



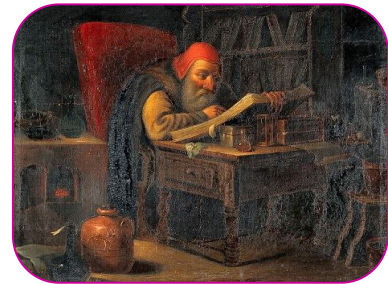
THE INTERPRETATION OF POLITY OF THE NATIVE RULERS OF SOUTH CANARA IN THE EUROPEAN WRITINGS.

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ABSTRACT

This article tries to show that the European Writing about the East represents similarities, and at the same time, differences and contradictions as Kate Teltscher argued in her path breaking work 'India Inscribed'. On the basis of this understanding, travelogue of Della Valle and the British writings are analyzed. Period of the composition of these accounts, the interest, purpose and the position of authors in the East and the European knowledge and experiences play an important role in their writings. The depiction of the East in these writings was not only a story of similarities but also differences. The depiction of the native King is different from the concept of 'Oriental Despotism' in the European writings, particularly prior to the second half of the eighteenth century. In the European writings the native polity generally considered as the 'Oriental Despotism'. Those who equate the 'Oriental Despotism' with the East, identify several specific features along with it. One such feature recurring in the European writings was that the king of the East was considered as the owner of the land. Contrary to this the colonial writings of South Canara in the early decades of the nineteenth century consider that the land was owned by the cultivators of the region. In this article, the native polity of Vijayabagara and Keladi period is briefly narrated in the European writings in comparison and contrast with Europe. The rule of Mysore Sultans are analyzed.



KEY WORDS: Polity, Rulers, Tolerant, Oriental, Despotism, South Canara

INTRODUCTION

This article makes a distinction between the mercantile phase and the imperial phase of colonialism while analysing the representation of South Canara in the European writings. In the mercantile phase, the travelogues as the popular form of European writings offer a vivid portrayal of the native rulers. During this period the European writings offer similar, diverse and even contradictory images of the region. The limited geographical knowledge and the political fragmentation of India make it difficult for the travellers to arrive at a unified image of India. In the imperial phase, though different representations of the region existed, yet in a systematic way knowledge was used for the justification and continuation of the colonial rule and in the process the native rulers and their administration was presented in contrast to that of Europe. It was during the

imperial phase that the features related to India were generalized, which paved way for the stereotypes. These stereotypes projected the colonial authority as necessary for the well-being of the colony.

The Polity of Vijayanagara, Keladi and Rajas of South Canara

As a curious traveller Della Valle was attracted by the liberal policy of the native Rajas. He states that, people belonging to whatever country or religion, official or non-official may live in luxury and comfort with all the liberty similar to the king. He compares the native Gentoo rajas with the kings of Muslim countries and states that the native rajas do not confiscate the wealth when the people live splendidly by exhibiting their riches.ⁱ The liberal policy of the native kings was even noted by the colonial officials. Thackeray observes that the princes of Vijayanagara, Keladi and even Mysore never seem to have questioned the general rights of the people barring an arbitrary assessment and individual acts of oppression.ⁱⁱ

The European travellers and later colonial officials have narrated about the administration of the local rulers of South Canara. Della Valle provides brief references about the administration of the Chauta ruler of Ullala. He mentions that the Campana Reale (a Royal Lodge) was the palace of Manel which was placed in the midst of the field.ⁱⁱⁱ (see Peter Wilson) Della Valle also reports that Abbakka queen of Ullala performs her judicial functions at night by giving audience to the subjects.^{iv} The criticism on Della Valle's liberal spending by Abbakka suggests about the financial difficulties faced by her.^v Later the colonial officials specially inform about those local rulers who revolted against the company authority. For Munro the local rulers were not the rajas but chiefs or amildars, one who have the power only to collect the revenue of the region. Contrary to this some of the colonial officials inform us about the existence of the Peshwa and Shanbogue in the court of Vittala Hegade.

