

# Port of Call: Revisiting Machilipatnam of 18<sup>th</sup> Century A.D

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## ABSTRACT

The economic history of India in late medieval period and early modern era has been a matter of great interest for many researchers. This is so because there are many cross currents of change in various realms such as polity, society and economy with deep implications for the course of social, economic and political formations. The East Coast, popularly known as the Coromandel coast was a major area that impacted the history of Andhra Pradesh. The economic history of the east coast was marked by the prosperity generated by the flourishing trade and commerce both inter-regional as well as overseas. However, the changed political scenario and the contestation of power between various political entities including the Mughals, regional states and European trading companies and their impact on the social and economic fabric of the country led to a range of interpretations on the fate of economic activity on the east coast in general and Andhra Coast in particular. The present paper, 'Port of Call: Revisiting Machilipatnam of 18<sup>th</sup> Century A.D' takes a fresh look at the state of the economic activity of the port in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries posing questions such as (i) what was the centrality of Machilipatnam Port in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century? (ii) Had it lost its glory in the 18<sup>th</sup> century or it continued to attract activity? (iii) What was the nature of Andhra – Telangana economic intercourse in 18<sup>th</sup> Century? (iv) Can we say that there was total decline in the economic centrality of Machilipatnam port? The answers are attempted based on analysis of existing scholarship as well as examining new sources.

**Key Words:** Andhra, Economic, Machilipatnam, Mughals, Port, Trade

## 1. Introduction:

Many academics are interested in the economic history of India throughout the late medieval and early modern periods. This is due to the fact that there are numerous crosscurrents of change in multiple domains such as politics, society, and economics that have profound consequences for the development of social, economic, and political formations. The East Coast, often known as the Coromandel coast, was a significant area in Andhra Pradesh's history. The economic history of the east coast was characterized by the wealth that was produced by the booming trade and commerce both within the region and beyond it. The economic history of the east coast was characterized by this period of prosperity. However, the changed political scenario, the contestation of power between various political entities including the Mughals, regional states, and European trading companies, and their impact on the social and economic fabric of the country led to a variety of interpretations on the fate of economic activity on the east coast in general and on the Andhra Coast in particular.

This arose as a result of the fact that the Mughals, regional rulers, and European commerce enterprises were all political entities. The Present paper titled "Port of Call: Revisiting Machilipatnam of 18<sup>th</sup> Century A.D." takes a new look at the situation of the economic activity of the port in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries, asking issues such as (i) what was the importance of Machilipatnam Port in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century? (ii) Had it lost its luster in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or did it continue to draw activity during that time period? (iii) What was the nature of economic interaction between Andhra and Telangana throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century? (iv) Is it accurate to claim that Machilipatnam port's role as an economic hub has become much less important? The answers are based on an examination of previously published scholarly work, in addition to the investigation of recently published sources.

## 2. Review of Literature:

The economic history of the east coast has been attracting a lot of attention from scholars from time to time. A path-breaking work on the topic is by S. Arsatnam who explores role and



activities of South Indian Merchants during 16<sup>th</sup> and 17 Centuries A.D. Comparable works on the topics in other regions have been conducted by S. Chaudhuri on Bengal, S Bhattacharya who dwells on the textile trade of the Dutch East India company on the Coromandel Coast in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and KS Mathew who mainly dwells on the maritime trade on the Malabar Coast and the Portuguese. While these works make passing remarks to Machilipatnam port, the present paper attempts at providing a micro picture with the help of new sources such as contemporary Telugu Literature, among other sources.

### 3. Discussion

For instance, the commercial networks that connected the Telangana hinterland to Masulipatnam remained intact, albeit periodically disrupted by banditry and Maratha incursions. While the brief breakdown of order was undeniable, traders in the Masulipatnam district were so established that they adopted their own precautions. Mughal authorities in the Deccan participated in commercial activities with Arabia and the Gulf of Persia in the early eighteenth century, and their ships sailed from St. thome and Porto Nova, which were also connected with Masulipatnam.

