

COMMERCIAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE VEREENGIDE OOSTINDICHE COMPAGNIE AND THE KONKANIS OF COCHIN: AN ANALYSIS

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Received: 14 Mar 2019

Accepted: 22 Mar 2019

Published: 31 Mar 2019

ABSTRACT

The present paper is an endeavor to trace the commercial interactions of Dutch Company, with the prominent trading community of Cochin named Konkans. Konkans were the immigrant trading community, from the central part of India to the south during the time of colonial invasion. This particular community played a very significant role in commercial activities of Cochin from the Portuguese period onwards. Even though there are commercial interactions with the Portuguese, the Dutch period was considered as the important era for the accomplishment of Konkani commerce. The Dutch policies towards this community were progressive for the betterment of commercial happenings. Hence this paper is an attempt to trace, a brief sketch on such occurrences.

KEYWORDS: Vereengide Oostindiche, Konkans, Cochin

INTRODUCTION

Dutch established commercial acquaintances with Kerala by stimulating the Portuguese trade monopoly. The Dutch supremacy in the commercial activities of Malabar trade dates only from the capture of Cochin and Cannanore from the Portuguese in 1663¹. Dutchmen first came to India in the service to the Portuguese, and then the VOCⁱⁱ used their knowledge against the later. The Dutch activities on Malabar Coast can be analyzed with the help of Archival sources and also from the Dutch administrative reports.

It was one of the beneficial rules of the Dutch Company that, every chief of a settlement should ordinarily, before retiring from his appointment should prepare a memorandum on the administration for the guidance of his successor. Indications from these sources are also great useful for understanding the Dutch period in Kerala. Merchants played a very crucial role for the smooth running of the commercial activities of the company. Through this paper an attempt is made to study about the commercial interactions between the Dutch Company with the prominent trade groups of Cochin, The Konkans.

The most important event connected with the establishment of Dutch power in Kerala was the Capture of Cochin in 1663. A treaty was signed between the Dutch and the Ruler of Cochin dated 20th March 1663 A.D. (12th Meenom322Puthuvaippu era). Those who go through the history of Cochin and that of the Konkans generally a question will arise that, why the Dutch gave protection to this community? Or what was the prime motive behind it, it is not because of any sympathy to this community but at the same time the Dutch people realized the importance of the Konkans as traders in Cochin the Dutch feared, their displeasure. They feared, the displeasure would affect the Dutch

commerce. For this reason, this interest was jealousy watched and safeguard by the Dutch, who exercised civic and criminal jurisdiction over Konkani subjects of the Raja. Unable to resist the Dutch, the Raja had to be satisfied with the Konkanis as they were nominally under him.

During the Dutch times the articles of trade were divided into two categories. Company's products and the articles gave them low returnⁱⁱⁱ and the VOC expecting their contractual relations with the pepper producing States of Malabar and their superior navel might obtain for them the monopoly of Malabar pepper that had been denied to the Portuguese; they neglected commercial means to ensure control of the market. Instead they fixed the Prices of South Malabar pepper at 12 Rix Dollars^{iv}. In the VOC Commerce, rulers were parties to contract and the Company sent two representatives from the Malabar Council to renew the contract annually. They made agreement with the merchants in the presence of the Rulers^v.

The Dutch had settled at the trade of Cochin with the help of Konkani community. They had ceded them the authority to collect income from Chertalai. In connection with the Treaty made with the Dutch and the Raja of Cochin on the 22nd March 1663, a mention is made of Konkanis. It states that, the representatives of Konkani Mahajanum requested the ancestors of the Raja of Cochin to take Konkanis under their Protection and also build for them a temple. Thereupon, a plot of land was given to them for latter purpose and also arrangements made for the conduct of the festivals in the temple built by them, the raja now binds him to protect those subjects as in old times. As in times of his misfortunes these subjects amply helped him with money, he promises further that the matter of protection and punishment the Konkanis shall be treated just in the same manner as the other Brahmins.

Konkanis were acted as agents of the Dutch company for the supply of pepper and other products. Name of a Konkani Merchant was mentioned Derwa Naik of Cochin, also in an *Ola* given by the Raja of Cochin to the Dutch commander on May 18th 1666, there was reference to one Wittical Naik who controlling the daily expense of the Raja of Cochin on behalf of the Dutch. The vessel from Dutch and Porbender employed the Konkani Merchant Naga Prabhu as their agents at Cochin

The "Memories of *Van Rhee*^{vi}" contain a series of letters written during the terms of his successor Jacob Lobos by two rival groups of Saraswath merchants to the Governor General of Batavia in 1678. It would appear that *Perumbalawa* was deprived of his office as the company's Merchant by *Van Rhee* in 1674 and forbidden to stay at Cochin; and that company's contracts for Pepper, Cinnamon, Cloves, etc. were given from 1674 to 1678 to a rival group of Merchants^{vii}. When Raja Rama Varma became the king of Cochin, he tried several measures to impose new taxes upon the merchants. This attempt from the ruler had been foiled by the Dutch^{viii}. This was not a favorable attempt for the Dutch. Finally the Dutch failed for achieving dominance over this situation.

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