CHAPTER V
ECONOMY, TRADE AND COMMERCE

Though agriculture has been the main stay of the economy of the Sirsi region, its rich resources in the form of forests, spices, and aquatic wealth have played prominent role from time to time in its economy. The sources do not permit us to have a complete picture of the working of the economic system in the region as the majority of inscriptions are related to temple-grants and hero-stones.

The early Kadamba inscriptions are devoid of references to flourishing merchants and currency system. The grants were in the form of lands for temples or Brahmanas or Buddhists and Jaina establishments. Sometimes donated lands were divided into shares (vrittis). The coins definitely ascribable to the Kadambas of Banavasi are also scarce. Compared to this the coins of the Satavahanas and the Chutus are more numerous and frequently reported. Perhaps this may be viewed from the point of view of decline of trade, both internal and external, in post Satavahana-Chutu period. On the other hand, excavations of tanks particularly for irrigation and clearing of forests for obtaining agricultural land appear to be more prolific in the Sirsi region from the Kadamba period onwards. Religion becomes a centrifugal force attracting resources of the ruling class. This is so particularly in respect of Jaina and Brahanical religious sects. Kadamba inscription refers to dasabhandha (a tenth of the agricultural produce of irrigated land),
antahkara⁴, Unchakara etc. in relation to the lands donated. But specific references to merchantile activity are totally lacking. It is only from the 10th century onwards that participation not only of the kings, chiefs etc., but also of the merchant class and at times common people is noticed in connection with grants and donations, to temple of various sects. Coins denominations like Gadyana, Kahu-gadyana, Pana etc are also can be seen. An organised merchant guild like Nakara figures in inscriptions. The term Nanadesi obviously referring to businessmen from different countries, also finds mention. Perhaps this kind of evidence may by interpreted as the revival of trade activity to flourishing levels.

The trade in spices with the west had ascended and income from such trade to the treasury of the rulers must have been quite stupendous. The rulers seem to have exploited the situation to their best advantage. Occasionally, conflicts with other competitors and the western settlements used to ensue. Interestingly the number of religious grants given by the ruling chiefs form the bulk during this period though here and there references are found to businessmen etc. making such grants. This may be reflection of the result of he interest that the rulers took in trading with the Europeans.

An idea of the local taxes can be had from an inscription from Bailur belonging to 15th century A.D. which mentions Manehana(house tax), Nogahana (Yoke tax), Okkalu guttige (contract on tenancy),
Kanike (occasional presents), Khadaya (compulsory levies), Bilkara (tax on waste end), Biludanda (fine on waste land), Vasage (tax on social festival), Bicha Birada, Otugay.

Only little information can be gathered from the inscriptions of the region about currency weights and measurements. Direct references to currency are found from 12th century onwards. The most common denominations mentioned are gadyna, pana, hana, varaha, honnu, visa and kahu of these gadyna was of gold and very popular; the pana or the hana could be gold, silver or copper; varaha also a gold coin, is frequently mentioned in the inscriptions after the 13th century A.D.; honnu was another gold coin; visa seems to be a smaller denomination of gold coin; kahu or kasu was a copper coin.

Among the land measures the earliest to occur in inscriptions is nivartana which was otherwise known as matter in Kannada inscriptions. Rajmana is referred to in connection with length but specific details are not forthcoming. The term matter referred to defined area of land roughly equivalent to an acre. In late inscriptions the terms mude and Khanduge are found particularly with reference to paddy. These pertain to land measure in which the sowing or producing capacity of the land was taken into consideration.
The region which was ruled by Sonda rulers included the coastal belt from Mirjan upto Ponda in present Goa state. This coastal Area comprises of the natural harbours like Belekeri, Karwar and Ximpim which were the main sea ports during the period of 16th, 17th and 18th century A.D. There was a competition between the European merchants themselves and Arabs merchants who had the monopoly of overseas trade before the arrival of the Europeans. Sonda kingdom owned therefore considerable importance in the eyes of foreign merchants such as the Arab, the Portuguese and the English.

Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese to the coast of Canara the Arab were enjoying the supremacy overseas trade through this coast. But the advent of the Europeans and their friendship with the local principalities such as Sonda and Mangalore made Arab to loose their supreme position. During 16th century, the Portuguese established their trade at Goa and after it in the middle part of 17th century British established their trade at Karwar.

From the point of view of trade two treaties signed between the chiefs of Sonda and the Portuguese at Goa are important.

The first was signed by Sonda king Immadi Sadasivaraya and the Portuguese governor in 1697 A.D. and the second one signed by Immadi Basavalingaraya and the Portuguese governor at Goa in 1735 A.D. These treaties enabled the kings of Sonda to open their shop at Goa to sell pepper and to get their ships built at Goa shipyard, to become partners in the Portuguese company of traders to get some trade facilities and to character
Portuguese vessels to transport Sonda merchandise. There were provisions to prevent the Arabs and the English from trading with Sonda, but these provisions were not always implemented or upheld. The treaty provided for the exchange of a number of articles of trade freely or conditionally.

The Portuguese supplied arms and ammunition and horses from the middle-east on certain conditions such as supply certain qualities of rice and spice by the Sonda chiefs. The Sonda rulers sold pepper, saltpeter, rice, timber, wood, woolen, blankets and provisions such as milk products including butter and fruits like oranges. According to the provisions of the treaties the Sonda kings should supply pepper to Portuguese rather than to any other party. But they were free to supply other commodities like rice and provisions to any trading party such as Arabs and English.

Sirsi region was heavy trade contract with the British also, in 1690 A.D. king Immadi Sadasivaraya of Sonda permitted certain trade facilities to the British at Karwar to develop their trade. But the trade contract between the Sonda rulers and the British was not always good.

Thus the trade and commerce in Sirisi region were helpful to strengthen the economy of the society.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. There is only one reference to a merchant in the whole lot of the early Kadamba inscriptions.

3. CKI.No.43.


15. *Ibid*.