Chapter 6
Disintegration of Honnavar and Basrur

Many people would not believe that the Greeks, Arabs, Persians, Portuguese, and French visited this place and walked around the streets of these port towns. Honnavar and Basrur were not ordinary towns. Instead, they were India’s west coast’s great towns and also the capital of this region. There are numbers of reasons that were responsible for the changes that occurred here. Today’s state of these two port towns is a result of several factors. These towns maintained a high status in that region, but it got diminished gradually because of the following factors:

6.1 Environmental factors

Often environmental misfortunes like floods, droughts, changing river courses and sea-levels have been cited as responsible factors for the decline of cities or civilizations. Numerous instances of such calamities have changed the world history for e.g. Bronze age, Indus Valley, Hattusa, Babylon, Xia dynasty were all destructed mainly because of environmental factors. The port cities Basrur and Honnavar too were very much prone to such calamities due to their proximity to river and sea. Basrur is situated on the south bank of Varahi River which flows from several dense forest areas and hills and flows down to the Arabian Sea via Gangoli. Along with this river, several other rivers together form several small, rich islands and waterfalls before joining the sea. These five rivers (Pancha Gangavali) in the past were used to transport supplies to the in-lands. The supplies from the inland areas used to come by road till the river points, from where the goods were further transported easily. For all such activities, Basrur was the centre, and it was an important link for river channels as well as sea networks. Even in the high waves, Basrur was a safer place to anchor the ship by using ‘Langaru’. All these were the reasons for its growth that also changed with the change in the river course. All the previously existed trade links were disrupted due to the shifts in the patterns of river Panchagangavali. It is important to note that Basrur not only faced the disruption once, but a rather similar event also took place in the seventeenth century as well. The first causality reported in the beginning of the fifteenth century that was mentioned in the
indigenous record dated 1413 A.D. found at Kundapur fort area. It is cited as “Nashta” that happened due to the overflow of the river Panchagangavali (Shetty 1978: 78-80). However, that affected the trading activities in that region for a short period only. When the same casualty hit again in the mid-seventeenth century, this port was not able to bear the damage caused due to flood. Both foreign and indigenous records have mentioned about the destruction at Basrur port. Mukambika temple of Kolluru has preserved copper plates of the seventeenth century which refer to ‘nashta’, happened due to the overflow of river Panchagangavali. It is mentioned in the record that flood came in 1620 A.D. One more copper plate dated 1643 A.D. found in the same place referred to a similar incident that occurred in 1628 A.D (A.R.S.I.E, 1928, Ap. A No. 3 & 5). Hence frequent flooding in the Panchagangavali area must have had destroyed the existing trading networks, and because of this, trade had completely dislocated from Basrur to other neighbouring centres.

Agrarian losses too registered in one the inscriptions of Basrur which says as ‘nashtas’ which means loss of agrarian produce. Such incidents indicate towards natural factors either flood or famine. Incidents of nashtas also mentioned in other indigenous sources like Kadatas was found in the temples of Koteshwara and Kollur. The Keladi rulers also adopted methods of overcoming such incidents by giving grants to mathas and these are revealed in the inscription (E.C. VIII Ti No. 82, 83, 92, 441 and also ARSIE 1939 No. Ap A No. 1) that grants were made to the Mathas at Basrur, Barkur and Chaudikoppa.

One of the Portuguese records also referred to shipwreck near fort area of Basrur. The cyclone was reported as the cause of the shipwreck which destroyed 14 warships and 140 ships (Shastry 1972: 87). Another indigenous record also referred to environmental factor as one of the causes of its disruption. An inscription dated 1662 A.D. found in the Matha at Ganguli mentions again ‘nashta’ in the port area of Basrur and also Ganguli. Salt water and sand entered the town. This incident happened due to flood in the river. One more incident about the flood again reported in the same place in the year 1674 A.D (Hamilton: 1930: 159). In the mid-eighteenth century, it is mentioned in an unpublished Kadatas that Basrur, Bayegundy and Angal were destroyed by an overflow of the river and that caused major damage to Basrur as flooding frequently ruined it. Port did start showing the sign of its decline when the number of visit of ships declined (Moraes 1991: 38). Prof. Vasanth Madhava has reported about this
in his study based on Kadatas. The information he borrowed from the Kadatas which is in the personal custody of B. Manjunath Shanuboga, a General Merchant of Gangoli. This Kadata dated 1749 brings to light about the shifting of trading activities from Basrur to Gangolli. Merchants of Basrur shifted due to ‘nashta’ (destruction) of their warehouse happened in the port of Basrur. Trading activities of the Basrur port dislocated from there to Gangolli (Madhava 2003: 109). Even the fort of Basrur also got decayed, and this had been reported by the Portuguese to the Keladi Basavappanayaka in 1750 for its renovation and reconstruction. Though the response of the Nayaka was not positive (Shastry 1981: 160). The negative response of the Nayaka for the restoration of Basrur fort also indicate a decline in significance of the port due to dislocation of its merchant base. That is why Nayaka did not take much interest in that matter.

About shipwreck and destruction either due to cyclone or flood can also be concluded from a letter to the Governor of Goa dated 1776 by Haidar Ali of Mysore. In that letter, Haidar Ali requested Governor of Goa, Tavores De Almeida to send some carpenters and shipbuilders to build the ships of Basrur and other port (Moraes 1991: 55). However, there was no definite response from the Governor Goa in this regard. This letter indicates causality that might have taken place at Basrur that destroyed the ships and boats on a large scale. Governor neglected restoration work at Basrur and Nayaka ignored even reconstruction of the fort. Both left Basrur in a lurching and staggering position that ultimately led to its decline.