The colonial officials accumulate wider information about the native polity for administrative necessity. In general, they though differentiate the polity of the 'East' and the 'West', there were inner contradictions and differences among themselves while depicting the native polity. For example, the observations of Wilks about native institutions, where in one occasion he considers that the best institutions of Hindus were destroyed by the Muslim invaders and replaced by their own institutions.^{vi} On another occasion, Wilks as the precursor Marxist historians critique of the concept of a golden age in Indian history, states that in India the golden age exclusively belongs to the Poet. He further opines that 'in the sober investigation of facts, this imaginary area recedes still farther and farther at every stage of the enquire; and all that we find is still the empty praise of the ages which have passed'.^{vii} Thus the context and necessity decide for the European writers how to present native polity in their writings.

Wilks identifies the distinction between 'eastern' and 'western' polity. For him, the eastern polity represents, 'despotism', 'divine code' while western polity was 'regular government', 'ideas of change and profanation', 'improvement' and 'learn the lessons which are taught by the experiences of ages'.^{viii} The concept of civil liberty, according to Wilks never existed in the eastern polity and he even argues that it has not even entered the languages of Asia. According to him, the immemorial despotism of the East is a fact so familiar to every reader. (in the west).^{ix} The administration of the Hindus according to Wilks was intermixed with theology. He further considers that, the political, civil, criminal code, affairs of government of judicature and of the police, down to the most minute forms of social and domestic intercourse are all identified with religious observances and it was held sacred and unchangeable.^x Wilks opines that only the monarchical government was known to Indians and considers that the concept of divine right theory originally belongs to the Hindus.^{xi} For Buchanan, terror is the leading principle of every Indian Government

and abject devotion to spiritual masters, and an obstinate adherence to custom, chiefly in matters of ceremony and caste were the principles followed by the people. He also recognizes the absence of loyalty and patriotism among the natives.^{xii} Munro notes that the native government was despotic and irregular and acted as a catalyst to other aspects of the administration.

The Administration of Mysore Sultans

The British writings generally terms the rule of Mysore Sultans as autocratic yet, some of them differentiates between Hyder and Tipu's rule. Buchanan praises Hyder and one occasion even states that Tipu was also loved by his subjects. He had good intentions and wanted his government to become model to others, yet on the basis of the construction of Tipu's palace he considered his mind was torn with apprehension.^{xiii} Even in the core region of the Mysore Sultans Buchanan identifies the difference between the policy of Hyder and Tipu. According to him, at Melkote, Hyder allowed the Brahmans to enjoy their entire revenue for themselves, but Tipu continuously reduced their land which was the source of their revenue and finally he entirely took away their land and gave them only an annual pension of thousand pagodas.^{xiv} Buchanan refers to Hyder's liberal policy of establishing the untouchables and slaves as farmers and insisted that they should be recognized as cultivators.^{xv}

Munro opines, the court of Tipu was 'imitating, or rather mimicking' though inadequately, the heard pomp and magnificence of foreign courts. He further states that Tipu's civil and military administration was divided into seven principal departments which had dignified Persian or Turkish titles and its chiefs mainly were the Muslims. These chiefs of the department were in reality vagabonds, and acted like statesmen without any knowledge, the real administrative business was conducted by the Brahmins.^{xvi} On the other hand, he also states that, the government of Mysore was the most simple and despotic monarchy in the world, in which every department, civil and military, possesses the regularity and system, communicated to the ruler and justice impartially administered, middlemen suppressed, merit get prominence for the appointment for the service. He further notes that the organized, well trained and disciplined army appointed on the basis of ability gives the government vigour hitherto unexampled in India.^{xvii}