There is evidence of coastal shipping from Masulipatnam to Surat as well. A ship named Fate Murad had left for Ceylon, which was under the Dutch with 14 Muslim merchants on board with a cargo valued at Rs. 25, 000. Masulipatnam in this period appears to have been a busy centre of coastal trade without much variation from its nature in the previous century.. Pathan merchants still controlled the Bengal trade from Masulipatnam, and a Pathan Mughal deputy governor of Hyderabad, Daud Khan Pani, showed a significant interest in international commerce. These Pathans to Bengal from Masulipatnam every annum largely filled with the renowned textiles and coming back despatched approximately ten to twelve ships with Bengal items such as rice, raw silk, silk cloths and Muslin gunpowder and saltpetre. The city of Masulipatnam, which is located in the south, has always maintained its trade relations with Madras and Pondicherry. By the year 1736, Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah had brought in a total of nine distinct types of cannons. In the year 1729, a total of two French

ships arrived in Masulipatnam. However, by the year 1740, the number of French ships that stopped there had climbed to eighteen. Masulipatnam continued to be the key hub of Hyderabad's economic activities along the east coast as late as the 1750s. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the city of Masulipatnam was situated between the French and the English and had experienced the political unpredictability brought on by the Carnatic Wars. The French had occupied the port town in 1758. The official grant, however, by Muzaffar Jung came in 1751 and the sarkar of Masulipatnam was given to the French along with Yanam, Karikal and some regions in Pondicherry. (1)

The range of products and exports over which the French had acquired control for about a decade even in a period had acquired for about a decade even in a period of so called political disorder will substantially disqualify any negation of trade and commerce in the region. Salampores, kalamkaris, equality muslins, betilles, percales and other type of cotton textile were continued to be exported from Masulipatnam to different destinations by the French.(2) The contemporary Telugu literature too refers to proactive economic activity in Masulipatnam region. (3) The diversification of production can also be gleaned from the fact that the textile industry was not alone in its path to prosperity. The trade in diamonds too provided considerable revenue to the French. (4) Masulipatnam still remained as a major centre for trade in salt, which was generally produced between January and May. The reported revenues of the French also confirm triumphant march of the town to prosperity in an age when it was said to be difficult. The French had a flourishing trade in cloths and handkerchiefs worth Rs 500, 000 per annum and most probably Masulipatnam had a lion's share in this. The salt trade at Masulipatnam alone gave the French annual revenue of Rs 30,000. There are references to the activities of the Private merchants the European trading companies has also encouraged private trade run by the natives and those of European origin at Masulipatnam.. The town served as an advantageous launching point for shipments to Bengal, Madras, Ida, and other nations in the Persian Gulf region. In the later part of the eighteenth century, it maintained strong



connections with South East Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea.(5)

In addition to an increase in exports, the area in and surrounding Masulipatnam has also seen an increase in the volume of retail commerce and monetary transactions. The French responded to the problem by minting a significant quantity of coins, as well as taking a variety of further measures to improve the percolation of monetary transactions. The dabou was struck in 1755 and it was estimated that at least 49,000 Kgs of copper was used every year for minting coins in Masulipatnam which in turn, yielded a profit of 24, 000 per annum. (6) The income from French customs house at Masulipatnam was pegged at Rs 34, 911 which substantiate the high volume of trade in the town.(7) Thus, even in the politically most disastrous period of the Carnatic wars, the port town of Masulipatnam could not be dislodged from its pivotal position.

#### 4. Importance:

Even in the latter part of the century, Masulipatnam remained a significant commercial hub, which is an essential fact to keep in mind. When the English acquired control of Masulipatnam, they utilized the city as an effective export base. The important among them were roumals, Allejas, Gingham red, Cpttagandoo roumals, Dungares, Gingham blue, Sastracundies and fine kerchiefs.(8) Along with the exports, there were also a few imports by the English into the port. Infact, there was an improvement with the addition of species and drugs for which there are no references in the seventeenth century. The important imports include perpetuanoies scarlet, broad cloth fine green, broad cloth fine blue, perpetuanoies green, velvet white and broad cloth super fine scarlet, etc.(9) Even Minerals and ores like iron, lead and copper were also unloaded at Masulipatnam.(10) The hinterland towns which supported a continuous flow of goods, especially textiles were Ventapollam, Devy Pargana, Madapollam, Inegaram and Guntur circar.(11) This shows that the theory of missing connectivity between the port town of Masulipatnam and the hinterland may not be totally correct. The system of advances to the producers by the East India Company which was to become very destructive to the Indian traditional production

base in the nineteenth century, was also implemented in and around Masulipatnam. The company records at Masulipatnam furnish good details of these advances. This is a good example of how the native traders were effectively integrated into the colonial economic paradigm. The records speak of Sadasiva Naik and Narikedemilli Veeranna, who had received advances from the English.(12)

