

ORISSA HISTORY CONGRESS

**PROCEEDING OF THE
XVI ANNUAL SESSION**

**Venue : BERHAMPUR UNIVERSITY, BHANJA VIHAR
18th—19th SEPTEMBER, 1990**

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GANJAM IN THE MARITIME TRADE OF COROMANDEL 1690-1750

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The term coromandel generally denotes to the coastal region of eastern India which starts from the coastal belt of Tamilnadu as far as Ganjam in the north. The term is an European corruption of *Cholamandalm* which was originally terminated at the point of Godavari. But for the Europeans the region also covers a part of the Golconda occupied Orissa region upto Ganjam. Hence Ganjam, which is situated on latitude 19° 22' N and longitude 83° 3' E at the mouth of Rushikulya, resembled much more with Coromandel in topography and climate than portion of Orissa adjoining to Bengal. The region's political and economic contact with Coromandel and Golconda was presumably strengthened since its political annexation with the latter empire in the sixteenth century.

The region derived its economic strength from the strong hinterland of the Rushikulya valley. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the European traveller Alexander Hamilton observes about the place 'fruitful in Rice and sugar-cane'. About 1744 sugar he mentions that they were 'pretty good sugars both white and brown'. The other notable manufactures were beeswax and iron which were also 'pretty good'.¹ The region was also rich in forest resources like sticklac and timber. About its timber Hamilton mentions that they were meant for building purposes and the strongest he had ever seen 'the not lasting'.² But it was rice and cotton cloth for which the place was most well-known. The inland countries manufactured several sorts of cotton cloths of both fine and coarse varieties which as Hamilton observes were 'fit for exportation'.³ The region produced all varieties of Coromandel cloth, the celebrated of them being *ampore* and *long cloth*. *Long cloth* was a coarser variety, which the Dutch called *Guinea* or *negrocloth*. These were in the seventeenth century exported to west Africa.⁴

¹ S. heednagar, Bhubaneswar.

The place was ideally suited for a harbour in the period under review. Hamilton in 1708, of course observes that the river was 'not navigable, nor the Bar passable for ships, till the Month of September, that the Freshes from the mountains open it and then there is three Fathoms on it, but it shuts again about the beginning of November and in the other months, there are not above 7 or 8 foot at High-water.⁵ However, the surf was heavy and large vessels anchored on the roadstead where they were reached by many local boats that operated from the river.⁶

The merchants of this place, as we are informed in the English Factory Records were mainly Telugu and Muslim origin. The record of 1717 mentions the name of a prominent Telugu merchant Paramatadu whose ships regularly plied between Madras and Ganjam. But for the proper management of his business, he for the last forty years had settled in Madras. At home, the business managed by Paramatadu's father Jampariyar.⁷ Thus, the family business was managed by both father and son in two different places. The fact that the local merchants were either Telugu or Muslim is suggested by the availability of typical name of the ships plied between Ganjam and Madras. Some of the typical Telugu names were *Venkata Swaran*, *Ranganaikala Jagarnaikalu* and *Ranga Naidu* etc. But sometime the ships were also named in the name of typical Hindu God or Goddesses like *Narasingha*, *Bhavani Shankar*, *Gopal Swami*, *Gruha Laxmi*, *Sambhu Shiva* and *Anna Purna* etc. In such cases the owner may be either a Telugu or Oriya. Some of the typical Muslim name of the ships were *Mohammodi*, *Murad Bux*, *Ali Mohammodi*, *Madina Bux* and *Allah-i-Aug*, etc. Though both Telugu and Muslim merchants were quite prominent, the former had an edge over the latter.⁸

The port came to the limelight of Coromandel trade in the beginning of the eighteenth century, as we are informed in the English Factory Records. However, this does not mean that the port did not exist before. A recent historian rightly says Ganjam is better known in the records of the eighteenth century than of the seventeenth 'may be because of increasing European interest in it.'⁹ In the seventeenth century this port and her two neighbours Bimlipatnam and Vizagapatanam were granary of Coromandel. The places to which they exported rice, would depend on the supply situation there. If there was any shortage in central or southern Coromandel, a deficit pocket in foodgrains, then almost all

the shipments from the above mentioned ports would be directed to ports like Palicat, Madras, Sadrasapatnam and Porto Novo. But if there was no shortage there then their rice was exported to Achin, Malacca, Ceylon, Maldives and even to west Asia.¹⁰ But by the close of this century Ganjam was emerging in the leading role of exporter of rice to Madras and other regions of the Coromandel coast. By this time Southern Coromandel's dependency upon Orissa coast for foodgrains had increased to a considerable extent mainly because of the rising population of the port settlements along the coast and a greater incidence of failure of harvests caused by nature and political factors.¹¹ Previously the bulk of the rice was also exported from Bimlipatnam, followed by other neighbours Vizagapatnam, Manikpatnam and Kalingapatnam. But by the close of this century these ports themselves were not capable of meeting the entire need of the Coromandel coast. By this time the demand for rice was particularly very high in Madras which according to Hamilton was 'Well peopled for there is computed to be 80,000 Inhabitants in Towns and Villages'.¹² Thus in a situation when the 'South became an area deficit in foodgrains, Ganjam became the starting point of a provisions lifeline to these places.'¹³ In the words of Hamilton 'Their (Madras) Rice is brought by sea, from Ganjam and Orissa their wheat from Surat and Bengal ...'¹⁴

