



# Coastal Gujarat on the Eve of Portuguese Arrival

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*History helps in understanding as well as in formulating policies. India being a peninsular country, various maritime dimensions have played a very important role in moulding its history. The paper attempts to study the Gujarat coast on the eve of the Portuguese arrival in the region as a colonial power in the 16th century. The paper roughly studies coastal Gujarat in the 15th century and the first few decades of the 16th century, by tracing the indigenous market systems, trade routes and commodity transport network, and studies the factors that paved the way for Portuguese dominance in the region.*

## Introduction

Gujarat has played a key role in the Indian Ocean maritime network stretching from the Persian Gulf in the west to the Southeast Asia in the east, from time immemorial. The strategic location of Gujarat, which lay in the west to east trade route, made the region the gateway to the western world. This role was further strengthened in the course of the 15th century, which witnessed the fragmentation of Asian trade into well defined segments. Increasingly, the participation of the Arab merchants in Indian Ocean trade became confined to the trade between West Asia and the west coast of

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India. The Indian merchants played a very important role in the trading activities of Red Sea–Persian Gulf regions and the Bay of Bengal littoral extending up to Malacca. While there was no clear demarcation of the autonomous areas of operation, there was a considerable amount of interdependence and interaction between the commercial networks of Indian merchants and overseas traders, and the different trading powers. Behind India's success in this growing trading network were the well developed agricultural sector, an organized market sector, intensification of division of labour, a well developed monetary and credit structure, the well responsive trading community and India's strategic location, in the middle of the Indian Ocean trading network.<sup>1</sup> In this process, the Gujarati merchants evolved as an economic group with substantial mercantile capital and the ports of Gujarat allowed the entry of early capitalism to India, along with the flow of bulk commodities.

### Trade and Commodity Movements

One of the most important factors of Gujarati trade was that the basis of its overseas trade was its own products, unlike that of Goa, Malacca, Hormuz or Aden. The soil of the place was very fertile, which resulted in high natural produce. *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* informs us that almost all kinds of food grains grew in abundance in the country. Apart from food grains, a great number of fruits were also grown in that region. As *Mirat* puts it, there were innumerable fruit-bearing plants in Gujarat, like that of mangoes, *khirni*, watermelon, common pear, and other common fruits.<sup>2</sup> The region also produced a large amount of cotton.

The sea trade also stimulated the secondary sector in a remarkable way. Industries like the textile manufacturing industry of Gujarat were well known. The woven and the dried textiles of Gujarat were exported to Iran, Arabia, Abyssinia, Turkey and Europe. Marco Polo gave a detailed description of the thriving textile industry of Gujarat. Duarte Barbosa, who visited Cambay before 1517, described the amazing manufacturing industry of cotton fabrics, silk and velvets, variations of satin taffetas, gilded leather and silken mattresses produced in Gujarat.<sup>3</sup> Cambay exported printed cloth, both cotton and silk, to Pegu.<sup>4</sup> Silk was traded between Gujarat and China, and with Kabul.

In the middle of the 10th century, Abu Zaid mentioned that pearls from the region were held in great esteem and emeralds were imported from Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Signet stones, rosary beads, cups, knife handles, daggers and other objects made from agate

stone of different colours, bracelets and other articles of ivory manufactured in Khambayat were exported by merchants in large volume to other countries.<sup>6</sup> Jewish Genizza papers refer to the thriving trade of the Jews in Gujarat, particularly in Khambayat.<sup>7</sup> Duarte Barbosa also describes the variety of ivory work carried out in Gujarat, particularly in the manufacturing of bracelets, sword hilts, dice, chessmen and chessboards, ivory bed-heads, beads of various kinds and colour, carnelians etc.<sup>8</sup> Ibn Khurdadhbih refers to the nature of trade in Gujarat and writes that from the west the merchants brought, fur, eunuchs, slave girls and boys, skins and swords, and from the east they brought musk, aloes, camphor, cinnamon and other spices.<sup>9</sup> *Mirat* claims that the famous *Sirohi* swords and arrows were best made here and were used by the Indians and the Iranians.<sup>10</sup>

