataka, in which, South Kanara also forms a part. B.A. Saletore published *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire* in two Volumes. It has a detailed discussion of revenue administration in the Pre-Vijayanagara and Vijayanagara periods with special emphasis on land revenue. However, this work deals with only Vijayanagara period but later Vijayanagara period is not touched upon at all. *Economic conditions in Southern India* by Appadorai which is an early work has detailed discussions on several problems of the economic history of the period. But it has no direct bearing on the history of South Kanara. A very exhaustive study which covers a large range of issues and subjects under socio-economic and administrative aspects of Vijayanagara has been made by T.V. Mahalingam. His work *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagara* is generally descriptive in nature. Moreover, they are beset with a compartmentalised reckoning of the economic, social and political aspects of history, thereby losing sight of the integral nature of the theme. Though he has discussed agriculture, methods of Administration and system of land tenure, these figures only as a minor aspect in his study. He has not given any details about political history of South Kanara or administrative system of South Kanara. However, the contribution of Mahalingam is not belittled by these shortcomings, for such is the wealth of information
brought out by Mahalingam. Following Mahalingam a few more specialized studies were made on different aspects of the history of this period.

One of the prominent works in this field is *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* by Burton Stein who challenged the idea of both a highly centralized, bureaucratized state for medieval South India and the loose and crude application of the model of Feudalism. He also proposed an alternative model for explaining the socio-political organization of medieval South India. Conceived to explain state and society under the Cholas, the *Segmentary State Model* of Burton Stein is extended to the Vijayanagara state and society in the centuries that followed. But this work once again is mainly a discussion on South India. Even he has not given any importance to South Kanara. Whether or not one accepts the validity of Stein’s model for either the Chola or the Vijayanagara state, his contribution to historiography will remain as of lasting value for the simple reason that it awakened historians from a lull of complacency. *South Indian History and Society – studies from inscriptions 850 – 1800 A.D.* by Noboru Karashima has some discussion on the issue of land holding during Chola times, integration of society in that period and revenue system of the Chola and Pandyas in the later periods. These are however, concerned with the history of the far South.

S. Gururaja Achar in his work *Some Aspects of Economic and Social Life in Karnataka* has made use of literary sources, apart from inscriptions, for the study of agriculture, which forms a chapter in his work. Principal crops, land reclamation and extension of cultivation, process of cultivation and irrigation are discussed in different chapters. However, he does not deal with the region of our Study. G. Kuppuswamy’s *Economic
Condition in Karnataka 973 – 1336 A.D. ²⁰ is not related to the area of this study as his work was focused entirely on Pre – Vijayanagara period.

K.S. Shivanna has made a specialised study of Agrarian System of Karnataka 1336 – 1761 A.D. ²¹ He has discussed at length some features of medieval agrarian economy, land tenure, collection of land revenue, trade in agricultural produce besides life and conditions of the peasants. However, he has made only a passing reference to agrarian system then existed in South Kanara. Ushadevi’s research work on Agrarian System under the Hoysalas too keeps out the history of South Kanara from its discussion.

Despite the importance of South Kanara during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the absence of sustained recorded studies vis-a-vis socio political history is surprising. Notwithstanding this, it is an area particularly rich in contemporary source materials. A researcher has to utilize the rich inscriptions of the Vijayanagara, Keladi rulers and local Chieftains issued from time to time. Information can also be obtained from the accounts of European travellers. Despite its fragmentary nature, this information can be of sufficient value when placed in the context of comments and observations in latter sources. The considerable time gap, apart from observation in these later works on the climatic, physiographical and agricultural peculiarities of South Kanara continues to be of relevance to historians.

Although local traditions and regional perception of history have significantly influenced the historiography of South Kanara, it can hardly be forgotten that South Kanara during sixteenth century was an integral part of a larger polity. The Vijayanagara Empire spanning virtually the entire subcontinent had significant bearing on the separate regions that constituted it.
The nature and functioning of Vijayangara system has, in the recent past, been subjected to close scrutiny, considerable efforts having been directed towards understanding its politico – administrative structure, and its economic base. As a political structure, the Vijayanagara and the Keladi Kingdom are normally viewed as one that sustained itself by appropriating a substantial part of agrarian activity. Much of government activities pertain to the assessment and collection of land revenue and its subsequent distribution with in the various sections of the ruling class. It was the efficient functioning of this system under close imperial supervision which ensured the integrity of the Vijayanagara Empire. The loosening of central control and the emergence of powerful regional entities on account of various factors contributed to its ultimate fragmentation.

