

## ALÚR TALUK.

ALÚR is one of the four taluks which make up the eastern, or black cotton-soil, division of the district, the other three being Ádóni, Bellary and Rayadrug. As much as 77 per cent. of its area is covered with cotton-soil, 15 per cent. being mixed soils and the remainder red ferruginous land. Round about its head-quarter station is a cluster of granite rocks forming part of a disjointed line of hills which crosses it from north-west to south-east; but except for the variety which these afford it is an almost dead level plain, draining for the most part into the Hagari.

Statistics upon many points concerning it will be found in the separate Appendix to this book. It suffered more severely in the 1876 famine than any other taluk in the district and its population in 1901 numbered only a few hundreds more than it did in 1871, thirty years before. More than half its people speak Telugu but Canarese is the vernacular of nearly two-fifths.

The percentage of the area of Alúr which is arable is higher than in any other taluk and its cotton-soil, which is of the typically heavy variety, is the best in the district, the average assessment per acre on its dry land being as high as Re. 1-4-0. The incidence of the land revenue per head of the population is also much higher than in any other taluk. A bumper crop from its rich lands brings in the ryots enough to tide them safely over that year and the next, even if in the next the crops fail, but the high proportion of it which consists of cotton-soil, the cultivation of which depends entirely upon the rainfall, and the almost entire absence of irrigated land leave no part of it protected against a succession of bad seasons, while the facts that it has the smallest area of forest land in the district and that (especially along its eastern border) water is extremely scarce—lying at a great depth and being often brackish—tell severely against its cattle in time of famine. Cholan and korra are the staple crops, and the area under cotton is the largest in the district.

Some account of the few places in it which are of any interest is given below :—

**Alúr:** The head-quarters of the taluk was moved here in 1805 from Gúliam. It is known to the natives as Chinna (little) Alúr to distinguish it from Hálaharivi, which they call Pedda (big) Alúr. The place is a Union, has a population of 3,528 and contains a Sub-registrar, a police-station and a travellers' bungalow. Otherwise it is entirely uninteresting.

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**Chippigiri:** Thirteen miles south-east of Alúr on the Guntakal road. Police-station; population 2,214.

The low fortified hill just north of the village contains traces of a prehistoric settlement. There was evidently also a considerable Jain colony here in days gone by and one of the Mackenzie manuscripts<sup>1</sup> says that king Bijjala (apparently the Kalachurya usurper, A.D. 1156-1167, is meant) built the fort and lived there with his people the Jains. On the hill is a Jain temple—still called “the basti” by the villagers—which has the pyramidal stone roof typical of structures of the kind and found also in the similar examples at Kurugódu, Hampi, Kottúru and other places in the district. The temple also contains several representations of seated and standing (nude) figures which are clearly Jain in character, and immediately north of the entrance to it, under a big boulder, are three stones bearing larger images of Jain tirthankaras. The inner shrines of the two largest temples in the village—those to Bhogésvara and Chenna Késavasvámi—were also obviously originally Jain shrines of the same design which, at a much later date, have been added to and converted into Hindu temples. One of these resembles the Jain temple on the hill in exhibiting, on the lowest course of the masonry of the tower over the shrine, the curious ornamentation, consisting of a row of little inverted cones, which is to be seen in one of the similar temples at Kurugódu.

The Bhogésvara and Chenna Késavasvámi temples have both been enlarged out of all resemblance to their original selves by being surrounded by a high wall equipped with a gópuram and by the addition in front of the shrine of imposing mantapams. The four central pillars in each of these are Jain in style but have been heightened in an incongruous fashion by placing on top of them a capital of the same Dravidian style in which the other additions are built. The two temples face one another and in the square between them stand two of the most graceful dhvaja stambhas in all the district. They are unusually tall, being perhaps 40 feet in length, taper very gradually upward, are richly carved throughout and are set in high pediments which add greatly to their effect.

In the Bhogésvara temple are two *virakals* of the usual pattern and a much damaged Canarese inscription. In that to Chenna Késava is an inscription dated 1508 A.D. recording a grant of lands to it by a local chief. In the smaller Venkataramana temple in the village an inscription dated 1528 records a grant by king Krishna Deva of Vijayanagar.

<sup>1</sup> See Taylor's *Catalogue of Oriental MSS.*, iii, 559.

East of the village and south of the road to Nancharla is a *brindávanam* to Vijaya Ráya, a famous Mádhva hymnist.

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**Gúliam:** A mile from the Hagari, east by south of Alúr. Population 1,667. The old village of the same name stands on the bank of the river. Up to 1805, it was the head-quarters of the taluk. In the great storm of 1851 referred to on page 142 above the Hagari rose very suddenly and washed away almost all the houses. A few people returned to the old site, but the majority moved to the present village, which is further off the river. In the temple of Lakshmi Dévi in the old village is a pillar with an inscription which is dated A.D. 1408 and mentions king Déva Ráya of Vijayanagar, but it is said to have been brought from Virupá-puram, six miles to the north-east. A *dhvaja-stambha* contains another inscription.

In the present Gúliam is the tomb of Gádi Lingappa, a Kuruba by caste, who provides an interesting instance of the manner in which deities are manufactured. He died only some 60 years ago and people still living remember him; yet his tomb has been converted into a regular temple in which worship is performed; even Bráhmans and Lingáyats pay him due reverence; children are named Lingappa, Lingamma and so forth after him; and the annual festival in his honour is attended, it is said, by as many as 10,000 people. He seems to have gained his position in the public esteem partly by turning ascetic and renouncing the world but chiefly by fulfilling the desires of those who made vows to him and by the success of his prophecies. He is declared, for instance, to have effected the reinstatement of a dismissed Tahsildar and to have foretold the great flood of 1851.

**Harivánam:** A village of 2,088 inhabitants in the north of the taluk, midway between Siruguppa and Ádóni. It was once fortified and one of the gateways of the fort is now occupied by the police-station. Just outside this is a Hanumán temple, in the enclosure in front of which is a rock bearing an inscription in Telugu. This is dated A.D. 1560 and speaks of Sríringa Ráya Venkatádri as ruler of the Ádóni pargana and records the grant of Harivánam to Bráhmans as an agrapháram. This Venkatádri was doubtless one of the two brothers of Ráma Ráya, the *de facto* ruler at that time of the Vijayanagar empire. He had rebelled against Ráma Ráya about 1550 and seized Ádóni, but after a siege of six months the place capitulated and he was pardoned.<sup>1</sup> The inscription seems to show that he continued thereafter to hold charge of the Ádóni country.

<sup>1</sup> Briggs' *Ferishia*, iii, 397, ff.

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Round about the Hanumán temple are several pieces of religious sculpture in a close-grained green stone. The villagers say that they are remnants of a temple to Sómésvara which has now disappeared. Just south of it is a *vívakal*, and another stands under a margosa tree some 50 yards to the west. The former is said to be in memory of the ancestor of some Kurubas, and the latter of some Chetti Banajigas, who still hold inams in Harivánam. Within the fort, some 50 yards north of the police-station, are two Jain temples of the same class as those at Chippigiri. Both are now occupied by Hindu gods.

The village has been stated to be a centre of the blanket-weaving industry but no weaving is done in it now. Three families of Kammas make agricultural implements and, to order, ornamental knives, swords and other hardware which has some local reputation.

**Holalagondi**: is a Union containing 3,398 inhabitants and a police-station, but, except that it is a place of some commercial and agricultural importance, it has little interest.

**Neraniki**: Eight miles to the north-west of Alúr. The hamlet of this village which the maps call Hosappátidévaragudda and the natives Dévaragudda or Kottapéta, and which lies close under the hill, is one of several places in the Bellary district which are widely believed to bring misfortune upon the heads of any official above the rank of a menial who ventures to visit them. Other instances are Manúru in Bellary taluk, Byásigadéri in Hadagalli, Rámaghatta and Mattihalli in Harpanahalli, Málavi in Kúdligi and Vyásapuram in Rayadrug taluk. The prohibition differs in degree in different places. Sometimes, for instance, it is held only to apply to Tahsildars, or only to halts and not to visits, but there can be no doubt that it is often seriously regarded by native officers. In the case of this Dévaragudda it apparently covers only visits to the deserted village which stands on the stretch of level ground part of the way up the hill to the south of it. This place has a tank with five or six acres of wet land under it and some 200 acres of dry land (neither of which are now cultivated), a mosque, a mantapam and some small temples and houses in ruins. On the hill above it is a temple to Mallésvara at which an annual festival is held. The feature of the gathering is the pronouncement of a prophecy regarding the fortunes of the coming year similar to that referred to in the account of the Mailár feast on page 243 below. The hill on which this temple stands is full of caves, or rather passages among the boulders of which it is made up, and in the largest of these is a shapeless protuberance on the rock, variously declared to represent a tortoise or a fish, to which worship is paid.

On another hill behind it are more small temples and a building said to have been used as a powder-magazine by the poligar of the place.

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**Yellarti:** A village of 1,262 inhabitants nine miles in a direct line north-west of Alúr. It is known for the *urus* in honour of the Musalman saint Sheikh Sáhí which occurs annually at it. The saint seems to have made a reputation for himself by granting people the fulfilment of their wishes, sending them children and so forth, and when he died his followers erected the existing *darga* to him. It possesses a landed inam. Stories of the miracles the saint performed are still current. He is said, for example, to have gone regularly to Ádóni (15 miles distant) five times every day so as to be there at the hours of prayer.