Around sixteenth and seventeenth century the entrance to the Basrur port was shifted due to regular storms. Entry to the port became impossible due to silting process in the original water channel. Landing of the ships was made possible only during extremely high tides when water level went high. Simultaneously a new water channel appeared close to Gangolli that was later used by local and Malabari traders to avoid the Portuguese control. This new port with new docking facilities attracted traders and later Portuguese too realised the potential of this place and decided to build a fort at Gangolli (Meersman 1971: 252-253). Portuguese records mention Gangolli as ‘Cambolim’ where Keladi rulers had full sway. Later Portuguese exploited the situation of civil war and internal rivalry and took possession of Gangolli (Shastry 1981: 55) and also to get the approval of local Chettis to erect the fort. Construction of Gangolli fort completed in 1633 (Shastry, 1981:56). Immediately after conquering Gangoli,
Portuguese got full control of rice trade and benefited by 20000 bags of rice from Canara for exporting purposes (Shastry 1981: 207).

Foreign records also reported about the gradual deterioration of the port caused due to regular deposition of sand near the estuary. One of the mid-seventeenth century Portuguese records observed that river was becoming narrower and narrower near its mouth. Regular deposition of sand made anchoring of larger ship almost inevitable. Port of Basrur which earlier used to support big frigate but later due to slow sedimentation process, it started losing large sized ships (Shastry 1972: 70-71). Due to regular flood in early seventeenth centuries the river cease to remain navigable even for the medium or smaller size vessels owing to excessive siltation and sedimentation. Portuguese records also referred to the accumulation of sand at the bottom of the river and soil erosion near fort area that ultimately led to the decay of the port (Madhava: 2003: 106). Several recent studies have depicted the sedimentation of mud and sand in the mouth of the river. This phenomenon is a very common one, and that is why most of the natural harbour of the world have faced the similar process of siltation. The latest study on harbour siltation has emphasized the role of tidal waves:

“Sediments (mud, silt and sand) stirred up from the bed by the action of currents and waves outside the basin entrance can be transported into the basin by (generally weak) currents due to tidal filling and horizontal circulation. Inside the basin, the wave height generally decreases rapidly resulting in a reduction of the sediment transporting capacity and hence in siltation in the entrance area, which may be problematic with respect to navigation. Often, a sediment trap (buffer zone) is situated in the entrance area to keep the navigation depth at the required level and to reduce the maintenance dredging frequency”27 (Rijn 2016: 2).

Studies also reveal that nearly 70 percent of siltation in the interior channels (like Varahi and other tributaries of Panchaganagavali) usually take place during the South-West monsoon season, June to September usually. As Basrur is not located at the mouth of the sea, hence the Saline content of the water of Varahi is not much as compared to Honnavar Harbour. During this Monsoon tidal inflow of salt water and outflow of freshwater from the river is a general

26 Author of this book has done some serious research on Portuguese sources.
phenomenon. Hence these conditions create mud concentration at the entrance of interior channels. Unlike Honnavar, Basrur’s river Varahi was marred by the muddy siltation that happened due to flood tides along with ebb tides where siltation material come from the sea due to the landward inflow of sediments caused by vertical circulation effects. After the flood, when the water receded inward, in that process muddy siltation was totally inevitable (Hegde 2009:310).

Honnavar too had faced a similar fate, and to a great extent, its glory lost when the place no longer was used for larger freight and cargos. Field trip to this place supported in concluding that its estuary too experienced the similar sedimentation process. Unlike Basrur, the harbour is located at the mouth of the sea hence port is vulnerable more to sand sedimentation rather than mud. Interviews with the local fishermen and port officials brought out the similar reason for not docking of the larger ship at the Honnavar port. Regular deposition of sand in the River Sharavati due to gravitational pull and tidal waves made navigation of larger ship totally impossible. That is why nowadays, Honnavar bander is primarily dominated by fishing boats. A team of researcher had conducted a study on the ‘morphodynamic processes’ in the Sharavati estuary at Honnavar and other neighbouring areas to identify the reason and process of sedimentation. It gave ample evidence to support that geomorphic process on the sides of the river Sharavati mouth along with nearshore coastal processes that include tidal winds both monsoons and post monsoon changes, led to erosion as well as sedimentation.

“The morphological changes of the beaches in the vicinity of a river mouth are much more complex owing to site-specific control of wind and wave processes. During the monsoon season, when the discharge is high, tropical rivers bring much sediment, and during other seasons, their flow is slower and thus hardly discharges any sediment. This variation in sediment influx into the beach environment results in a complex adjustment of sediments between the sea and the foreshore in the vicinity of the estuary” (V. S. Hegde 2009: 305).