Another important manufacturing sector of Gujarat was salt. A large amount of revenue was being earned by the rulers from the sale of salt to other regions like Malwa. According to *Mirat*, the paper industry of Gujarat was also extensive.<sup>11</sup> Skins of goats, buffaloes, wild oxen, rhinoceroses formed another major stream of cargo taken to Arabian countries for trade. Gujarat was also very well known in the contemporary world for its embroidery work.<sup>12</sup> Coverlets for beds and cushions, made of red and blue leather and stitched with gold and silver thread, were also taken for trade. They were extremely delicate and soft. The trade list given by the Arab traders in the *Manual of Traders* of the 9th century lists precious stones like diamonds, pearls, turquoise, carnelian, onyx and coral as highly traded items, followed by various scents such as musk, amber, camphor and sandalwood. Spices like cloves, ginger and cinnamon were very important items of exchange. They also mention woollen items and furs, paper and metals like iron, copper, lead and tin.<sup>13</sup> Items of necessity and daily products formed a part of the commercial transactions. Items like Malwa sugar were also exported in great quantities in ships from the Gujarat coast to a number of places, national and international.

Before the entry of the Portuguese into the trading world of the Indian Ocean, there was a flourishing trade in coinage metal happening between western and southern Asia. On one hand the Venetian *zecchino*, along with the Egyptian and Ottoman *sultanis* and the *dinars* of Aden dominated the imports into south west India.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, trade from the Persian Gulf port of Hormuz to Gujarat, western India and Bengal brought silver in plenty to the markets of these regions. Hormuz used to pay for her imports mostly through horses. In 1516–17, exports to India were about thousand horses per year, which had doubled by mid-16th

century.<sup>15</sup> Gujarat was the major trading partner of Hormuz and, as Jean Aubin had pointed out, to cover her deficit, and to equilibrate her payments, Hormuz used to send India large quantities of coins, particularly silver.<sup>16</sup>

## Trade Routes and Satellite Markets

Ibn Khurdadhbih, who came to India as early as the 9th century AD, wrote that the merchants from west used to travel to east both by land and by sea. The Jews who took part in this trade embarked from the country of the Franks on the Occidental Sea to Farama (near Egypt). From Farama, they reached Quzulum, the Northern end of the Red Sea. There they embarked on the Oriental Sea (Red Sea) and embarked on a journey towards Hijaz, Jedda, proceeded to Sindh, India and then to China. According to him, the Russians also took part in this trade. They sailed down from Volga to Astrakhan, from where they entered the Caspian Sea to the Iranian port of Bandar Shah and Baghdad.<sup>17</sup> The travellers then entered the Arabian Sea trading network and anchored in India, through the ports of Gujarat. The coastline along Gujarat was piracy infected and some of the worst piracy cases were recorded in this region.<sup>18</sup>

The emergence of Malacca as the entrepôt, with Indian, Chinese and Javanese meeting there to exchange their wares, coincided with the convergence of Arabic and Persian merchants, who used to journey to Cambay to take ships to Malacca. Cambay cloths, both cotton and silk, drugs, onions and porcelain were found in abundance in the region along with goods from Pulicat and Bengal. Cambay also exported *pucho mangicam* (gall-nuts), which they re-exported from Mecca,<sup>19</sup> though direct shipping between Malacca and Red Sea is also known. Though Indian ships were not sturdy enough to withstand the typhoons of the China Sea, nor adequately armed to deal with the Wako pirates, Indian textiles clothed both rich and poor in Southeast Asia, and Indian vessels went regularly to Pidie and Pase in north Sumatra. In western Sumatra, Gujarat ships visited the four small seaport principalities of Priaman, Tiku, Baros and Singkel. The ships from Cambay frequented the ports of Sumatra with merchandise from Cambay, such as coral, quicksilver, rosewater and dried fish from Maldives. Cambay merchants went to Timor and exported iron axes, knives, cutlasses, swords, cloths, copper, quicksilver, vermilion, tin, lead and Cambay beads and imported sandalwood, honey, wax, slaves and pepper.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the trade of Gujarat

ports to south and east Asia was a traditional trade that had continued since time immemorial.