Agriculture was not the only economic activity in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in South Kanara. Cities, Ports and towns scattered all over South Kanara Coast as well as in the interior, emerged important centers of commercial activity. These towns and harbours encouraged the growth of internal and external trading activity. It is apparent, however, that the range of commercial transactions was immense, not only in geographical extent but also in terms of the large sums of money involved.

Apart from the indigenous, business class, the European trading companies in India had begun to assume greater significance by the sixteenth century. Through these trading companies the economy of South Kanara established a crucial connection with Europe. The increased demand in Europe for Indian commodities, such as pepper made possible the integration of South Kanara with outside world. Textiles acted as an
incentive for greater production, creating new jobs in South Kanara. It was nevertheless, long before the English came to dominate the Indian economy.

It is true that the history of South Kanara can not be described merely in terms of local chieftains, regional chieftains, and Vijayanagara imperial system thriving upon economic activity. Hence, the present study makes an examination of the socio-political process in South Kanara during the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century.

Sources:

Written documents on stone or copper plate known as inscriptions provide valuable sources for the present study. The texts of a few inscriptions of South Kanara are published in the Volumes of *Epigraphia Indica, Karnataka inscriptions* Series, *South Indian Inscriptions* series particularly Volumes VII, IX part I and II and Volume XXVII. Some of the inscriptions concerning the region are found in the Volumes of *epigraphia Cranatica* Volumes VI, VII, VIII and *Mysore Archaeological Department Annual report* and *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*. A large number of inscriptions are noticed with summaries in the *Annual report on South Indian Epigraphy* and *Annual report on Indian Epigraphy*.

Stone inscriptions are of a different category from pillar inscriptions, memorial records and slab inscriptions and these are found throughout the region under study. The copper plate inscriptions, another division in the study are mostly in custody of the private individuals. This category of the inscriptions found in considerable number belongs to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
The Vijayanagara inscriptions outnumber other inscriptions. Post-Vijayanagar inscriptions donatives in nature are found in considerable number in the Kundapur taluk of South Kanara region. The Vijayanagara epigraphs usually record donation of grants. They were issued by or in the names of some sovereign or feudal chiefs with the object of recording gifts made by the sovereign or by feudal rulers, or by officials or private individuals or group of private individuals or civil or merchant guilds. Some of the inscriptions contain no reference to imperial authority, but are concerned with political contacts between two or more local chiefs who were till then at constant war with one another. The epigraphs concerning the settlements of disputes between the citizens or between merchant guilds are available for study in South Kanara.

The inscriptions of the post-Vijayanagara period speak of the provincial activities of the Keladi Nayaks, their donation of land grants to religious institutions or merited persons who had rendered valuable services to the state. Such records deal with the land transaction procedures, the tax structure and the agrarian setup.

A host of inscriptions between the middle of the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries provide information about a number of feudatory chiefs such as the Bangas of Bangavadi, the Choutas of Puttige and Ullala, the Samantas of the Mulki Sime, the Ajilas of Venuru, the Tolaharas of Suralu, the Honneyakambali chiefs of Hosangadi, the Saluvas of Gerusoppe and Sangitapura and their nature of political relations with the Vijayanagara Sovereigns and the Nayakas of Keladi.

Regarding trade transactions, the epigraphs enlighten us on the purchase and sale of commodities and concerns with information on
conditions which promoted or curtailed local and foreign trade. Such inscriptions are found at Barakuru, Basruru, Siruru, Bhatkala, Gerusoppa, Chandavara etc. A few inscriptions from places above the Western Ghats belonging to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often refer to the commodities that moved from above the Ghats to places below the Ghats and mention Sunka Thanas in South Kanara.

Regarding topographical and environmental study, the South Kanara inscriptions have immense value. The distinct topographical features of the region are Hadavu (barren land), Niru Hariva Oni (water flowing lane), Kiri gadde (small Paddy field situated near tank), Bengare bailu (field situated near sea), Uppinagara (salty region), Kuduru (an island formed by river), Bila gadde (uncultivable land), Hola gadde (land for wet and dry cultivation), Haravari (grasy land), Hadi (elevated ground covered with brush wood), Kadu (forest), Gajani (land formed by residing the river or sea). The post Vijayanagara inscriptions mention the natural calamities such as gudde jarida Nashta (the damage caused by land slides), Hole Harida Nashta (the damage caused by the overflow of the river), uppu Niru ukkida Nashta (damage caused by the overflow of the salty water of the river) etc; thus indicating the changes in the course of the rivers flowing in South Kanara region. Measures taken by the rulers and prominent persons to preserve environmental purity are revealed in a few inscriptions of the periods of the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth centuries.