There was also another important reason which led to the growth of Ganjam in this time. This was the decline of Coromandel's premium port Masulipatnam by the end of the seventeenth century. From the nineties of the seventeenth century, trade in this port showed signs of decline due to a number of factors such as disruption of hinterland with Hyderabad and Krishna-Godavari delta, continuous famines, rising prices of textiles, rise of taxation and indebtedness of the company's servants to the merchants.¹⁵ All these led to gradual abandonment of this port and both the Telugu and the Muslim merchants were compelled to migrate to the ports like Madras and San Thome in Southern Coromandel and Ganjam, Vizagapatnam and Bimlipatnam the Orissa coast. This coast was now recognised as an important textile exporting centre for the English and Vizagapatnam was now raised to the status of a divisional headquarters for the English in Northern Coromandel to which Ganjam was an important feeder. The earliest English contact with Ganjam which we have in record was 1688, when they made perhaps their first attempt to procure rice there.¹⁶ Thus, it was the activities of both

European and native merchants which led to the growth of Ganjam by the end of the seventeenth century.

II

We have already observed that by the close of the seventeenth century, the port became a very important supplier of rice to Madras. The traffic between these two ports was participated by both the native and the private English traders, but the former considerably outnumbered the latter. Now we will discuss the intensity of this traffic and its long-term trend.

Though the Commercial contact between these two ports had started at the close of the seventeenth century, the traffic until the second decade of the eighteenth century was not so brisk. For example between 1698 and 1709, twelve ships of native merchants are recorded to have arrived at Madras from Ganjam and five ships have left for that place.¹⁷ But the figure suddenly jumped thereafter. Between 1710-14 it was twenty and eighteen respectively.¹⁸ Between 1715-19, the figure was slightly fewer between eleven and seven.¹⁹ But between 1720-24 it again jumped to sixteen and eleven respectively.²⁰ However, from 1725 onwards the trade from Ganjam shows an abrupt decline. Between 1725-29 only five ships in the name of native merchants are recorded to have arrived at Madras from Ganjam and two have left for that place.²¹ Thereafter, the trade in this route was almost dried up. For example between 1730-34 not a single ship is recorded to have arrived at Madras from Ganjam and only one ship in 1732 has left for Ganjam.²² Similarly between 1735-39, only one ship in 1736 is recorded to have arrived and two ships in 1739 have departed for Ganjam.²³ The figure draws a blank in both the ways between 1740-44 and between 1745-49, barring 1746. In this year only one ship has arrived from Ganjam and three left for that place.²⁴ The data from then onwards, of course are not available. But considering these figures our conclusion should be that Ganjam which in the beginning of the eighteenth century emerged as the leading supplier of rice to Madras, suddenly declined in importance from the early 30s of this century.

What is the reason of such abrupt end of traffic between these two ports ? Unfortunately our evidences are completely

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silent about it. But the only possible conclusion which may be drawn in this regard is that, Madras now came to depend on some other ports for her rice. This view can be supported in the light of some other existing data available to us. For example, in 1729, five ships came from Kalingapatnam and left for that place. Similarly one come from Bimlipatnam and three left for that place. These two ports were the neighbours of Ganjam. But in this year only two ships arrived from Ganjam and no ship is recorded to have sailed for that place.²⁵ Until now, we scarcely find any reference to these two ports in the English Diary and consultation Books. Only occasional ships in some years sailed to and fro. In 1730, two ships came from Kalingapatnam,²⁶ but after that we do not find any regular shipping from this port any more. Thus, shipping between Madras and other ports of Orissa coast almost came to an end from this period with the solitary exception of Vizagapatnam. In 1732, four ships each arrived and departed for Vizagapatnam and in 1740 four ships sailed for that port as against the arrival of two.²⁷ It is to be mentioned here that though the rice trade between Vizagabatnam and Madras was regular throughout our period, it was not so brisk like that of Ganjam in the second and third decades of the eighteen Century. However, this relation ship was strengthened a bit from the thirties of the eighteenth century. In this decade at least two or three ships sailed to and fro each year.

Now the question crops us, if Madras reduced its rice import from Ganjam who met her need? The infrequent shipping in the third decade of the eighteenth century between Madras and other ports of the neighbour of Ganjam could not have met the deficit of Madras. Our evidence suggests that Madras for sometimes depended upon Balasore for the rice. For example, before 1730, the traffic between these two ports was not frequent. In every four years, not more than two, three or four ships plied between this traffic.²⁸ But in 1730-34, six ships arrived at Madras from Balasore and eight ships left for that place,²⁹ an indication of correspondence between the descendance and ascendance of Ganjam and Balasore respectively. But afeter 1735 we also find a considerable decline of shipping between Madras and Balasore, Madras now came to depend on Bengal more for her rice. By this time Calautta appeared to be the most important port in entire Bay of Bengal where freighting of goods in privately owned English ships by the

native merchants became very popular. Now a large volume of trade passed between Calcutta and Madras in which the latter imported considerable quantities of Bengal rice. In 1737, 3500 tons of Bengal rice and other foodstuffs, were thought to have been transported by sea.³⁰ Thus from the fourth decade of the eighteenth century Calcutta appears to have captured almost entire rice market of Ganjam in Madras.

To sum up, Ganjam never rose to the same prominence as that of Balasore in the seventeenth century. Its trade in its flourishing period can be said to a foot-note of the trade in the Indian ocean.

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