A significant strand of Gujarati trade extended to Maldives, Ceylon, Burma, Siam and the countries of the Malaysian and Indonesian Archipelagos and China. Gujarati merchants reached as far as Japan long before the Europeans did.<sup>21</sup> Tortoise shells from Maldives were much valued in Gujarat, especially Cambay, where they made bracelets with it for women and cabinets were inlaid with silver for the elite classes. Cambay even enjoyed a significant trading relationship with Ceylon from where came the pearls, elephants, topaz, tiger's eyes, glass, rubies, cinnamon and pepper. Each year ships went from Cambay to Colombo carrying cloth, saffron, coral, quicksilver and cinnabar. Ceylon had precious stones in plenty and Cambay received much of its precious stones.<sup>22</sup> They also carried with them opium, coral-threaded cloth, vermilion, quicksilver, rosewater and some Cambay drugs. These merchants returned to Cambay with lac, mace, cloves and many goods from China brought to Pegu from Malacca. They brought musk and rubies from Ava.

On the western front, Indian trade flowed along two established maritime channels, one through the Red Sea, Cairo and Alexandria, and the other through the Persian Gulf up through Basra and Baghdad. Indian merchants during this period brought their wares to the different markets in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf regions. It was through this conveyor belt that Indian goods were transhipped to the European markets.<sup>23</sup> Besides this long range network, Indian commodities were sold in regional markets, which included the towns of Hijaz and Yemen, ports like Suakin, Massowa and Zeila on the African coast of the Red Sea, and the towns of the Hadramaut coast like Shihr, Kish and Zofar. Rings, necklaces, cups, and handles for knives and daggers were manufactured at Cambay from carnelian of different colours, along with a variety of objects made of ivory and they were distributed all through the Indian Ocean region in return for a wide variety of overseas cargo.<sup>24</sup> The trade of the Gulf was much more of a transit nature, aimed at the towns of Mesopotamia and beyond.<sup>25</sup> The trade with the Red Sea ports continued longer than that with the East African and Persian Gulf ports, where with the discovery of the Cape route by the Portuguese in 1498 and their efforts in gaining monopoly of trade in the Eastern waters, they harassed Gujarati and Arab ships. Gujarati merchants had allied with Turkey to facilitate trade with Red Sea ports. Another group of ports with which Cambay had close trade contacts were those on the coast of East Africa. The Cambay merchants traded with Sofala, Mombasa, Malindi, Kilwa, Mogadishu, Zanzibar and

Mafia. By land they reached as far as Cape Town where the Arabs and Hindus from Gujarat had trading settlements.<sup>26</sup>

Besides the intra-Asian trade, Gujarat also took part in the coastal trading network of India. Production and distribution of a variety of goods in India was realized through a process of inter-penetration of subsistence and commercialized sectors. Gujarat had trading relations with other parts of India, like Malabar, Bengal and Coromandel. Moreover, the location of Gujarat made its ports the natural outlets for the large land-locked area of Indo-Gangetic plain and Malwa. As the location of Gujarat was also favourable for trade with West Asia, many Eastern production centres also dispatched their products to the Gujarati marts rather than to Bengal. Gujarat mostly produced commercial crops like cotton, indigo and vegetable dyes, and consequently it used to face a deficit in the production of food grains, which it used to cover up by way of trade with the surplus-producing areas of Malwa and Indo-Gangetic plains. Products from Rajasthan and Delhi were found in the markets of Cambay. Geographically Gujarat was also favourably placed in respect with the Deccan plateau through the Burhanpur–Khandesh route.

Cambay also had trading relations with the chief commercial hubs of Gujarat like Patan, Ahmedabad and Champanir.<sup>27</sup> The agate industry in Cambay was sustained mainly by stones of Rajpipla, Bad Kotra, Tankaria and Ranpur, onyx from Jabbalpur; cereals were exported from Ajmer, Malwa, Bastar and Deccan. Silk and sugar came to Cambay from Bengal and diamond from Deccan. Also, indigo came from Ahmedabad and Agra, and textiles from areas around Ahmedabad and Deccan. The Gujarati traders frequented the Malabar Coast in the pre-Portuguese period, especially the ports of Calicut, to obtain pepper and ginger. They had their settlements in Cannanore, Cochin and Calicut, and could be compared with the Italian merchants in the matter of trade.<sup>28</sup>

Not only did Cambay carry on trade with national and international markets, it also had a well developed and flourishing local marketing network. There were a number of markets that were set up in and around the region, and the importance of commerce could well be understood from the importance of the market place. The main feature of these bazaars or markets was that all sorts of goods and commodities such as cloth, grain, foodstuffs, drugs, sweets, medicine, tobacco, fruits, vegetables toys etc. were sold mostly in retail; very rarely were these items sold in wholesale in bazaars. The *bazaar-i-khas* was confined to the streets of cities. The *ganj* was the grain market whereas the *katra* was a market attached to the house of the nobleman or

within the walls. In the *mandi*, according to the *Mirat*, the goods were sold in wholesale and not in retail. The *daribapan* meant a street, stall or market where betel leaves were sold.<sup>29</sup> The *nakhas* were the daily markets where elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, oxen, hen, pigeons as well as slaves were sold in wholesale or retail.<sup>30</sup> *Kasadariba* sold cups, plates and utensils made of brass. The streets selling spices and herbs were known as *anjisadariba*.<sup>31</sup> Besides these permanent markets, there were many temporary markets called *peth*, where petty banias and local manufacturers gathered from adjoining towns and various commodities like food items, oil, butter, clothes, thread, cotton, indigo, cattle and horses, and other necessary products were sold.<sup>32</sup>

The coastal trading route was linked with the land routes for the Asian trading network, which started from far off Spain, to Egypt, Damascus, Kufa, Baghdad, Basra, Ahwaz, Fariz and Kirman. An alternative land route was from Germany or Armenia, across the country of the Slavsto, the city of Khazars, then it crossed the Sea of Jurzan (Caspian) and Transoxiana to Toghuzghuz. The route was bifurcated here – one went to Khurasan to China, i.e. across Central Asia to China, and the other went to Sindh, Kutch, Gujarat and western India.<sup>33</sup>

## The Banking and Credit System

The banking and credit system of India was relatively well developed in Gujarat, because of the convergence of international trade at its ports. The bankers or the *sarrafs* transmitted money through their own *hundis* and financed commerce, particularly long-distance trade and international commerce.<sup>34</sup> The *hundis* indicated the easy availability of money and a highly developed financial system. So brisk was the use of these bills in the markets of Ahmedabad, that merchants transacted almost exclusively through the medium of this commercial paper. In the handicrafts markets, the development of merchant capital had brought artisans under the control, through forms of the putting out or *dadni* system. Both cash advance and giving out of the raw material were established practices in this economic system.<sup>35</sup> In a document in *Lekhapaddhati*, dated 1231, it is revealed that in the post-10th century in Western India, loans could be secured after pledging land, house and chattels.<sup>36</sup> Al Idrisi refers to the prevalence of coercion in the recovery of loans, when he points out that the creditors in Gujarat drew a circular line around the debtor and the debtor could not leave the trap without meeting all the demands of the creditor.<sup>37</sup> Although the custom

duties, mostly collected in cash, did not directly provide an enormous revenue to the Gujarat Sultan, they no doubt initiated a major overall stimulation for the economy.<sup>38</sup>

## Trading Society

Rashid-ud-din described Gujarat as a large country along the shore. He wrote that Gujarat comprised 80,000 flourishing villages, cities and hamlets, and the inhabitants were rich and happy.<sup>39</sup> The coastal society of Gujarat was cosmopolitan in nature. Ibn Khurdadhbih claimed that during his visit to India in the 9th century AD, there were 42 religious sects in India, among which some believed in the Islamic religion. According to *Mirat* there were 84 castes or sub-castes of Hindu merchants along with the Muslims in Gujarat. Indian shipping was dominated by Gujarati Muslim merchants and the finances as well as the banking sector used to be in the hands of the Hindus.

The Parsi community, though small, participated in both local and overseas trade and ventured into banking and insurance, quite out of proportion to their numbers. They emerged as the strongest business rivals to the other local communities by increasing their share in the overseas trade. The Parsis throughout Gujarat emerged as one of the leading trading and banking communities.

Gujarati merchants undoubtedly played one of the most important roles in the Gujarat trading network, but there were many other traders involved in this trade too. The prosperous trade of Gujarat attracted traders not only from other parts of India but from throughout the world. Traders from Arab, Central Asian and European countries started residing in Gujarat. This gave Gujarat a cosmopolitan character. It was that region of Indian Ocean where men from different climes mingled and parted. The commercial class of Gujarat was extremely heterogeneous, including both Hindus and Jains, both Sunni and Shia Muslims of local and foreign origin, and the Parsis. The merchant communities though did not have a single aim or ambition, yet they would come together if their common interest in trade would be hurt.

The exact timing of the emergence of the Gujaratis as the principal Indian trading group in the Indian Ocean cannot be conclusively determined nor can we say with precision which community or segment of Gujarati merchants turned out to be the leading economic players in the trading circuit; however, one thing is certain –the Gujarati merchants on the eve of the Portuguese entry in India formed one of

the leading entrepreneurial segments in the Indian Ocean. They were also found in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea regions, and in Southeast Asia. The Gujaratis formed the most powerful community in Malacca and specialized in trade with West Asia and with Egypt. Through their trading posts of Aden and Hormuz, they sent drugs, spices and precious woods, and received opium, rose water, woollen cloth and dyes.<sup>40</sup> The Muslim traders, generally the Bohras and the Khojas, left the country for trade more willingly than others. They had their own ships and their crews were the most able and experienced pilots of the Indian Ocean trading world.<sup>41</sup>

Al Idrisi mentions that the Indians were inclined towards justice and their actions never departed from it. Their good faith, honesty and fidelity to their engagements were well known and this attracted people from other places to come here and indulge in commerce, thus bringing prosperity to the Indians.<sup>42</sup> The Jain merchants of the 11–13th centuries were taught by their religious preachers to follow truthful and peaceful means of earning a decent livelihood and pursuit of profit.<sup>43</sup> The rulers did not view wars to be the only method of conquest,<sup>44</sup> which is suggestive of the dominant peaceful atmosphere promoted by them and which facilitated the intensification of trade in this region. The Arab writers of the 7th and 8th centuries were struck by the tolerance shown by the Indian rulers and the people towards Islam, even though most of them were Hindus.

## Political Scenario

The absence of a strong ruler in Delhi in the 15th century and the decentralized power structure of Gujarat played a very important role in helping the Portuguese gain a foothold in India. The power structure of Gujarat was divided among the Rajputs and Kolis, and the nobles and governors of Gujarat Sultanate. Coastal Gujarat in 15th century was mostly under the control of governors like Malik Gopi and Malik Ayaz, who wielded immense power and often influenced the throne. The subordinate rulers of the Gujarat Sultanate did not necessarily owe their allegiance to the throne, which invited factionalism and fragmentation in the political structure, making it vulnerable.

In the words of M. N. Pearson, the aim of any strong ruler of Gujarat was horizontal territorial expansion rather than greater vertical penetration.<sup>45</sup> The contemporary writings, mainly the *Mirat-i-Sikandri* and the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* do not throw much light on the maritime activities of Gujarat. Though the merchants were a

very influential section of Gujarati society, the Gujarat rulers, like the rulers of other regions of India, were generally negligent towards maritime activities and were indifferent to the need of maintaining a navy. During the rule of Muhammad Begada, the commerce of Cambay and Gujarat as a whole flourished because of the peace and encouragement extended by the Sultan. *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* claimed that craftsmen were highly pleased that the sultan offered them land to settle down in Ahmedabad and Cambay. Mahmud Bigarh and Bahadur, who occupied the Gujarat throne during the Portuguese arrival in India, did not realize the importance of maintaining a navy or resisting them. The merchants were free from any political interference in the pre-Portuguese period in Gujarat. Such was the lack of awareness of the government, that Bahadur gave the Portuguese the occupation of Diu Fort, in lieu of their protection against Humayun, without realizing that he was giving away a strategic location.