At Honnavar, the formation of tidal winds gave rise to excessive turbulent water that not only formed the dense white froth but also increased the sedimentation process. If we analyse the sediment characteristics of Sharavati River, it is greatly affected by the monsoon phenomenon. During pre-monsoon (from February to May) due to the north-west orientation of the coast,
wind stress is southward whereas south-west wind also puts pressure on northward. These two both anti forces create air tension in that zone that ultimately gave rise to a surface current. Such current gave birth to coastal tides that sometimes resulted in shifting of the river mouth. Studies of the wave characteristics of the Sharavati river mouth has been conducted by the researchers and provided following data:

Table: Wave Characteristics in the Sharavati River mouth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>August</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wave Period</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave Height</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1-1.25</td>
<td>1-1.25</td>
<td>1-1.25-2</td>
<td>2-2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(m)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Energy</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave (H/T)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longshore</td>
<td>10-16 north</td>
<td>15 north</td>
<td>1-16 due south on the northern side and due north on southern side</td>
<td>1-12 due south on the northern side and due north on southern side</td>
<td>Weak 5-10 due south on the southern side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drift (m/s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table from the Journal of Coastal Research, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Mar. 2009)

The above table reflects wave pattern that takes place during monsoon and pre-monsoon period on the West coast at the mouth of river Sharavati. Mild waves get reported in Dec but slowly gets wilder in the mid-May and August when its height reaches up to 2 m and

---

28 Data taken from the article “Low-Scale Foreshore Morphodynamic Processes in the Vicinity of a Tropical Estuary at Honnavar, Central West Coast of India” from the Journal of Coastal Research, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Mar., 2009),
sometimes even reaches up to 4m. During pre-monsoon season (Dec to Feb) sediments are dominated by the fine-grained and skewed kind of deposition whereas beaches experience erosion due to rain and wind. Beaches of Honnavar are flatter than other beaches, and this feature promotes preferential erosion or movement of soil towards the sea, but in the absence of gravitational pull, coarser grains of sand usually do not get pulled back to the sea which would have been possible if the beaches slopes had been higher. However, flatter beaches are unable to withhold its finer sediments. Sea waves usually wash away the fine sand and leave behind medium grained deposits. A study conducted on the behaviour of Sharavati rivers reveals that “Coarser sediments were observed during August and fine-grained sediments during December, indicating a progressive decrease in energy from the monsoon to the post monsoon season” (V. S. Hegde 2009: 312). Hence influx of sediments varies from time to time due to varying river characteristics, beach characteristics and monsoon characteristics. If we analyse the river inputs separately, sediments from river usually migrated towards shore during post monsoon period. During monsoon time high energy prevailed in the form of wave energy. Normal currents are generated when the high tide is more than 2.5 m. During these processes, fine sand was washed off from the upper foreshore and also mid foreshore. These sediments are also deposited in the lower foreshore. This process continues for a longer time, but most of the sediments which are formed and deposited here are trapped due to the crescent-shaped structure of Kasarkod which partly trapped all the sediments. This phenomenon led to river mouth adjustment which is nothing but sediment dispersion process which ultimately led to trapping of sediments in the river itself.

6.2 Political factors
From 1500 to 1700 A.D. Canara had very dynamic and vibrant history due to trade and commerce that had brought significant changes. The trading activities influenced fundamental changes that took place in socio-culture life. However, the course of the development in trade was primarily determined by the political factors. Trade flourished under favourable political conditions. Favourable political and economic policies adopted by the rulers of Vijayanagara gave way to general prosperity in foreign and domestic trade. However, the fall of Vijayanagara power and decline of Mughal rule had a significant impact on the commerce. There were sea changes in the situation. When the state crumbled down, it affected the trade severely due to non-supervision and no protection of the mercantile community from any
central authority. The absence of any governing authority attracted several attackers and plunderers in this region that further affected the commerce badly.

6.2.1 Fall of Vijayanagara Empire

The first and the primary cause of the decline of Basrur and Honnavar was connected with the decline of Vijayanagara. Basrur during its peak time in the early sixteenth century was an important place in conducting trade with the Vijayanagara Empire. With the decline of Vijayanagara, Basrur was left abandoned by the foreign merchants like Persian, Turks, Portuguese, and Italians who seems to have moved to Calicut, Cochin and Dabhul in the early seventeenth century (Subrahmanyam 1990: 260 - 65). Like Basrur, Honnavar began to lose its commercial importance after 1565. Himanshu Prabha Ray’s meticulously researched article on the west coast of India has referred to Vijayanagara kings who emphasized the importance of maritime trade by mentioning that in their inscription as “Lords of the Eastern and Western Ocean” (Ray 2016: 22). The same reflected in the following line where the ruler of Vijayanagara tried to create a perfect condition for trade and commerce to flourish.

“A King should improve the harbours of his country and so encourage its commerce that horses, elephants, precious gems, sandalwoods, pearls, and other articles are freely imported ....make the merchants of distant foreign countries who import elephants and good horses attached to yourself by providing them with the villages and decent dwellings in the city, by affording them daily audience, presents allowing decent profits. Then those articles will never go to your enemies” (Rangaswami 1925: 69, 72)

Basrur and Honnavar along with other prominent ports of the Canara were the main suppliers of the foreign goods. They also acted as a local produce centre to Vijayanagara Empire and along with their support these port cities became important centres of trade. These port cities were under the control of local chiefs or Nayaks who used to pay taxes to Vijayanagara rulers when the goods were passed through Vijayanagara territory. There is no strong evidence available that can prove the Canara coast was under direct control of the Vijayanagara kings. Revenue and tax were collected by the local chiefs that are why when Portuguese got the control of Basrur fort, agreements were made between local chiefs rather than with the kings of Vijayanagara. Hence the local chiefs enjoyed a great degree of autonomy and independence
that worked in their favour to rise. Revenues collected from the coastal centres were directly going to the local chiefs. These chiefs along with the local merchant communities organised the overall trading as well as governing systems of these port towns.

In 1546 A.D., according to a treaty signed between the Portuguese and Vijayanagara king, all the merchants of the Kingdom who were engaged in the coastal trade were compelled by the ruler to conduct the trade through the ports of Honnavar and Basrur (Heras 1927: 59). This treaty had diverted movement of goods to these two ports. Such arrangements led to the establishment of the seat of control in the form of fortress and customs house including fortification of the town. The unprecedented economic growth of these two port cities due to this pact was the obvious outcome. Vijayanagara was dependent greatly on these two ports for the supply of its primary goods, but things got changed with the decline of the Empire. Fortification of the port cities too discouraged foreign merchants especially traders from Arabia and Persia, whom Portuguese had targeted to gain the control of pepper and rice trade. Moreover, greediness of Portuguese captains and their coercive measures against those traders who entered the river with their consignments further caused disruption of the trade.

In 1565 A.D. fall of Vijayanagara Empire gave way to Portuguese to conquer and control the vast coastal territories. Portuguese annexation policies started adding one by one most of the important Canara ports like Mangalore, Honnavar and Basrur in their command. Initially, rice became major foodstuff to export after that pepper also came under their direct control due to trade monopoly. Most of the benefits of trade started going directly to the Portuguese pockets owing to their diplomatic negotiations and various commercial dealings. Major shift in their trading policies after the decline of Vijayanagara Empire, the balance of trade drastically shifted in favour of ‘Estato da India’. Conditions of local merchants also deteriorated due to the notorious practices of Portuguese in dealing with Kanarese merchants. Ill-treatment, illegal imports, plundering acts like forcibly taking the merchandise became common (Shastri 1969: 305). Portuguese greatly targeted Muslim merchants to destroy their strongholds from Canara. Owing to the fact that rulers of Vijayanagara and even the Keladi chieftains preferred Muslim merchants for conducting trade in their territories, this had become a reason for Portuguese’s dislike and jealousy towards them. In one of the Portuguese document of 1591 A.D., it is noted that Portuguese illegally collected extra money from the Muslim merchants.
for the purchase of rice at Basrur (Shastri 1969: 335). Hence during Vijayanagara time, even after coming of Portuguese, the very dimension of trade was still in favour of Indian merchant which supported the urbanisation initially. The policy of Monopoly adopted by Portuguese later became the reason for their aggressive posture and violence against the traders and local rulers which led to de-urbanisation in the Coastal region including Honnavar and Basrur.

6.2.2 Maratha Invasion

Many times Marathas invaded Canara region with the intention of territorial gains and tributes from the local chiefs. Shivaji did not appear in Canara region during his early years of rule. His first raid reported in 1664 A.D. on Bhatkala port. Next, in 1665 A.D. he attacked Basrur and plundered it. Then he proceeded to Gokarna in North Canara, where he camped for some time (Foster 1665-67: 71). Portuguese sources mentioned about the Shivaji raid which was reported to them by the Narayana Mallya who was the trade agent of the Keladi Nayaka at Basrur. People of Basrur were alarmed that Shivaji was going to attack the kingdom (Indica 1974:47). He collected an enormous amount of booty. Even after this attack, Canara did not get much relief as Maratha soldiers to collect booty, frequently attacked the region. Such attacks affected the trade interest of English and Dutch in this region. Shivaji targeted mostly English merchants and collected a good amount of money from them. This discouraged English merchants to expand their trade further in this region. These expeditions ultimately shook the roots of these foreign merchants and their trade interest (Sarkar 1973: 232-33 & 34). When British could not control the menace, they finally suspended their trading activities at Canara.

In 1673 Shivaji tried to conquered good part of Canara. His naval expedition to Karwar affected the Keladi Nayakas (Telang 1961: 60). His attack and plunder on Hubli generated fear amongst merchants’ community and rulers as well. By 1675 A.D., he invaded North Canara and established a strong hold over it. People were not happy the way he carried his raid. For instance, Karwar was burnt completely in the process of besieging the North Canara. Fryer, an English doctor who visited this place same time, mentioned in his account that the people of Canara were totally dissatisfied with his rule (Fawcett 1952: 356). One thing about Shivaji was very true that he never led any expedition unless he was very sure about the good
booty that too without any loss. His profit analysis was always very well calculated. It is rightly said about Shivaji that he was a robber on the land and pirates on the Sea and Sea coast.

Even his death created a situation of total confusion and continuous rebellion. The English reported several destructive raids of Marathas. English records also reported about frequent raids by Peshwas on Keladi chiefs for the tribute. Between 1725 to 1758 A.D. Nayakas of Keladi managed with Marathas by paying them tribute but they were also very much disturbed by the frequent incursions. Tributes paid by these rulers to the Marathas caused great misery to its people as frequent demands for the tributes totally drained their treasury and savings (Buchanan II 1807: 351). This region further got deteriorated when Angre’s, who were the partners of the Peshwas started invading Canara coast. They sieged Honnavar in 1699 A.D., their clash with Keladi Nayaka ended with plunder at Honnavar port where Angre had got an upper hand (Shastri 1972:166, 172). Angre’s campaigns not only devastated Keladi Nayakas but also affected Europeans activities too. Their trading activities were severely damaged by the Angre’s plunder as well. Hence, Marathas constant attacks and disruptions gravely affected the economy of the kingdom which directly caused a decline in trade and commerce at the coastal ports.

