CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Issues related to state have always remained crucial to many historical studies, and this thesis is one of such an endeavour in that direction: The structure of the state, the social section that it represents, and the means of control that it adopts in the context of Bellary region with special reference to Vijayanagara and post-Vijayanagara is emphasised in this thesis.

An exposition of late medieval political formations during what may be described as the ‘post-Vijayanagara phase’ in south India with special relevance to the Bellary region (which currently forms a part of the modern linguistic state of Karnataka) is taken as a parameter to study the pre-colonial socio-economic formation in South India.

Also, the present attempt tries to steer clear of existing categories or frameworks of classification like ‘feudalism’ and ‘peasant state’ by leaving the ‘centre and periphery’ and concentrating on the ‘intermediate levels of authority’, a relatively neglected area in the studies on South Indian state. The social section which represented the intermediary levels of authority in this context appears to be mainly of hunter-gatherer and pastoral backgrounds such as the Boya Bedar poligars of Harapanahalli and the Kuruba poligars of Bellary, respectively.

The interregnum, following the decline of the imperial Vijayanagara empire (founded in AD 1336), and lasted for well over three centuries (when it collapsed Bahmanis made inroads in AD 1565) until the onset of British colonial rule, has not received the attention. It should be mentioned here that simultaneous with the emergence of regional powers, the Shiaite Muslims established (A.D. 1347) the Bahamani empire at Gulbarga, which soon broke into five independent kingdoms - Bijapur, Bidar, Berar, Ahmadnagar and Golconda. These five kingdoms, by exploiting the mutual rivalries among the native powers, extended their sway up to Raichur in the Krishna valley. By 15th century A.D., the Rāṣas of Vijayanagara succeeded to emerge as a strong political force and resisted the Muslim power in the south. Evidently, the perceivable gulf signalled
the end of a major political era with its medieval past through a political continuum into early modern times, offers many missing links. Most traditional historians on medieval south India ended their enquiries at the fall of Vijayanagara; and those dealing with the modern period stalled their writings preferably with the advent of the British, or in some cases with the national movement. Hence an attempt has been made in this dissertation to analyse some of the political processes in this interlude, which are largely uncovered. In salvaging the post-Vijayanagara history, this thesis has made sufficient use of, literary accounts, belonging to both 'little' and 'great traditions, and also to sources such as Rājayavanavijaya and Amukta mālavyā, both attributed to Kṛishnadevaraya, to explain his political expediency in integrating the Boyas into the power structure as "frontier guards". Similarly, the local Kyfiats collected by Colin Mackenzie have been analysed to explain the social origins and role perceptions of poligars and Kavaligars, the sub-regional intermediaries of the supra-local power.

The post-Vijayanagara phase belongs to the twilight zone in the political evolution of south India, and so described variously as the 'nayaka period' in respect of Tamil country, or simply the late medieval period, or sometimes even as the 'late pre-colonial past' by some (eg. F rank Perlin). His categorisation provides each period with a particular identity. For too long, the British regime in the whole of the subcontinent has been treated as completely different from all prior states. As a comparative perspective, if we observe carefully, the spatial and temporal controls in the Vijayanagara as well as post-Vijayanagara phases were different from the much earlier Chola period during the same medieval time span. There can be no difficulty in agreeing with Stein (1989, see chap. II) that Vijayanagara represents a major shift in the locus of political power from the riverine wet zones of highagniculture in the Tanjore deltas (Cholamandalam) to the plateau or upland dry zone of marginal agriculture. What is interesting note here is that the "activity space" and the cultural landscapes remained the same, and the shadows of the medieval legacy of Vijayanagara continued to persist in the dry Bellary region.

Slate formation is complex. The privilege extended to the unitary state formation almost always entails a unilinear power structure. If we reject the unitary conception of states, the other alternative that needs to be examined is the feudal formations. The unitary
state with a single administrative corpse, a centralised concentration of coercive means, and fixed territory does not comprehend all forms; it neglects those political formations variously called as 'feudal', 'patrimonial-bureaucratic' or segmentary states. This may have something to do with the conceptual models that may lead to the reconstruction of object (according to the parameters of its model) rather than to its interpretation. Recognition of the fact that there may be principles of statehood different from the conventional unitary state oilers the potential for refining the concept of state, more so, the late medieval state in south India. It is in this light that the present thesis has been viewed, to substantiate an argument that the late medieval state in south India was essentially a multi-centered state, characterised by divergent elements of power. The essential point here is that different, even conflicting principles of political association may exist in the same time and place, and among the same people, and that these different principles may also be understood as appropriate, or legitimate. That at least seems the possibility in considering the pre-colonial states of south India, and even early colonial state.

The power structure of the medieval state in this region was multicentred, based on patrimonial legacy and prebendal rights and properties. Through patrimonial legacy the peasant-warrior families, often referred to as the sat-sudra in the epigraphs, amassed considerable properties and control over the local resources. They actively participated in the state expansion strategies and acquired the newly found villages through the prebendal rights bestowed on them for which they lent their allegiance. The kings, for the sustenance of their settlement frontiers relied on the holders of the patrimonial rights. The mutual alliances and the internecine conflicts, the prime feature of the medieval polity, caused no political power to sustain constant boundaries for more than a century.

Even at the pan-Indian level, there seems to be a common understanding in regarding this near ending pie-modern phase. During the past few years, several studies have begun to probe the complexities of the late pre-colonial regimes of the subcontinent. These studies share certain dispositions which, whatever their differences, require that they be considered as a new historiographical view. It is generally considered that the century or so from 1750 to 1850 as a period of transition from the extant old regimes in various parts of the sub-continent to the colonial regimes which were to dominate Indian
history for the next century. The eighteenth century is a time of economic vigour, even
development, and hence the conventional characterization of the time as one of chaos and
economic decline is now being rejected. This is very much true of the pre-colonial Bell-
lar Region where the agrarian economy had been rigorously changing, giving rise to forces
of commercialisation and market economy with widespread tank irrigation promoted by
both the Muslim rulers, and the sub-regional intermediaries. But, the present thesis differs
with their postulate in seeing early colonial-regimes as a continuation of prior indigenous
regimes of the subcontinent. It is so because, here in the case of the Bellary Region, the
British rule in the early nineteenth century constitutes a fundamental break with prior
historical developments by dismantling old bastions of power on historical and political
grounds, and by the introduction of an altogether new agrarian reform, namely, the
iyotwari system by the British as elsewhere in the Madras Presidency. Perhaps what may
be lightly said is that the inroads of colonialism were made possible by the volatile
political situations prevalent in the entire Rayalaseema with the dictatorial, autocratic local
potentates and fluctuating central authority, which was often changing hands.

And the reasons for tailing upon Bellary for such an exercise do not merely rest in
its medieval legacy as the ‘epicentre’ of Vijayanagara ruling systems, but even in the most
turbulent centuries that followed thereafter, during the late medieval period as the bastion
of pre-colonial politics dominated by poligari strongholds forming the core of patrimonial
regimes in this upland Deccan plateau. It may be recalled that the poligars numbering
around eighty as repotted by Munro held sway over the whole of Rayalaseema until the
British subdued them in about A.D.1800. And not that alone. Even during the colonial
period this region acquired a place for itself, comprising the four Ceded Districts of
Anantapur, Kurnool and Cuddapah, besides Bellary. It was where Thomas Munro dealt
with the problem of poligars most successfully, only to show that, conversely, Bellary
reflects a typical picture of ‘physically dry, yet politically fertile landscape’!

It is logical to consider some of the salient features of the political formations of
the period under study with special reference to Bellary region in one such a political
continuum as detailed above.
The thesis has brought to light certain specific sociopolitical institutions evident in the Bellary region in the aftermath of the imperial decline of Vijayanagara. It was essentially the poligari system, with its roots deeply seeped in the hunter-gatherer and pastoral backgrounds. Unlike the earlier kingdoms of the medieval south, the post-Vijayanagara phase presents a marked difference in so far as the polity is concerned. When the royal authority weakened, especially at the time of change of dynastic rule, the dominant lineages of the peasant warrior groups annexed their prebendal rights (which they had acquired from their erstwhile overlords for extending military and political support) to patrimonial legacies to defy the royal authority. And the subsequent Muslim rule that followed was very weak, and failed to retain the status of the previous Vijayanagara ruling system. During the same phase, Bellary region came under the hold of those other than the Bahmani sultanate also, including the Marathas, the Mughals as well as Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan, the Mysorean warlords. Resultantly, this led to instability in the state mechanism due to recurrent changes in the administrative and revenue policies of each ruling authority. As for instance, when the Marathas came onto the scene, they had introduced a special revenue called the Chant. However, the poligars remained indomitable throughout, ever increasing in their hold of local dominance. Presumably, this great instability caused by the recurrent changes in the ruling strata with the indomitable, and almost autocratic political intermediaries represented by the Poligars may have given way to the inroads of colonialism by the beginnings of nineteenth century.

Further, the unique ethnic and regional character of Bellary region also partly contributed to this specific historical development in the political evolution of Bellary as the natural habitat for hunter-gatherers and pastoral agriculturists, who, in turn became the sub-regional intermediaries. Although, with the royal initiative. This also suggests to substantiate an argument that the historical influences of a region’s ‘ecotype’ have a direct impact on its political as well as socio-economic systems.

Parallel to the poligari power pockets, there came into existence during the same phase, the amildari and Jagirdari revenue systems evolved by the successor Muslim rulers. These were essentially created to farm revenue bases for the state, with the help of those deputies drawn from the ruling strata. They apparently have their similarities
in the Mughal administrative set up, envisaged in the contemporaneous zamindari and mansabdari systems. The core of patrimonial regimes transitional in nature thus evolved were not altogether independent either. They had been ever evolving from one of subordinate status to that of semi-independence. In other words, they were only hinting at sovereignty, never claim it fully, with their legacies still connected to the earlier Vijayanagara kingship.

The dry ecosystem of the Bellary region inevitably led to the parcellization of sovereignty in such a specific character that the holders of patrimonial possessions and rights turned semi-bureaucratic powers and forced the overlordship to accept their sway in their own territories. With the result, the revenue resources were augmented by these sub-regional intermediaries as and when necessary and proclaimed almost Tittle kings' status. Ironically, the ritualisation of kingship manifested by these sub-regional powers as homologus to the central power. These holders of patrimonial and prebendal rights like the sovereigns of the empires did claim ritual status by demonstrating it through royal paraphernalia such as dhanka (big drum used to announce the arrival of the kings), chatri (a decorated umbrella to hold while the king is in procession), dandam (gold studded hand stick ritually exhibiting the royal power as judge), ratham (a chariot used to take the king in procession) etc. Similar to the kings these sub-regional intermediaries also maintained body guards, militia and held public courts. The poligars of Bellary like their counterparts in Tamilnadu virtually enjoyed autonomy in their provinces and hence their regime, in this thesis, has been described as 'little kingdoms'. The poligars of Bellary especially those who rose to power from the pastoral and hunter-gatherer communities, such as kuruba and Boya in order to acclaim ritual status took prime lead in sponsoring the local gods and goddesses (which are popularly known as jatras). Even to this day the survivors of the poligar families, such as Bellary and Harpanahalli inaugurate the jatras by accepting the customary offerings locally known as agralamboolam, which symbolically represents that the gods goddesses bestowed them the blessings to rule.

The poligars of Bellary by following the religious, behavioural modes of the rural masses controlled tactically their territories. This made them ritually strong to enhance their revenue base by adopting similar strategies of their overlords by means of
tax-tribute-plunder matrix. The revenue collections of the poligars variously known as shistu (tax on the agricultural produce), sunkam (tax levied on merchandise passing through their territories). Pannu (levies on civil crimes and properties), kavali rusumnu (tax levied on caravans), chant (a form of forced extraction from the neighbouring territories) etc., made the poligars to sustain in power. In order to publicise formal allegiance with their overlords, they made a payment known as peshcush (tribute to the central powers, be it Marathas, the Hindus, and the Muslim Rajas/Sultans.

This structure of the state of the pre-colonial Bellary in a way got misrepresented in the British records. The early colonial administrators such as Thomas Munro, Mark Wilks and Francis Buchanan represented the sub-regional intermediaries (poligars, Zamindars and jagirdars) as plunderers and bandicoots. They even went to the extent of showing in their records to the Board of Governors at the presidency headquarters, the poligars as unwanted elements in the power structure. In order to develop their logic the early colonial regime created a myth in the form of 'Village Community'. According this the Indian villages were represented as "self sufficient closed peasant republican agglomerations surviving in a state of static reciprocal norms and untouched by the political upheavals". In the Bellary and Cuddapah regions, Thomas Munro noticed village servants system prevailing. This system was locally known as 'ayagar' system and specifically called 'panniddarayagars' (barabaloti in Maratha provinces) system. According to this system, the village survives by the services of Brahmin priest, patel (village headman) Karnam (accountant), jyotishya (astrologer), chakali (washerman) and mangali (barber) etc. These services were utilised by all sections of villages by paying customarily a share of crop, and therefore this system is also known as mirasidar (it comes from the root word merah which means share) system. These services are paid either by donating pockets of land at rent free and known as inams or a share in the produce.

The British records justified that poligars neither as mirasidars nor as inamdars but as plunderers since they do not fit into the reciprocity norms of the village community. Munro taking this exceptional view as a utilitarian champion advocated the removal of these intermediaries through formally legalising the land holdings by issuing a written document called the pattas (title deeds) through the ryotwari system. In fact, he strategically
manipulated the ryotwari system to strike at the very roots of the sub-regional Intermediary power groups. Instead of collectively lacing the poligars, he isolated them and individually tackled by fixing their legal lights in their patrimonial and probendal possession.

Munros's wars with poligars of Harpanahalli, Chitradurga, Kudigi, Bellary etc., are the classic examples to state the intentions of the colonial regime. The powerful poligar regime was given a death blow and these positions were reduced to a kind of rural elite to whom Munro could always have access and blend them to the British interests. A careful examination of the documents of Bellary district reveal that most of the poligars were allowed to stay in their villages and continue as rich peasantry through an inamndari system which the scholars identify as silent settlement.

To surmise from the above discussion, the post Vijayanagara period witnessed the rise of sub-regional intermediaries as local potentent power groups and their fall in the hands of the British through the ryotwari system. The multi-centred power structure of the pre-colonial Bellary was subjugated to centralised bureaucratic system of the British administration.