However, the Muzaffarid rulers of Gujarat and their power sharers, who benefited immensely from the lucrative maritime trade of the region, strongly resisted the agenda of the Portuguese power sharers like Malik Ayaz, the governor of Diu, even formed a larger mercantile alliance incorporating the support of Venetians, the Mamluks of Egypt, Zamorin of Calicut and the Ottomans in 1508 to fight against the Portuguese and to sabotage their mercantile agenda.<sup>46</sup> But the Asian forces were unable to stand against an aggressive Portuguese attack under Viceroy Almeida. The Viceroy, after having avenged Dabhol for helping Malik Ayaz and Amir Hussain, proceeded to Diu, which he reached on 02 February 1509 and the former completely defeated the joint forces of the Egyptians, the Venetians and the Indians, consequent to which Malik Ayaz agreed to surrender Diu.<sup>47</sup>

The crisis and instability in the political scenario often came between Gujarat and its natural hinterland, which extended from Multan to the Far Eastern regions and the Deccan Plateau area, but trade emanating from the ports of Gujarat thrived.

## Ports and Urban Centres

Trade and commerce in coastal Gujarat led to the development of urban centres across the coast of the region. Gujarat has often been referred to as Cambay. This description of Gujarat seems to be a bit of a misinterpretation of the geography, equating it with almost the entire western coastal region. But at the same time, it showcases the importance of the region. Rashid-ud-din's account (1300) refers to Gujarat as a large country with important centres like Cambay, Somnath, Konkan

and Thane.<sup>48</sup> Though the importance shifted from Broach to Cambay, Diu and Surat, urban centres in the region always played an important role in the Indian Ocean trading network.

Broach was a port town, which was both a major trading centre and at the same time an important textile-manufacturing centre with specialization in fine *baftas* and other cotton goods. They also developed bleaching and dyeing in cotton textiles, which further helped to increase the trade in textile materials. The town depended on its weaving industry. Broach also exported clothes to Mocha, Mozambique and South Java.<sup>49</sup>

In the beginning of the Christian era, Broach had monopolized all export and import trade of North and Central India, a detailed treatment of which is found in the *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, where it was mentioned as Barygaza.<sup>50</sup> The maritime activity of Broach continued unabated and Heun Tsiang, in 640 AD, wrote that the sole profit of the people of Broach comes from the sea.<sup>51</sup> This glory continued until the early medieval period and under the Rajput rulers from Anhilwara, Broach continued to flourish. Al Idrisi, writing in 1178–88, described it as a large and beautiful city, well built in bricks and plaster. Its people were rich and engaged in trade, and were enterprising in speculation and distant expeditions.<sup>52</sup> Considering that the walls of the city were built by stones and the area was deficient in stone, this activity must have been very expensive, indicating the wealth of the people. The importance of Broach is also evident from the fact that Sultan Mohammed Khalji of Malwa invaded Gujarat in 1451 and tried to persuade the Governor of Broach, Malik Sidi Marjan, to surrender the fort to him on promise of favours, as the former believed that Broach would help him to increase his income because of its maritime trade.<sup>53</sup>

The growth of Broach depended greatly on its ideal location and nearness to the sea, which increased its commercial prospects for centuries. Moreover, climatically and production-wise it used to hold a very important position. It was a major producer of cotton yarn and indigo as well as wheat, grains, cotton and butter. The production was mostly aimed for export. The population of Broach consisted of merchants, brokers, storekeepers, grain sellers, exchangers of money, carpenters, blacksmiths, artisans and many more people who were somehow related to its trade.