6.2.3 Role of Tipu Sultan

There is no doubt that trade flourished in the reign of Haidar and Tipu Sultan too. Both gave extra care to agrarian products and their production. For this, he encouraged cultivators for their expansion to the overseas markets. Amongst several trading ports, Honnavar and Basrur were prominent trade centres for the agrarian products. Both father and son had a great desire for the expansion of cultivation of pepper and rice so that it could be sent to the markets of Muscat, Arabia, China, Peru and even to the island of Maldives. For this Tipu had set up a depot at Muscat and also appointed officials like ‘Amildar’ for the supervision of the trading activities in these centres. Despite the fact that Tipu was in favour of development and tried his level best to expand the cultivation for the overseas trade, he did something just opposite of his previous act in the last days of his reign. He prohibited the English from conducting any trading exercise in the coastal zone of Karnataka mainly northern part of it. Such control on production severely affected the pepper production and agrarian trade of this region. Because of this trade dislocated from these ports largely from Honnavar, Karwar and Mangalore.
Tipu almost ruined the trade in Canara region. According to him, trade impoverished a country because it gave an opportunity to strangers to interfere with the affairs of his kingdom. In the year 1801 Buchanan mentions on the North bank of Tadri, forts, and towns were corrupted by Musalmans and suffered greatly by Haidar Ali and finally destroyed by Tipu Sultan (Buchanan, 2011: 152). In his words, “Honnawera, or Onore, as we call it was totally demolished by Tippoo after he had recovered by the treaty of Mangalore. It was formerly a place of great commerce, and Hyder had established at it a dock for building ships of war” (Buchanan, 2011: 137). There were no manufactures, and little export of rice as the whole was consumed in the local and inland markets. He reported that when British got the district, Honnavar had nothing, all trade and commerce were totally wiped out. Not a single house was left for the trading. Even the commerce at Mirjan was completely ruined (Buchanan III: 137, 150, 152). Due to total negligence and unsupportive ruler, trade slowly took the back seat. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, he further reported that even the coasting trade was severely affected by the pirates and because of that people were afraid to indulge in shipbuilding and coastal trade. Productions and manufactures both were badly damaged. People stopped to own or to keep a boat as there was always a fear of robbery and theft.

In 1799, when the districts were given to the British, Honnavar had not a single house, and Mirjan was ruined. He highlights that in the lake remained wrecks of some which were sunk by the troops after the assault took the fort. About the current image of the city, he says, “There is now a custom house – at the place and some poor people have made offers of rebuilding the town if the government would assist them. Five shops only have been rebuilt. But these are not in the situation of the former town.” Such pathetic was the case of Honnavar (Buchanan, 2011: 137, 150, 152).

6.3 Economic factors

Trade and commerce in coastal region were also affected by the taxation policies which were not very peasant-friendly. Non-payment of taxes led to stern steps like the acquisition of the land by the rulers. In one of the inscriptions dated 1465 A.D. from Nilavara, Udupi taluk refers to the incident of non-payment of taxes where Governor of Barakuru rajaya Pandarideva-Odeya took harsh measures against the defaulters. In their ordinance, they made it clear that the taxes should be paid without fail to the imperial treasury (ARSIE 1928 – 29: No. 49). The
similar instance also reported in another inscription from Basruru, Coondapur taluk. A record dated 1465 A.D. mentions about the Hanjamanas of Basruru who failed to pay the taxes to the palace in the form of gold had to surrender their harvest to the authority. Finally, Pandarideva-Odeya of Barakuru gifted the gold derived from the selling of this harvest to the god Mahadeva of Paduvakeri in Basrur (S.I.I, Vol. IX, Part II, No. 459).

Economic setback given by European merchants to some extent discouraged the indigenous from embarking trading vessels for the overseas trade, and slowly and gradually these merchants started to withdraw from the trading world. Dominating nature of Portuguese in the Asian water can be seen in the epithet used by the King of Portugal, Dom Manuel I in 1501 as “Lord of Navigation, Trade, and Commerce of India.” Later they declared that all the ships should collect the passes (Cartaz) from the Portuguese captain otherwise ship would be attacked or destroyed. Initially, these rules were not very strict, and charges were also very nominal, but later they made the procedure very stringent, ships were bound to visit the specified ports under the Portuguese for paying the customs duties and taxes for the Cartaz (Mathew 1995: 143). It was not just the taxation and trade monopoly which dispirited the traders but also the acts of plunder which Portuguese undertook to meet their expenses in India for organizing commercial set up to carry out their trading exercises. Hence to generate more fund, more exploitative measures were introduced by the Portuguese which directly and indirectly affected the trading communities.

According to Portuguese records of the year 1574, Port of Basrur collected huge amount 2,10,000 Reis as customs duties on the horses brought from the Ormuz (B.S.Shastry 1987: 98-99). From sixteen to seventeen century, these ports played a significant role in collecting duties on articles of export and import. Exact data for these collections during Portuguese period is not available but British records to a great extent help in identifying the decline in the import from these ports. Though these are later centuries data, in order to understand the contemporary situation, such records are significant in comprehending the changes that took place and also to assess the level of decline in trade. Hence, according to such data given below it is possible to analyse the decline in trading activities with respect to other neighbouring ports.
The above data reflects how in later century’s Sea trade imports decreased drastically whereas the neighbouring port Kumta took over almost all the possible import of the region. Honnavar did try to maintain its position in the maritime trading networks and between temporary received a boost too but did not able to maintain it.

