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Research Papers



ECONOMIC CONDITIONS UNDER THE HOYSALAS OF DWARASAMUDRA

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Abstract

The Hoysalas were a prominent [South Indian](#) rulers who ruled most of the modern day state of [Karnataka](#) between the 10th to the 14th centuries. The capital of the empire was initially based at [Belur](#), and later transferred to [Halebidu](#) (Dwarasamudra).

The Hoysala rulers were originally hill people of [Malnad](#) Karnataka, an elevated region in the [Western Ghats](#) range. In the 12th century, taking advantage of the internecine warfare between the then ruling [Western Chalukyas](#) and [Kalachuri](#) kingdoms, they ruled over areas of present day Karnataka and some parts of the [Kaveri River](#) delta between [Kongu](#) and [Chola](#) territories in [Tamil](#) country. By the 13th century, they governed most of present-day Karnataka, minor parts of [Tamil Nadu](#) and parts of western [Andhra Pradesh](#) in [Deccan](#) India.

The Hoysala era was an important period in the development of art, architecture, and religion in [South India](#). The empire is remembered today primarily for its temple [architecture](#). Over a hundred surviving temples are scattered across Karnataka, including the well known [Chennakesava Temple](#) at Belur, the [Hoysaleswara Temple](#) at Halebidu, and the [Kesava Temple](#) at Somanathapura. The Hoysala rulers also

patronised the fine arts, encouraging literature to flourish in [Kannada](#) and [Sanskrit](#).

Economy of Hoysalas was primarily based on agriculture though business within [India](#) as well as foreign trade flourished to some extent.

Agriculture

The administration sustained itself through agriculture.¹ Land grants were made by the kings to religious beneficiaries like Brahmins, Jains and persons rewarded for services rendered to the king. The type of land grant was generally wetland which was already under cultivation. This was popular in the fertile river valleys of the [Tungabhadra](#) and [Kaveri](#). In addition, clearing of forests for cultivation was viewed favourably as it not only brought new sources of revenue but also created job opportunities for the landless and introduced forest dwellers to a more agrarian life style. Whenever land was cleared for cultivation, it was on a large scale. Knowledge of agriculture included assessing irrigation systems like tanks,

reservoirs with sluices, canals and wells which were built and maintained at the expense of local villagers. The more impressive irrigation tanks such as Vishnusagara, Shantisagara, Ballalarayasagara were created at the expense of the state.² Irrespective of whether the expense and control came from local or state bodies, organizing labour to till the land was taken up at the village and across village levels and the job of cultivation was largely that of the landless. The highlands ([malnad](#) regions) with its favorable climate was suitable for cattle farming, orchards and spices. Paddy and corn were staple crops in the plains (Bailnad). In Kannada country, key figures in rural areas were the rich land owners called gavunda or gauda and heggade.³

They are mentioned in inscriptions relating to land transactions, maintenance of irrigation, collection of taxes and works of village council. The gavunda of people (praja gavunda) was lower in status than the wealthy lord of gavundas (prabhu gavunda). The gavundas sometimes had a dual role as village representatives and appointees of the state. Some judicial responsibilities were also included like raising a militia if required.

Trade and Commerce

The Hoysala economy was based on prosperous agriculture and a few basic industries, which flourished. The numerous roads connecting different parts of the kingdom promoted trade and commerce. The traders organized themselves into guilds, and by far the biggest of the trading associations was the “Five hundred of Ayyavole”. They described themselves as the followers and protectors of “Virabhanajigadharma” and called themselves “Nanadesis”. They maintained steady trade contact with Chera, Chola and Pandya countries, the Malaya archipelago, Magadha, Kosala, Nepahal, Persia, Arabia and other countries. They enjoyed respect in society and they displayed their generosity by their munificent grants to temples and Mathas.⁹