The economic activity in the eastern Deccan also received a shot in the arm with ever-expanding networks of the European trading companies. Both in terms of investment and factories, these companies showed lot of enthusiasm in the eastern Deccan. By 1723, English had full-pledged trading operations at Masulipatnam. Dutch were active in Jaganadhapuram, Palakollu (1735). (13) Vizagapatnam, Yanam, Madapollam and Ingeram recorded growing trade of French and English East India Company to St. George even in 1751-52 the evidence for which is plentiful in Letters from St. George, 1751-52.(14) In fact, the cash flows to Vizagapatnam were considerably large in the entire Madras Presidency and the English were still willing to invest more there! It may be noted here that this was the time of Carnatic wars between Duplex and English. Even there is a reference to “several vessels and supra cargoes passing to and from Bengal touching your place (Vizagapatnam) with Armenians and Black merchants” affecting the profits of the English.(15)

Trade and commerce in the eighteenth century are frequently mentioned in contemporary Telugu literature. Hasavimsathi refers to rich merchants Vasumantha, Somadatta and Visnudasa. (16) This kind of description of merchants presupposes a good interaction between the prominent merchants of the time and European trading companies. The above said work also gives an inventory of commodities. There is a reference to 11 varieties of saris in Hamsavimsathi and 100 varieties of paddy.(17)

#### 5. Conclusion

A comparison of the inventories and trade centres mentioned in the 17<sup>th</sup> century text Sukasaptasati and the eighteenth century text Hamsavimsathi shows that there had been much



continuity between the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century. The author of *Hamsavimsathi*, Narayanamatya, refers to a merchant of higher strata – Vishnudasa – who was consulted by the Dutch in Ceylon (Ilamu Valvda) and the East India Company traders from the ships (Badara Inglishu Kalamu) for trade related purposes. The modern literature in Telugu makes numerous mentions to several cities and commercial hubs across the language. There is a frequent assumption that Bandarulu was a center for exports, and the fact that the word is used at all suggests that the region must have had significant historical significance and popularity. Considering that European commerce businesses had a substantial presence in both Vizagapatnam and Masulipatnam, it's reasonable to assume that the two ports' land waterways were effectively connected. A tiny village in Godavari's East Godavari District, Nagaram, is mentioned in Telugu records as exporting Miriyal, Vakkal and Elakulu to Balaghat. Because Pallicollu is located in the vicinity, we may deduce that there must have been a connection between Narasapur and Nagaram. The towns of Adoni (cotton), Dharmavaram, Gutty, Tadipatri, Warangal, Rayadurgam, Nizamabad, Hindupur, and Walajipet, among others, are mentioned in contemporaneous sources as having served urban centers with a rural bent, as do Dharmavaram and Gutty.

These lines also reference the thriving foreign commerce in the Eastern Deccan during the eighteenth century and identify some of the most popular imports of the era. For instance, glazed glass, large mirrors, ivory combs, perfumes, some kinds of expensive silks and conch shells, among others were imported by large traders to be sold in other markets. However, source-countries of these imports are not mentioned. Some of them could as well be sources from the other towns, rural and semi urban centres. The continuation of exports, preferably to the plot of the story of *Hamsavimsathi*, the Brahmin husband of Hemavathi, Vishnusarma who migrates to 'distant land' on a trade mission.

There is also mention the towns and some other places of economic importance such as Nellore, Manukonda or Manukota (Mahabubabad), Kadapa, Gandikota, Gadwal, Chittor,

Nandyala, Saidapuram, Tadipatri, Simhadri, Putnur, Eluru, Tirupathi, Peravali, Duwuru and Gandikota. While all these places are located in the Eastern Deccan or present Andhra Pradesh, the same poem talks of other important places in the country including Chennapatnam (Chennai), Tanjavur, Bangalore, Tirichunapalli, Kumbhakonam, Jalikota and Kothakota. It also hints at possible economic linkages between these places. In addition to these locations, cities and bazaars including Pagonda, Nagole, Tallur, Mylapuram, Jataprolu, Bhuvanagiri, Kongondi, Tarigonda, Dharmavaram, Ramachandrapuram, Bezawada, and Kotakonda are specifically mentioned (present Kotappa Konda).