6.4 Local and Indigenous factors

Sometimes people’s reaction to certain events and incidents are enough to cause disruption. Such disorder affects the productivity and ultimately creates an economic loss. There were several instances when serious differences arose between neighbouring regions. Such situation sometimes resulted in arms fight which unfortunately destroyed the cordial relationship between the neighbouring places which is essential to conduct trade. Such incidents discouraged the traders from undertaking immediately any trading expedition. Inscriptional evidence during the Chandarasa governorship in 1430 A.D. registered a case between inhabitants of Chauliyakeri and Murukeri of Barakuru city. This controversy arose due to the utilization of crops and other goods coming from the ghat region. This dispute resulted into bloodily fight and turned very ugly (S.I.I., Vol. VII: 309, 340).

From the agricultural front, there too existed some problem which reduced the crop production of Basrur. Due to frequent floods and cyclones, the fertility of the land reduced and farmers

208
had to use expensive fertilizers. Such expense on cultivation made the farmer poor. After the decline in agricultural produce, the relation ties with this town for agriculture was also broken. Now this town had to buy agricultural produce which was totally a changed situation. Even the industrialisation effect did not appear in favour of Basrur. Apart from rice, the city was also famous for its handicrafts and textile. Its steel, Aluminium and mill clothes took over its indigenous industries which had good demand in the Western world.

The commercial control over the ports by the Muslim merchants was not tolerated by the Portuguese who had always depended on the Canara ports for meeting their demands for rice and spices. They made use of their friendship with the Vijayanagara rulers in the pretext of exclusive supply of Persian horses to them. Very soon Portuguese started naval attacks on the main ports of Canara on the ground that these ports were giving refuge to Malabar pirates and also accused them of getting involved with the piratical activities. Slowly Portuguese became vigorous in attacking the ports, under control of Vijayanagara. Sometimes such attacks created more confusion and misunderstanding between the locals and Portuguese which ultimately led to brutal clashes that disturbed the further expansion of commerce in the region.

6.5 The Region – Being the Reason for Political and Economic Contests

Prosperity too has its dark side. This is very well reflected in the political ups and downs of Honnavar and Basrur. Upon realising the importance of these ports all the rulers – native and foreign both tried to control it. It was possible by controlling these two ports along with other western coastal ports, of trade and also trade routes and through that large quantity of taxes and tolls could be collected. Since these port cities were the gateway through which commodities were exported and imported, most of the rulers desired to control these regions which caused frequent tussles between them.

The pepper trade conducted through Honnavar port via river Shravati became the main ground of battle for control. Rani Bhairadevi, Queen of Tulu country, first lost her hegemony of this region to Venkatappa Nayaka I and hence Keladi consolidated their rule over this region. Though she was mighty and powerful, she was unable to stop the tide and surge of Venkatappa. Historian K. N Chitnis in his work ‘Keladi Polity’ points out and cites epigraphical support that he successfully stemmed out the Muhamdan advance by driving back the Bijapur troops. (E.C, Vol II, Sh. 2) Account of an Italian traveller, Pietro Della Vella
too supported the event that he had driven out Bangara Raja an ally of the Portuguese out of the territory and routed Bhairadevi and devastated her kingdom completely (Valle 1892: 219-222). About Keladi, Chitnis says that they maintained diplomatic relation with the Portuguese and other foreigners very ably and successfully (Chitnis 1974: 14). So these expeditions were made mainly from the point of view of commercial gain. That is why one by one the rulers of Keladi were targeted as important, and they were holding strategically located regions. Amongst excavated material found in the fort of Mirjan, 75 cannon balls bear the testimony of the fact that this place might have carried valuable position in the medieval period. That is why the safety of this fort needed much attention.

Fig: Canon balls weigh 10 to 15 kg found in Mirjan fort (Source: ASI Dharwad Circle)

History of the political contest started at the beginning of 15th century with the coming of Portuguese in the scene. Moors of Honnavar who initially controlled this place were then in 1469 taken up by Bahamani general. Later Timmaya, a Honnavar chief first resisted

29 http://karnatakatravel.blogspot.in/2010/01/asi-booklet-on-mirjan-fort.html
Portuguese leading to the total devastation of Honnavar by burning it into ashes. Timmaya realising power and strength of Portuguese collaborated with them and became the partner of them throughout his life.

We have references of fortified island like Basavarajdurg, an island in Sharavati at Honnavar. It was fortified all around with a stone wall with guns mounted on towers by the great Shivappa Nayaka of Bednur (1648–1678) (Buchanan 1807: 138). One noticeable fact, however, is that, if an island is surrounded by water having a natural fortification itself, then why is fortification needed? It could be because trans-oceanic activities which were at its height during 16th and 17th Century due to geographical discoveries saw an increased number of western traders and also a shift in their intention from purely economic to political. That created an air of distrust and fear of frequent warfare. Thus places with strategic location and value like Mirjan ought to have been fortified and fully armed. Change in political dimension remained a permanent feature of 17th Century coastal Karnataka. In 1678, under a treaty with Bednur chief, Portuguese were allowed to build a factory and church at Mirjan, but the same thing repeated and this time Portuguese gave permission to Bednur chief to build a factory there (Bombay Gazetteer 1883: 333). That is why eco-politico tussles remained a permanent feature of this region.