Accounts of foreign travellers have been of considerable use in the present study. The main drawbacks in these accounts, however, are the unreliable nature of much of the information contained in them. The obvious reason for such a situation is the ignorance of visitors. It is noticed that many
fantastic and totally unbelievable hearsay accounts have crept into many of these works.

Official and non-official documents such as private records, diaries, official correspondence and the like are useful in the study of history of the post-Vijayanagara period. They consist of records such as the Kadatas used for maintaining temple accounts, family history, correspondence of the rulers of South Kanara and the European traders. There are also some diaries of authors namely Della Valle, Buchanan and others. This is the general nature of the source material for the reconstruction of the history of South Kanara during the period under study.

The project has been divided into seven chapters. In the first chapter an attempt has been made to evaluate the contributions of the few existing works on South Kanara and to point out the inadequate nature of the treatment of the subject. The present work tries to provide a fuller and historically meaningful study of the theme. An examination of the nature and significance of different sources also forms a part of this chapter.

Chapter second, the geographical setting of South Kanara region, traces the significance of language, geography, legends and topography as factors contributing to its distinct identity. According to the traditional notion, 'Parashuram ksetra' is known for the fertility of soil, abundant rainfall and wealth. The region under study has a variety of flora and fauna. It has mountains, valleys, rivers and ports. South Kanara has Arabian sea as its western boundary. It is almost straight, but in some places it is broken with rivers, rivulets, small streams, etc. The Western Ghats are situated on the eastern side of the region. The rivers of South Kanara run from the east to the west. With the heavy rainfall of south-west monsoon and the broken
nature of the country, the rivers and streams are innumerable. These rivers are extensively used for bringing products to the coastal ports and towns. The backwaters and salt water lagoons provide great facilities for traffic. Therefore the rivers on the one hand facilitated transport and on the other provided fertile land for agricultural production. The importance of various ruling families in South Kanara against the background of the overall history of the region and administrative divisions that were formed during different periods also has been sketched briefly.

The third Chapter examines the pattern of agriculture. South Kanara has been an agrarian economy and agriculture and agrarian-based production thrived as the two major pillars of the economy of this region. It is evident that geography as well as topography of the region greatly contributed towards agricultural activities of the region. Agriculture produced the raw materials required for trade as well as industries of the region. Geographical factors favoured the cultivation of food and commercial crops such as paddy, coconut, sugar-cane, cashewnut, arecanut, pepper and a wide variety of vegetables and fruits. Increased cultivation led to the expansion of the economy. It resulted in advancement of agricultural and industrial production. It also touches upon growth of irrigation, trade and commerce, trade routes and trading centres in the economic prosperity of South Kanara during the period under study.

The fourth Chapter is on the nature of interplay of European power politics. Since South Kanara has been the chief producer of valuable agricultural products like pepper, rice, sugar, etc., a large number of Europeans took active interest in enjoying maximum benefits by imposing hegemony over the trading centers of the region. After the fifteenth century,
Europeans like the Portuguese, Dutch and the English arrived in South Kanara and they tried to establish their factories in ports like Mangaluru, Basruru, Barkur, and Gangolli. The European element considerably influenced the economy, trade and commerce of South Kanara. The Portuguese signed treaties with the native rulers and tried to obtain supply of necessary provisions to their factories in different parts of India and abroad. During this interaction there were military encounters and political negotiations. This led to proliferation of trade in items like rice, pepper, ginger, iron, saltpeter, etc. The Dutch and the English attempted to compete with the Portuguese. The Dutch established their factories in Mangalore and Basruru. The English also appointed their agents in Mangalore to procure necessary supplies of rice to their settlements in Tellicherry and Bombay.

Topographical features and the other historical factors which contributed to the regional identity of South Kanara, also influenced the organization of its administrative divisions. This is the theme of fifth Chapter. Administrative convenience facilitated many integrating forces which were knitting the region into a closer unit. Local society and polity were subjected to a variety of stresses and the administrative system responded by transgressing the formal administrative divisions and sub-systems of the earlier governmental system. Further, the maintenance of an effective revenue machinery contributed immensely to the stability and integrity of the region.

The sixth chapter deals with the society. It seeks to identify the social stratification of the region and the liberal attitudes of the ruling families in the process of social control. They in fact kept aside the deployment of the ideas of superiority and inferiority of caste and creed while determining the
social status of individuals, at least in theory. This policy of appeasement was necessary to attract the subjects for the acquisition of territories as well as to defending the boundary initially. However, the social structure reveals social differentiation which led to unrest. An attempt has also been made to examine the observations of European travellers on South Kanara Social relationships.

The concluding chapter seeks to put together the main arguments of the study.
Notes and References: