Chapter - 1

INTRODUCTION

"... how laden all 'knowledge' is with power, interest, and strategies of control, appropriation, and domination..." (Preface to Nicholas B.Dirks, The Hollow Crown, XV, 1987)

This thesis deals with the power structure in the Bellary Region during ca. 1565 to 1835 AD, one of the most turbulent periods in the late medieval history of south India: the 'post-Vijayanagara phase' at the threshold of colonial takeover. The focus therefore is the transition from late medieval to early modern times in this region. The enquiry thus centres on a micro region - Bellary, presently situated in the modern linguistic State of Karnataka. The methodology adopted here seeks to go beyond the traditional pattern by following a systemic approach. The medieval legacy of power (or the epicentre of the Vijayanagara 'State' on the banks of river Tungabhadra dredging through this semi-arid terrain) and the aftermath of its decline in the late medieval centuries is the scope of this study.

The emphasis in this thesis is an appraisal of the widely held notion that the historical influences of a region's ecotype have a direct effect on the overall political systems it reflects; socio-economic institutions operate in a given time scale (Robert 1982: 18-19). In this context, it should be noted that the Bellary region, a typical semi-arid country, predominantly supports sheep/goat pastoralism, agro-pastoral (primarily) dry farming vilaliges (millets being the main crops), and further hunter-gatherers like the Boyas (who were prominently known from the medieval times in Karnataka as Bcdars) live in symbiotic association with the agro-pastoral and trading village communities in the lowlands. The pastoralist groups (Kurubas/Gollas) and the Boyas played a significant role in the political economy of the region, ever since the medieval times and eventually rose to eminence in the power structure of Bellary, of course with a royal initiative, corresponding to its regional specificities (Murty 1992: 326).
Mention should be made here that, although aiming at a holistic view of a micro-region as implied in the methodology, the Bellary region as conceived in the present study entails a slightly larger entity than how it exists today, with some of the taluks included in the former Bellary district forming the westernmost part of the famous four Ceded Districts of the erstwhile Company administration (the other three being Kurnool, Anantapur and Cuddapah) (Francis 1916: 46).

Given the nature of the study, and the geographical aspects of the region taken up for this investigation, it is necessary to make an overall assessment of the nature of the state and society with special reference to medieval South India, with focus on the divergent views and broader theoretical formulations as put forward in the existing historiography.

The traditional Indian historiographical model which perceived the state as unitary, centrally organised, and territorially defined to any great length in elaborating the state is followed subsequently by the three popular models: 'Indian feudalism', the 'segmentary state' and 'the patrimonial state', which have more clearly been elucidated in recent descriptions of medieval India.

One does not have to overstrain to recognize that the post-independence historical writings in India have been dominated by intense academic exchanges between R.S. Sharma and Harbans Mukhia (which subsequently drew in many others) on 'Indian feudalism'; Burton Stein's application of the 'segmentary state' concept for South India; and the projection of the Mughal empire as a patrimonial/bureaucratic state by Stephen Blake and M. Athar Ali (see Kulke 1995).

While R.S. Sharma's writings in the last three decades have tended to take cognisance of multipolarity of his thesis, much of the counter arguments and alternative constructs have remained confined to political processes (Champakalakshmi 1992: 151-56; Mukhia 1979: 229-80; Sharma 1985: 19-43). However, B.D. Chattopadhyaya in
his 1983 Presidential Address had recognised that the construct of Indian feudalism represented a "structural change in the Indian social and economic order" and that its most distinctive contribution was "to plug in the gap between polity and society". Chattopadhyaya further argues: "in trying to understand the political processes and structures in early medieval India, it may be more profitable to start by juxtaposing the process of the formation of local state politics and supralocal politics than by assessing the structures in terms of a perennial oscillation between forces of centralization and decentralization" (Chattopadhyaya 1983: 36).

As an alternative paradigm, political processes in the "integrative polity" are seen in terms of parallels with contemporary economic, social and religious developments, such as: (i) horizontal spread of rural agrarian settlements, (ii) horizontal spread of the dominant ideology of social order based on Varna division, and (iii) integration of local cults and sacred centres into a pantheistic supralocal structure. Influenced by Perry Anderson's thrust on the political forces (construction and deconstruction of state) as a catalyst and determinant of struggle between classes, the case of "integrative polity" is based on shifting political geography of the lineages and the pattern of network they represent, "both territorially and in interlineage combinations" at different levels of organisation of "political power". Preferring to use the nomenclature of "Varnashrama system" rather than "feudal polity", Chattopadhyaya views the system as an instrument of "political integration" and "a counterpoint to the decentralized polity of the feudal", which was caused by the horizontal spread of lineage based state society with varied local bases (Chattopadyaya 1983: 36-38). The political basis of such an organisation of both local and supralocal structure was the "ideal of ranking", which in turn was to function as a potential source of tension on the political plane. Crisis was thus built into processes of the formation of the structures (Shrimali 1994: 4-5).