The English East India Company rule itself was known as 'document raj', yet Munro draws the portrayal of vainness Tipu's day to day administration through writing. According to him, 'Tipu dictated all orders himself, and even the very words of them; and was so particular in this, that he often made his moonshees write over a letter two or three times. In letters, and regulations, and writing of every kind, he spent a great deal too much of his time; but he took little pains to see them executed, and left all investigations of revenue matters entirely to Meer Sadek'.^{xviii} Munro notes that Tipu issued codes of regulations to his civil and military officers in relations with revenue and army administration. He also notes that the issuing of regulations increased much more after the defeat of 1792 and which includes the orders principal officers and subordinate employees of the state. The subordinate officers were in charge of his gardens, of his buildings, of feeding his bullocks and his elephants and the order also contains the curses on the Europeans in general and English in particular.^{xix} Munro opines that the well-regulated, vigorous Government of Hyder has, under his son, become more systematic and more strong; the European discipline has been more rigidly enforced, and all kinds of firearms, which were formerly imported by strangers, are now made by his own subjects under the direction of foreign workmen.^{xx} Munro also notes that various regulations and institutions, infused so much of the spirit of vigilance, order and obedience, into every class of men.^{xxi}

Munro feels that the administration of Mysore Sultans motivated to draw funds from South Canara as much as possible for his military operations elsewhere. He further argues that the whole

course of his deputies seems to have been nothing but a series of experiments, made for the purpose of discovering the utmost extent to which the land – rent could be carried, or how much it was possible to extort from the former, without diminishing cultivation.^{xxii} Tipu's excesses in relation to revenue collection is narrated by all the Company officials without a difference. Buchanan was so critical on Tipu's financial policy and considers that he had always more projects in his hand in comparison with his financial position so he never finished any work.^{xxiii} He further states that, Tipu has collected much higher revenue from Canara since 1792 to pay the stipulated money to the company.^{xxiv} The recent historians of South Canara critically evaluate and consider that the beginning of Mysore Sultan's rule in the district causes for loss of its individuality' and its rule viewed as 'internal colonization'^{xxv} Among the European writings Buchanan, Wilks did not make any difference in the rule of the Sultans over core and periphery regions of their empire. On the other hand Munro as a successor of Tipu gives a description of the repressive policy of the Mysore Sultans over South Canara. According to him the native employees of the region were excluded and the new employees from Mysore were brought for revenue administration.^{xxvi} Munro also states that South Canara was used as the continuous extracting fund for the Mysore Sultans for their expansion of the empire. The Mysore sultans ordered an investigation in Canara for the exaction of highest revenue from every source which includes cultivated and uncultivated lands.^{xxvii} The reports of the collector informs that Tipu confiscated the Brahmadeya and DevadanaInam lands from Brahmans and Temples. Later these Inam lands were granted those for who pay rent to the government.^{xxviii}

While analysing the policy of Mysore Sultans, the historians of South Canara state that their economic policy was different in Mysore in comparison to South Canara. But, when we look at the British accounts on their policy of South Canara it reports that they tried to squeeze wealth from the people in every form at the same time they gave importance to the development of the region. Munro notes that, to match the company's control over eastern coastline Tipu followed the policy of expansion in the western coastline in which the port of Mangalore in South Canara would equal or excel that of Madras.^{xxix} French writer Michaud also notes that Tipu re-established the rich manufacturers of Canara and favoured arts and new discoveries.^{xxx} The idea of establishing pearl fishery in South Canara also was there in the mind of Tipu Sultan.^{xxxi} Stein also opines that trade with Madras, or 'Chennapatam', was prohibited, and encouragement given to trade between the towns of Mysore and the ports of Malabar and Canara.^{xxxii} In comparison with other native states the area of government's activity under Tipu was much wider than that of many other Indian states. To increase his source of wealth he undertook the role of a trader, manufacturer, banker and money changer.^{xxxiii}

Thus the depiction of the native administration in the European writings is not uniform. Della Valle though criticize the appearances of the native kings, but he praises their judicious administration. The later colonial writings depict the native kings rule depend upon the contexts. The collect large information about native polity for their revenue administration. Wilks completely differentiates the administration of the 'East' and the 'West'. Buchanan within the East or Mysore differentiates the administration of Hyder and Tipu. Munro and other colonial writers though critical about Tipu's policy on South Canara, yet they also identify the positive features

END NOTES

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