### References:

1. The *Sarkar* of Masulipatnam had ten paraganas, a few of which were also brought under French control in the period under study. By the middle of the century under review, about 853 villages came under the authority of the French, giving them access to a wide range of produces in the hinterland
- 2.. The narrative of the French commandant at Masulipatnam, M. Moracin, provides a wealth of information in this respect. Written in 1751, this text covers economic and social factors of the era that point to the continuous economic activity in the period, contrary to assertions concerning its demise by other researchers. Bibliotheque Nationale, Department des Manuscrits Francois, Nouvelles Acquisitions, document no.9355, folios 343-61.
3. Numerous accounts from the seventeenth and eighteenth century detail a prosperous commercial climate in the area in question. This had also led to the development of a high-class trade class, in addition to small and medium-sized merchants like as the Banjaras, who transported bulk products and raw materials from the border to distant ports in order to be exported. See the inscription of Chidpirala and Jammalamadugu Kaifiyat in the AP State Archives from 1964: J. Brenning's "The Textile Trade of Seventeenth Century Northern Coromandel: A Study of a Pre-Modern Asian Export Industry," which was his unpublished D.Phil. thesis at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1975.



4. Places like Paritala, Ustupalli, and Jaggayyapeta, which lie enroute to Hyderabad were noted for mining of quality diamonds. Similarly, Shamshabad and Narkoda near Hyderabad were also famous for the same. It has been said that a 375-carat diamond, which was later named 'Nizam Ratnam' was mined from Narkoda during the period under study. Suravaram Reddy, *Andhrula Sanghika Charitra*, Hyderabad, 1949, p.378.
5. Bibliotheque Nationale, Department des Manuscrits Francois, Nouvelles Acquisitions, document no. 9355, folios 343-61.
6. Bibliotheque Nationale, Department des Manuscrits Francois, Nouvelles Acquisitions, document no. 9355, folios 343-61.
7. Bibliotheque Nationale, Department des Manuscrits Francois, Nouvelles Acquisitions, document no. 9355, folios 343-61. There were actually two custom houses for the French in the eastern Dakhin: one at Masulipatnam and the other being Narasapur, European and Asian Muslims paid 3 per cent of ad valorem while the Hindus paid 5 per cent. The French also collected tolls from Inegodur and Konduru. These were mentioned as Rs. 9,000 and Rs. 12,000 respectively.
8. The list of merchants who dealt with the English is also available in the reports of 1788, 1790 and 1791. See, *Masulipatnam District Collectorate Records*, vol. 2839, AP State Archives, August-October Report, 1788, vols. 2840-1.
9. The list of merchants who dealt with the English is also available in the reports of 1788, 1790 and 1791. See, *Masulipatnam District Collectorate Records*, vol. 2839, AP State Archives, Reports of 1987, vols. 2840-1.
10. *Masulipatnam District Collectorate Records*, vol. 2840 (1791).
11. *Masulipatnam District Collectorate Records*, vol. 2840 (1791).
12. The descendants of this Narikedemilli merchant family are still engaged in business in Bhimavaram, West Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. Their family records, which have been consulted by this author, speak of high-sounding fortunes from trade arising out of major ports in the region during the eighteenth century. (Unpublished Family Books)
13. .B. Bhattacharya, 'Some Aspects of the textile trade of the Dutch East India Company on the Coromandel Coast, 1730-1780', *International Institute of Asian Studies Year Book*, 1994, pp. 169-92.
14. *Letters from St. George*, 1751-52, no. 18, Hyderabad State Archives.
15. The council at Vizagapatnam was instructed to provide safety to company's investment by maintaining strict vigil to check these activities, *letters to St. George*, no. 107, Hyderabad State Archives.
16. C.V. Subbanna Satavadhani, *Hamsavimsathi of Ayyalaraju Narayanamatya*, Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Academy, 1977.
17. C.V. Subbanna Satavadhani, *Hamsavimsathi of Ayyalaraju Narayanamatya*, Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Academy, 1977. pp 218,355.