In quite contrast, Stephen P. Blake sees the Mughal empire as a patrimonial bureaucratic state, a concept he borrows from Max Weber, where the state was an enormously extended, if bureaucratized, household. All authority emanated from the
emperor, and government was an instrument for the fulfillment of the interests of the imperial household (Ali 1978 : 38-49, 1993 : 625-638; Blake 1978 : 77-94, 1991 : 1-6). Here we see an extremely centralized state that impinged heavily on the society allowing no space for alternative centers of power. Interestingly the same view is echoed in the recent work of J.F. Richards too (1993). In his choice of themes and the space he allots them, Richards is greatly convinced of the strength (or reality as he puts it) of the Mughal empire. In his view, the empire was an extremely centralized power that crucially affected the Indian society, the history he writes is one which has the imperial court as its epicentre. As he frankly puts it: "the empire was more than a superficial canopy stretched over the substantial life lived in that region. It was an intrusive centralized system which unified the subcontinent". And again this time more emphatically: "the uniform practices and ubiquitous presence of the Mughals left an imprint upon society and every locality and region of the subcontinent, few persons and communities, if any, were left untouched by this massive edifice (Richards 1993 : 1-2).

The historians of the 'Aligarh School' with whom Richards seems to be in agreement here, do not go that far, yet they insist in viewing the Mughal state as a centralized state possessing a uniform currency, an imperial fiscal system, and centralizing military-cum-administrative institutions, such as the jagir systems. Despite all the controversies that have gone on regarding the nature of the Mughal state, a question that still begs an answer is whether the state alone affected the society, or whether the society too, possessed the means and dynamism to influence, and even encroach upon the preserves of the state.

However, Irfan Habib (1963) in his work on Mughal agrarian history argued that the agrarian system of Mughal India towards the late seventeenth century was characterized by the oppression of the peasantry by the state and that the jagirdars had considerably increased, leading to a decline in agricultural production and a series of zamindari-led peasant revolts that sapped the vitality of the empire and led to its ultimate demise.
Now, let us also consider the most controversial and highly debated segmentary state theory proposed by Burton Stein in his re-examination of medieval south Indian state and society. In a segmentary state formation the king's real authority would extend over the core, while the segmentary and shatter zones being the nadus which constituted the periphery, formed pockets of Power bound to the centre in a tributary relationship. The sovereignty which the core extended over the periphery (or peripheries?) was a ritual one. The early notions of his grand narrative of the south Indian segmentary state are to be found in his article, The Segmentary State in South Indian History (1977). Those ideas and theories consequently crystallized in his, Peasant State and Society (1980), many of which were admittedly based on the sound research of Y. Subbarayalu (Subbarayalu 1973).

However, the seminal theme of the segmentary state of Stein derives from the model posited by Aidan Southall for the tribal society of the Alurs in African Uganda (Southall 1956). Southall's analysis of political authority, stemming from clan chiefs and kinship ties, was picked up by Stein and posited against the holistic model of Chola state in South India. Richard Fox had applied it to the states of Rajputana in his, Kin, clan, Raja and Rule (1971) to come up with the intriguing observation that 'rural India is a picture of a tribal society rearranged to fit a civilization'!

Southall responded to these two scholarly efforts by conceding the application of the segmentary model to the Rajput states but questioned its suitability for the south Indian states. But up to the last Stein proclaimed that the model of segmentary state was seminal to his conceptualizations of south India (Southall 1988: 52-82).

The study of nadus has been fundamental to Stein's theories on the south Indian polity. He defines them as 'locality social, economic and political systems' which pre-dated the Cholas and endured long after their demise. The units were 'self-regulating' though not 'self-sufficient'. The empirical and theoretical focus on the nadus is the major contribution Subbarayalu and Stein have made towards formulating
hypothesis of the Chola state (Stein 1980; Subbarayulu 1973). Stein spoke of 'opposition which is complementary' among parts of the state as a whole as well as within any constituent segment. That is, the political system of the Cholas was described as composed of a multiplicity of political units—each a segment, and within each segment internal divisions (ethnic and functional groups) which are capable of acting together as units. The segments of the structure are integrated on the one hand by royal patronage to the Brahmans and temples, and on the other by ceremonial and ritual acknowledgement of Chola kingship (1980: 22-98). It is not easy to ignore the significance of a centralised 'core region' and the emergence of a 'state society', but understanding the impact of these on the slate itself requires greater scrutiny.

Southall's scepticism about Stein's formulations arose from the superimposition of a model applicable to a tribal set up of clan lineages to a caste-based society. Stein believed that the nodes were held together by 'ethnic coherence' and voiced his conjecture that the functionaries with high titles mentioned in inscriptions implied not 'central bureaucrats' but rather clan or tribal leaders, whose 'rule credentials' indicated status as an ancient one not dependent on the Chola kings. The inherent weaknesses of such a supposition are obvious. There is a wide gap between the ethnic coherence of the Alurs or Shmbalas held closer by the accepted oral tradition of common origin, and proliferating jatis with conflicting origin myths which characterized Indian society, unless one were to argue with Fox that 'what is true of the kin body also applies to the so called caste' (Fox 1971: 63-174).

Also, in a recent study of the Chalukya-Cholas, the Kakatiyas, the Reddis, the Gajapatis and the Ray as in the Eastern Ghats of south India between AD 1000 and 1500 based on extensive use of the Khilat literature, epigraphic references and anthropological parallels, case has been made out for the state being a major variable in the manipulation of physical and social environment with an intensification of forest clearance, founding of new villages and expansion of agrarian order. In this process of integration of the forested zone, with the king's domain, the forest people (hunter-
gatherers like Boya and Chenchu) and pastoralists eg. Gollas became historically important. The state made alliance with the hunter gatherers and pastoralists by allocating services; as a consequence emerged a new pattern of resource exploitation, mobilization and distribution. In this new mechanism of surplus appropriation, mathadhipatis and pitadhripatis became willing collaborators and sustainers of kingly authority. Without being an overt critique of the ‘segmentary state’, this significant micro analysis gives a severe jolt to the notions of the core and the periphery and their linkages with the political and ritual suzerainty respectively, which were hitherto considered to be cornerstones of the concept of the segmentary state (Murty 1993 : 626-27).

Coming now to the subject proper, the shift of focus over to the post-Vijayanagara phase as it is hoped, would help us in more ways than one. Primarily, it makes this possible for us to see through the processes of state formation, deformation and transformation in one such a political continuum from the visible collapse of a major political era signalled in the imperial downfall of the medieval Vijayanagara until the ushering in of yet another, relatively modern state form of colonial dimensions in around AD 1800 in respect of Bellary (See Dirks 1987; Kairnshma 1992; Narayana Rao et al. 1992). Secondly, historiographically too, the period under consideration, and more so in relation to the region under consideration has not received due attention, though it has enough potential to draw serious scholarly enquiry. Especially, the period beginning with Vijayanagara eclipse until the rise of Hyder Ali in Mysore in AD 1761, is considered to be something akin to a blackhole in South Indian history by modern historians. This they ascribe, sadly so, to the paucity of sources. However, there have been a few studies made on the contemporaneous Nayaka period of interior Tamil country, since some of the South Indian scholars are increasingly converging on this period (Menon 1995 : 125-128; also see Price 1983 : 563-590). As against the fairly well researched works of the Nayaka period ‘Tamil country, the post-Vijayanagara problematic of the
upland Rayalaseema plateau is a relatively untouched area. The present attempt, therefore, is hoped to fill in this lacunae to a certain extent, with Bellary as its focus.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the time bracket chosen for the study, AD 1565 - 1800, has rightly been taken to represent a period of transition from late medieval to early modern era. The transition as implied here suggests a whole of set of changes in the historical development of a region from one major epoch to another (See Bayly 1989). It is in this sense, that the interregnum following the imperial collapse of Vijayanagara, until the coming of the British, covering over a span of three centuries has been seen to have witnessed a discernible shift not only in the realm of power, but even in the composite spheres like agrarian political economy and society. And this process has been systemically dealt with, using longitudinal analysis as a general tool for the identification of the underlying factors responsible for change.

What is politically important during the period under consideration was the virtual fragmentation of royal authority with the disintegration of Vijayanagara power. It should be remembered here that the city of Vijayanagara was sacked at the hands of the allied Bahmani forces of Bijapur, Ahmednagar, Golconda and Bidar in the battle of Tali kota (or Rakkasitangadi), in the year AD 1565, during Aliya Rama Raya's reign (1542-1565) (Venkataratnam 1972 : 1-2). It was a catastrophe which changed the entire course of south India history. Hence the period ending with this battle is a convenient point to start this enquiry. This empire, however, lasted for another century under the Aravidu dynasty, the fourth and its last dynasty, but its foundations were deeply shaken, and it could not rise to the former zenith of glory. The Muslim dominion which followed was weak, and the unstable political conditions consequent to the decline of Vijayanagara kingship gave way to the rise of numerous sub-regional strongholds held by those known as poligars, (Telugu - palegadu; Kannada - palegararu, meaning, holder of an estate), each one in his own right, forming a core of patrimonial regimes in the Vijayanagara heartland (Dua 1972 : 467). Such of these poligars mostly comprising the dominant lineages of the turbulent Boya/Bedar stocks and militarist, peasant warrior
groups, to start with, were the holders of army camps and collectors of revenue which they passed on to their overlords under the Vijayanagara kingship. In a way, they should be seen as the supralocal intermediaries between the villages under their control and the state, and acted as "boundary role players" (Cohen 1974: 265). It therefore suggests the shrewd political expediency of the Raya overlords to integrate these ethnics into the state's realm both politically and ritually by virtue of their fighting prowess; and for whom Bellary became a favoured habitat since ages, as the physiography of the region suggests sufficiently.

There are numerous inscriptions to tell us that certain lineages of the forest dwellers especially the Boyas were bureaucratized; each village had a complement of watchmen for the protection of persons and property, and policing the village seems to have been an ancient institution (Mahalingam 1967: 246). These watchmen were remunerated for their services by the assignment of land and the proceeds of a cess called padikaval kali. During the Vijayanagara rule (1660-1700 AD), a person enjoyed padikaval rights over a nadi (a large administrative unit), and he engaged a complement of watchmen called taliyaris, whom he paid in kind or cash, besides granting land free of rent, and held them responsible for the safety and prosperity within their jurisdiction. A work with the title Rajavahanavijaya attributed to Krishnadevaraya, the Vijayanagara king who ruled from 1509-1529 AD describes how the Boyas in his army were marching with bows in their hands and quills on their backs like black tigers. Some lineages of these Boya militia, who had wielded great influence over their tribesmen, and who were highly paid officials (they were given rent free agricultural lands and other kinds of allowances) began to emerge as powerful potentates from 16th century onwards, with the decline of the Vijayanagara power (Murty 1992: 332-334).

Similarly, the village bodies (eg. Sabha, ur, periyanadu etc.) dominated mostly by Sat-Sudra families of peasant warrior groups, wielded considerable power over the villages and attracted the attention of the kings and royal personages. The power of the village bodies virtually became a force to reckon with for the state. To get these village
bodies into the fold of the state, some influential lineages from among them were bureaucratised as revenue and military officials. These were instrumental for the protection/expansion of settlement boundaries, establishment of new agrarian settlement and water resource management. Through patrimonial legacy the peasant warrior families 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 by the kings for which they lent their allegiance. The kings for the maintenance of their settlement frontiers, relied on the holders of the patrimonial rights. But when the royal power weakened, especially, at the time of change of dynastic rule, the dominant lineages of the peasant warrior groups also annexed the prebendal rights to their patrimonial legacies and defied the royal authority (Murty 1993 : 620-24).

Therefore, with the colonization of the forested and pastoral landscapes by the state, the forest peoples (like the Chenchu, Yerukula, in other parts, besides the Boya) and the pastoralists (Golla and Kuruba) became partners in the political, economic and social milieu on the one hand, and in the organisation of the settlement frontiers on the other. This created new relations of power, giving rise to institutions such as poligars and kavaligars as noticed above (Reddy 1986 : 112-114).

Contemporary inscriptions and later accounts collected by the first British administrators in the core of the Vijayanagara kingdom provide valuable evidence on the political authority of these chiefs. The heyday of the chiefs was the 16th century, but most seem to have come into existence during the early 16th century, as a result of Krishnadevaraya's policies for incorporating older chiefly families.

Burton Stein sees the new intermediary ruling strata as emerging from below. The Amuktamalyada (attributed to Krishnadevaraya), a work containing his political maxims also prescribes measures such as recruitment of martial tribes in the army and royal promotion of commerce and control of forts (Stein 1989 : 51-52).
However, as attention has already been drawn, the present study concerns itself with the core Bellary region only for an exclusive case study of some of these political intermediaries who played a predominant role in the arena of power in the upland Rayalseema, more visibly from the later half of the sixteenth century.

The intermediary zone of authority is largely hazy in many medieval states and as such is one of the least understood areas of power. Hence it becomes particularly necessary to assess their role in the authority structure for an explication of the pre-colonial state (Champakalakshmi 1992: 152-153).

Thomas Munro, the famous first Collector of the region regarded these chiefs as the major centres of resistance, and he justified their removal on the grounds of their historical political authority. Munro, in his letter to the Board of Revenue (1802) speaks of their bravery and turbulent nature, especially of the Boya poligars. In Munro’s time, nearly 2,000 villages were held by eighty poligari families of different statuses. The highest and perhaps oldest of such local magnates are found in modern Bellary district. One was the chief of Anegondi across the river Tungabhadra, calling himself Tirumala Raja and claiming descent from a Vijayanagara ruling family. This chief held 114 villages in 1800. Fifty miles southwest of Anegondi and Hampi was the Harapanahalli poligar; this family seems to have been established in the sixteenth century by a Lingayat chief, Doddappa Nayaka, on the modest basis of his watchman’s (taliyari) rights in two villages (Munro Reports 1802: 37).

The number of villages held by each chiefly family in the Vijayanagara times is not always known from the family records said to have been consulted by Munro. Those of the Anegondi and Harapanahalli chiefs are not known, but another, the Jaramali Poligar, held 309 villages then and appears to have supplied a force of 3,000 foot-Soldiers (infantry) and 500 horsemen (cavalry) to the kings. The Rayadurg chief, Venkatapati Nayaka, paid no money to the Vijayanagara kings, but contributed 2,000 infantry. The other prominent poligars include those of Bellary, and (Gudekota in the
kudligi taluk), all invariably belonging to either Boya/Bedar or Kuruba castes in the Bellary region. Evidence of around 1800 suggests that all of the eighty poligars of this Vijayanagara heartland held some villages free of any payment to the Vijayanagara kings and held other villages as tax farmers. In addition, they were obliged to maintain some mounted and some foot soldiers for royal service. Munro estimated that over 1,200 villages were under poligars until 1660 when the former Vijayanagara heartland had come under the control of Bijapur sultans or their commanders such as Shaji, father of Shivaji. Of these villages, 682 were held free of any money demands and 535 were held as tax farmers for which money was paid to the Sultanate officials. The same eighty poligars supplied a total of 29,000 infantry and 1,200 cavalry to Bijapur armies (Munro Reports 1802: 38-44). Moreover, warfare tested and fortified the military capabilities of the numerous military chiefs of the south; wars also spread the poligar institution. Fighters seized or were granted income from villages for maintaining the armed forces used in the wars of greater lords; otherwise, local cultivating and trading groups seeking some protection from the violence of the times paid for the protection of poligars in many places of the far south, as implied by the term padikaval used in Ramnad and Pudukkottai (Stein 1989: 60-61). No chieftains could remain aloof from nearby warfare, which was bound to lead to a reshifting of local power that left the strong stronger and pushed the weaker into greater vulnerability and submission. Scattered contests for local dominance often changed balances between local chiefdoms and the communal bases of their rule on the one hand and between these local lords and the kings of Vijayanagara or their agents on the other. As evident in the Post-Vijayanagara phase of the Bellary region, these various local potentates were very much sought after by the successive Mohammedan rulers also for their fighting prowess (Murty 1992: 352).

So, it is suggested here that this cluster of poligari conglomerates thus evolved were not altogether independent either. They did have to function under a new stream of Bahmani dynasties that followed one after another in quick succession, by only contributing a regular tribute or military support, after the fall of Vijayanagara. For a short interval, Bellary witnessed the rule by the Marathas as well as the Mughal emperor
Aurangazeb. We also notice here that towards the fag-end of the period (excepting Sandur which witnessed the Maratha rule administered by the Ghorpade clan of the Bhonsles of Satara from the beginnings of eighteenth century onwards), this region seems to have come under the hold of Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan, the warlords, with their base in the Mysore region. And it was from whom the Nizam of Hyderabad regained the lost territories by the treaties of Srirangapatnam in AD 1792 and Mysore in AD 1799, respectively. Though became a part of the Nizam's Dominions, interestingly, these vast tracts comprising the districts of Bellary, Kurnool, Anantapur and Cuddapah, as mentioned before, were again ceded over to the East India Company as a result of an alliance entered into with the British in AD 1800, with Thomas Munro as the first Principal Collector (Regani 1963: 184).

These districts together with Bellary thus came to be known as the Ceded Districts of the erstwhile Madras Presidency. After inclusion of the region into the modern colonial system, the British had to wage prolonged wars to subdue the poligars who became a formidable force.

An important aspect of the economic organisation in the form of property organisation in the form of property held by various people, the most prominent of which being the inams. Munro reports a large number of land holdings under the category of inams. These were also agrahara, devadana and brahmadeya grants. Gradually, inams granted as service tenures were substantially increased and converted into private and hereditary possessions by the poligars. Even, the poligars appear to have grabbed the fertile lands under their jurisdiction, most often by use of brute force, and declared them as poligar manyas. Another interesting feature of the post-Vijayanagara power structure which should need a special mention here is that almost parallel to the dominant poligari system, the incumbent Muslim rulers initiated their own revenue systems in the form of amildari or jagirdari systems in certain pockets of Rayalseema. These later revenue systems which functioned in close alliance with the help of the deputies drawn from those having a close nexus or extraneous connections' with the new ruling strata seem to
have enjoyed greater autonomy in terms of lax farming and overall jurisdiction, in most cases. It was unlike their poligari counterparts who had derived their leanings from (the earlier Vijayanagara ruling system (Reddy 1986: 105-106, 115-116).

And for such an exercise to come to fruition, even though the permissible scope of the thesis ends by the close of eighteenth century when traditional processes of power had been confronted by inroads of colonialism in the Bellary region, its purview extends a little further into the early decades of nineteenth century, in order to locate the subtle changes and continuities occurring in one such a political continuum as described above, especially in matters pertaining to the responses of local structures to the British administrative policies.

Finally, what comes in here for one’s immediate attention from an altogether different perspective, and which is also stimulating to note was the reassertion of self in the Sudra consciousness evidenced in this period. And it is in a way similar to what some analysts tend to say: the reawakening of subaltern consciousness, as part of a larger discourse (for a cross-cultural study see O’Hanlon 1988: 1-33). This reassertion or reawakening here is not only seen through Sudra participation in the power structure of the region as local potentates, but also by following an alternative belief system like Virasaivism, and at times even by acculturing certain symbols of substance usually associated with ritual superiority. To cite an instance of this, the best possible means by which the poligars could express their status in the higher echelons of society was by conveniently Haunting a proud nayaka suffix, in each case, regardless of their social origins ridden either in hunter-gather or pastoral-agriculturalist backgrounds. To further suggest these dynamics of mobility and social change epitomized in these upwardly mobile poligars, certain lineages of peasant warrior families legitimised their ancestry by tracing their descent to either Lunar (Chandravamsa) or Solar (Suryavamsa) dynasties, as innumerable accounts in the local kyfials bear testimony to (this phenomenon.
Moreover, when these less privileged social groups tried to crowd themselves into the limited space offered by ritual privileges, the resultant pulls and pressures were reflected in the contemporary late medieval society. This situation of social flux continued into the seventeenth century by which time Vijayanagara had ceased to be an imperial power and the last king of Vijayanagara, Sriranga III AD (1642-49), held no greater title than that of the king of Vellore (Ramaswamy 1985: 417).

It is then implied here that while trying to analyse the whole process in a transitory phase, the thesis tends to examine also the subaltern perspective, in an attempt to bring into mainstream the historical relevance of the marginalised categories in the power structure of the Bellary region. As a part of this effort, in many cases, the ethno-historic accounts of the lineages of the erstwhile poligari families who prominently figure in this study have been consulted. The vast corpus of Kyfiat literature, collected and documented by Colin Mackenzie (Mackenzie manuscripts,) is one of the crucial sources of information for this investigation. During the period under discussion, there are eighty poligars in this region belonging to either Boya/Bedar or Kuruba communities; the most prominent of the Bedar poligars are those of Harpanahalli, and likewise those of the Kurubas are the Bellary Poligars. I have examined and quoted the documented sources of those poligars, especially by Thomas Munro and Colin Mackenzie.


The following discussion therefore centres around these dynamics of social mobility, conflict and change in the post Vijayanagara society by analysing the functions and role perceptions of the leading poligari families who held sway over the region until the British subdued them.