Basrur fortress became a reason of contention due to its very strategic location near the port. Therefore, those who lived in and around the fort area mainly ‘Casados’30 were protected by a mud wall of 3.3 meters of height. Outside the wall, these Casados also occupied some rice fields and enjoyed the produce. However, the fortification of Basrur discouraged the foreign merchants and also local merchants to enter the Basrur as Portuguese used to charge heavily from the merchants for entering the river. Portuguese forced local merchants to sell their goods to them at a very low price, and sometimes resistance to their demand caused them to lose their entire merchandise. Hence in many cases, merchants’ fought against the Portuguese coercive policies in order to liberate themselves from their clutches (Shastry 1969: 99).

30 Literal meaning of Casados is married but in context to Portuguese in India they were Portuguese citizen who wedded to Indian Girls and settled there. They played significant role in shaping the commercial strategy of the Portuguese and emerged as powerful mercantile group by joining their hands with the native merchants. They formed their strong base in Portuguese Asia by acquiring wealth through trade and commerce.
Sometimes with collaborative efforts of the local merchants resulted in serious conflicts with Portuguese army. In one such incident Andre Furtado, the commander of the Portuguese launched an attack on the villages along the river banks by entering the river with armed ships. Portuguese army assaulted a temple and even set it on fire where native soldiers were assembled. They damaged entire native camp of Basrur and destroyed each and every habitation along with its plantations. He spent nearly whole rainy season in attacking that disrupted the lower Basrur. Later he attacked the upper Basrur twice and destroyed it. Thus, constant attacks and onslaughts shattered the trade and commerce of Basrur and due to this most of the merchants shifted their base from here. This also had impacted the urban nature of the town.

In the reign of Bidanur ruler Basavappa Nayaka I who ruled from 1697 to 1714 A.D. incident of clashes with Portuguese were reported in 1704 and again in 1707. Vested interest of Portuguese in rice and pepper of Canara and their intention to monopolise the same to get rid of payment which they had to pay for the rice taken from the Canara had created the Bidanur – Portuguese relation very tense. The situation became tenser due to a preference for Arab merchants for trade in coastal ports by Basavappa Nayaka. Portuguese sent their troops from Goa to Basrur and also to Kallianpur to destroy the loaded ships. Not only that several terror attacks were also conducted by bombarding important coastal trade centres like Mangalore, Kumta and Gokarna. Attacks became a regular phenomenon from 1713 to 1714 A.D. Such acts disturbed the routine trade in this region. Most of the traders hesitated to venture into any trading exercise. Through peace treaty, it was made clear by the Portuguese that no Arab traders should conduct any trade in Canara region even their visit to Canara ports were not permitted (Abhishankar 1975: 59).

6.6 International factors

For the holistic understanding of the traditional maritime network, it is needed to study in a wide range of varied sources. Such a vibrant and dynamic traditional maritime system requires emphasis on travel accounts of sea voyages and nature of circulation. In the recent book on the maritime trade Pearson writes:

"In the first half of the nineteenth century, there was considerable variation around the ocean. In some areas, such as the Gulf and off southern Arabia, local ships did well. In other areas,
a pronounced dualism developed at this time, and this is before the major impact of steam ships” (Pearson 2003: 200).

There were several changes that reflected in the maritime coastal trade due to change in the international markets. Between eighteen to nineteen centuries there was a regular trading network between ports of Malabar and Bombay for the mutual exchange of articles. Along with that were annual voyages to China also mainly for raw cotton which was in the hands of private merchants both European as well as Indian merchants. Several changes were introduced to the Indian ships due to the change in the nature of trade and political changes both nationally and internationally. Primary export commodity – cotton was replaced by the opium from China. The old traditional method of shipbuilding could no longer compete with the technologically advanced European vessels. Indian merchants, despite their exceptional skills in maritime trading activities, failed to organised themselves on global lines. It is rightly quoted by a maritime historian about the changed scenario of the world economy and pattern of exchange which was not adopted by the Indian traders led to the decline of their hold from the maritime trading world.

“The new trade from England relied on increasingly more sophisticated European banking systems and the involvement in time of money markets worldwide. In this field, Indian merchants found it hard to compete” (Bulley 2000: 243).

Hence old mercantile practices and conventional systems of trading followed by the Indian merchant did not cope with the cosmopolitanism existed in the international market. Moreover, in general, colonial powers adversely affected the indigenous manufacturers and Indian traders by completely monopolising its foreign trade. Finally, British East India Company in mid-eighteenth century gave the final blow to trade and commerce of the country. The great trading community which had flourished by the coastal trade and had enjoyed the extremely favourable balance of trade in conducting trade with the foreign countries. Later they began to lose all their fortune and had dwindled to nothing by the end of 18th century when the British trading company established their control over the Indian sub-continent.
6.7 Piracy