Imports and Exports

Import of horses on the western seaboard was a flourishing business and inscriptions speak of Brahmin merchants who were active. [Arabs](#) made wealth from the unending need for horses from Indian kingdoms.⁴ Rich forest produce like [Teak](#) was exported through ports of present day [Kerela](#). Merchants from this region settled down in [Arasikere](#) and Halebidu in addition to Jain traders.² Virgal ([hero stone](#)) in the coastal areas depict ships indicating active sea trade with shipping fleets. Piracy was common and Virgals

made for fallen heroes have been found. Inscriptions mention a flourishing textile industry. Trade with overseas kingdoms reached unprecedented levels. [Sung dynasty](#) records from [China](#) mention Indian merchants in ports of South China. [Chinese](#) interest in Indian astrology and [Alchemy](#) is well known.⁵ South India exported textiles, spices, medicinal plants, precious stones, pottery, salt made from salt pans, jewels, gold, ivory, Rhino horn, [ebony](#) and [camphor](#) to China. The same products reached ports like [Dhofar](#), [Aden](#). In addition, [aloe wood](#), perfumes, [Sandalwood](#) and condiments reached western ports like [Siraf](#) which was the entry port to [Egypt](#), [Arabia](#) and [Persia](#). [Cairo](#) and [Alexandria](#) were in active trade across the [Arabian Sea](#).⁶ Architects (Vishwakarmas), sculptors, quarry workers, goldsmiths and others whose trade directly or indirectly related to construction of temples were also prosperous due to the vigorous temple building activities undertaken.⁷

Taxation System

Tax assessment was done by the village assembly who were responsible for collecting for the government. Land revenue was called Siddhaya and included original assessment (Kula) and various cesses. Cesses were collected in proportion to Kula.⁸ Taxes were levied on professions, marriage, goods in transit on chariots, carriages, domesticated animals. Taxes on commodities like gold, precious stones, perfumes, Sandalwood, ropes, yarn, residence, hearth, shops, cattle pans, sugarcane presses and produce like black pepper, betel leaves, ghee, paddy, spices, palm leaves, coconuts and sugar are mentioned in records.⁵ Cattle tax was called balavana and loom tax was called maggadere. Fines for violating laws were also collected. The village assembly could levy tax for a specific purpose like construction of a water tanks.

Industries

Industries were the backbone of the [Hoysala](#) economy. Inscriptions mention various industrial products on which taxes were levied. Survey of the literary works and the records of the contemporary times of Hoysala dynasty give an idea that the people of those days were highly advanced industrially. There were different types of major industries like the textile, dye industry, sugarcane crushing, oil pressing, iron work, mining, metal industry, ceramic, salt, stone carving, basket weaving, jewellery making, carpentry, house building etc. Details and illustrations are provided from inscriptions and literary sources.¹⁰

Conclusions

Thus the above study reveals that the Hoysala era was an important period not in the development of art, architecture, and religion in [South India](#) they patronized the fine arts, encouraged literature in [Kannada](#) and [Sanskrit](#).

Though economy of Hoysalas was primarily based on agriculture, business within [India](#) as well as foreign trade flourished to some extent. Industries like the textile, dye industry, sugarcane crushing, oil pressing, iron work, mining, metal industry, ceramic, salt, stone carving, basket weaving, jewellery making, carpentry, house building etc, **flourished**.

The Trade Guilds maintained steady trade contact with Chera, Chola and Pandya countries, the Malaya archipelago, Magadha, Kosala, Nepahal, Persia, Arabia and other countries. Import of horses on the western seaboard was a flourishing with [Arabs](#).

[Teak](#) was exported through ports, textiles, spices, medicinal plants, precious stones, pottery, salt made from salt pans, jewels, gold, ivory, Rhino horn, [ebony](#) and [camphor](#) to China, [Dhofar](#), [Aden](#). [Aloe wood](#), perfumes, [Sandalwood](#) and condiments reached western ports like [Siraf](#) which was the entry port to [Egypt](#), [Arabia](#) and [Persia](#). [Cairo](#) and [Alexandria](#)

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