Rampant piracy all along the West Coast created an alarming situation in the early medieval time. Marco Polo and Ibn Batutah too reported about the piratical activities that shook the merchants and overseas commerce in an adverse manner. Ibn Batutah highlighted the custom that was prevalent in Southern part of the west coast that whenever shipwreck happened all its merchandise were taken from the royal treasury (Gibb: 1929:238). Similar customs was also highlighted by the Marco Polo who reported a peculiar belief of the coastal people that whoever found out anchoring of a ship by mistake to the port for which they were not bound, instead of guiding them they undertook the acts of plundering. Not only that they also justified their acts of by saying that it was God’s will due to that ship did not reach to their actual destination. That was their right to have all the goods that loaded in the ship. They did not even consider this act of plunder as sinful (Polo: 1903: 385). These two methods of piracy depict notion of a right to capture, and that supported plundering activates in the coastal zone. Ibn Batutah again mentioned about another method of similar control that was exercised by the rulers of Fakanur (present Barkur). Ruler of this coast made it customary that every ship that crossed this port town had to anchor there to pay tribute to the ruler in the form of presents and gifts which they called “right of bander” (Batutah 1929: 233). This right to collect tribute suggests the nature of piracy existed that time. Non-payment or in the case of avoiding the port, the culprit ship required to pay double tax and could also be detained as long as the ruler wished (Batutah 1929: 233). Such practice and mentality of the people and local authority did affect the oversea commerce in an adverse manner. Such acts in the name of law and practice discouraged merchants from undertaking overseas trading expeditions. Such piratic practices according to Polo was prevalent in almost entire Western Coastal zone. Later Buchanan Ibn Batutah also tried to highlight the fact that those places that did not indulge in the acts of piracy flourished greatly in trade and commerce. Like Cochin maintained its position as never to indulge in plundering shipwreck nor political authority played any role in capturing the goods which anchored to their ports. Rather in the case of shipwreck, they returned goods of the ship to the owner merchants (Batutah 1929: 237). Such gestures of the ruler attracted a large number of merchants from a different part of the subcontinent. Such cordial atmosphere was absent in the Coastal Canara ports that is why a ground was not created for a long term
thriving trade and commerce. It can also be the reason of shifting of most of the bases of the overseas trade from Canara ports to the Cochin and other favoured ports.

The piratical boats from Maratha coast were the great hindrance to commerce; they hovered especially around the pigeon island and had even the impudence to enter the rivers and inlets of the coast. Buchanan records the event as “eight days ago they cut out from this place two boats; fifteen days ago one boat from ‘Manky’ and five days previous to that a fourth from Batuculla” (Buchanan, 2011: 138). Such pirate activities created an atmosphere of terror and alarm amongst merchant and trading communities. References of Pirates in several accounts suggest a strong reason for the decline. It prevented any recovery even after the end of devastation by Tipu, people were afraid to build or to own boats.

6.8 Emergence of new trade centres
Seventeenth century onwards new ports emerged as centres of agrarian trade. They emerged due to the availability of agrarian products in a large quantity such as rice, coconuts, and pepper. Some of these newly established ports offered competition to the existing ports not just in the sense of larger ships that could anchor there but also in quantity of products that were loaded from these ports such as Kumbala, Carnate (near Mulki), Gangoli and Karwar (Shastry 1981:207). These newly developed port became prominent over a period of time due to the availability of agrarian products in large quantity. Some of these centres gained prominence because of their hinterland which produced the best quality of pepper and rice in large quantity. Because of these factors, newly formed ports started making their direct trade contact with the European countries. English record of 1682 A.D. mentions that port of Karwar required sending 200 tonnes of pepper and cardamom around 50 bales to England. There were instances of purchasing pepper up to the weight of 500 tonnes (Hamilton 1930:148). Two important ports Ormuz and Aden, to which Honnavar and Basrur ports used to supply large quantity of pepper and rice was taken over by the Mulki port. Towards the end of Seventeenth-century due to change in the direction of river Shambhavi, it created an excellent condition for the port of Mulki to export a large quantity of rice to these gulf ports (Hamilton 1930:159). Hence due to favourable climatic conditions, and ever-changing environmental dynamics, some newly developed ports became excellent suppliers of the agrarian produce to the foreign markets and slowly started replacing the other ports. Like
Gangolli totally replaced Basrur Rice export and took its position in maritime trade network. River channels too supported Gangolli position as a centre for procurement and exchange. Hence the movement of ships and boats carrying agrarian produce from hinterlands which earlier used to go to Basrur diverted to Gangolli for further exporting them to the foreign markets. Hence, by mid-eighteen century arrival of boats to Basrur was a rarity. Basrur port market and local trading were halted. People of Basrur started growing only essential commodities of regular needs, and trading was limited only in around areas. Movement of people and commodities also get reduced.

The developments that took place outside Basrur also affected the development in Basrur. Until Portuguese time it maintained its significant place in the maritime trading system. Portuguese used to transport supplies via Basrur. After 1800 A.D. when British came to power they established their district office in Mangalore, and because of this, Basrur lost its commercial as well as administrative importance from the west coast. Commercialisation that took place due to the development of towns and gave rise to other cities but that did not help Basrur and Honnavar to rise due to political upheavals during the British period, trading activities in the Arabian Sea did not gain much pace. This marred the least chances of survival of commerce at the ports of Basrur and Honnavar.

Hence, these two ports were not just the excellent natural harbour but also had occupied a very suitable location for the internal and external trade. It attracted both Muslim merchants and European traders who had assimilated these ports in the world economy by connecting the ports and its hinterlands with the important trade centres of the world. Similarly, the decline was largely attributed to the running of the same natural harbour and their inability to cater the larger ships. To some extent mismanagement at the port was due to lack of any solid administrative unit to handle the increased volume of trade and changing global political scenario.