Cambay or Kambayat or Kimbaya was the most famous and wealthy ports of Gujarat before the Portuguese arrival under the royal patronage of the Muzzafarids, because of its strategic location. Al Masudi, who visited Cambay in 913–914 AD found

that the shores of the Gulf of Cambay were covered with towns and villages, and praised the emeralds of Cambay, which then had a good market at Mecca.<sup>54</sup> When Al Beruni visited India, Cambay had become the chief port of the Solanki dynasty and by the first half of the 12th century, Siddharaj Solanki was controlling the trade routes leading to the Gujarat plains.<sup>55</sup> The writings of Al-Idrisi documented that a large number of ships entered the Gulf of Cambay and a large number of Arab and Persian merchants used to reside in the city. They had their own mosques and were treated kindly by the Hindu king. He claims that the Arab traders were harassed by Jats, Mehds, Rajputs, Barias and Kurks, who operated as far as Socotra but there was peace in Cambay.<sup>56</sup> The ruler Sidhraj Solanki paid great attention to the welfare of the Arab merchants and allowed them to build mosques in his kingdom.<sup>57</sup> The trade of Cambay increased with the prosperity of the Solanki kingdom. Abdullah Wassaf called Cambay a populous town where the people abounded in wealth and luxuries. Cambay, according to him, had a trade of horses with Persian isles, Bahrain and Hormuz. During the reign of Arabak Abu Bakr, 10,000 horses worth 22,000,000 *dinars* were imported to Cambay and ports of Malabar. These sums were paid out of the funds of Hindu temples and from taxes attached to the temples.<sup>58</sup>

Marco Polo<sup>59</sup> described the city as one of the most important manufacturing centres for commodities like sandals and sleeping mats embroidered with gold and silver. Great quantities of indigo were manufactured and there was abundance of cotton cloth, as well as of wool. Dresses made from skins were exported and in return Cambay used to receive gold, silver, copper and *tutty*.<sup>60</sup> In the 12th century, rice, wheat and Indian cane are mentioned as the chief exports of Cambay, although merchandise of every kind and from every country was found in the town.<sup>61</sup> One of the most important factors for the commercial development of Cambay was its prosperous hinterland. Tome Pires and James Forbes described Cambay as a region that was abundant in all kinds of wheat, barley, millet, vegetables and fruits.<sup>62</sup> Carnelians, agates and the beautifully variegated stones improperly called *mocha* stones, formed a valuable part of the trade.<sup>63</sup> Cambay exported beads to Aden and East Africa.<sup>64</sup>

From Cambay, Indian pilgrims to Mecca boarded their ships, a distinction which was later taken over by Surat during the time of Akbar. Also, pilgrims from the Southeast Asia used to go to Mecca through the port of Cambay, re-loading the goods

required for the journey. This gave an immense importance to Cambay and also helped in the growth of its economy.<sup>65</sup>

Cambay was not only commercially developed on the eve of the Portuguese arrival but was also militarily well equipped with horsemen and many more artillery with other warlike devices. It also had many caparisoned horses and beautifully curved weapons like daggers, swords, lances and armour. Not only Indians but also Arabs, Persians, Turks, Khorasans and people from many other races were employed under them.<sup>66</sup>

Eventually, Cambay faced decline due to the problem of heavy siltation at its mouth, as large ships were unable to enter the port city and had to tranship their goods from subsidiary ports like Gogha. This was a major reason for the decline of Cambay and rise of other port cities like Diu and Surat. However, Cambay on the eve of the Portuguese arrival continued to remain one of the most important port towns, a prestige that it lost to Diu later when the Portuguese occupied the latter.

Diu gained importance as it had a very good harbour and was outside the influence of the dangerous tides and currents of the Gulf of Cambay. The port brought in large amount of revenue to its rulers by virtue of the heavy and precious goods loaded and unloaded there. Duarte Barbosa called the governor of Diu, Malik Ayaz, a strong industrious man with very strong artillery, which was renewed on a regular basis. He also had many rowing galleys, which were well designed and well equipped; gunners were always present near the harbour.<sup>67</sup> Under his rule, Diu prospered and around 1500 it started to displace Cambay as the great transshipment centre and market of Gujarat. Malik Ayaz, the governor of the Muzaffarids at Diu, promoted and initiated its external trade and its urbanization process in the attempt to develop it as a rival to Surat and Champaneer.<sup>68</sup> Malik Ayaz maintained a lavish proto court, to fortify Diu, to establish a strong fleet for its defence and maintained his influence at the sultan's court by heavy bribing and present giving.<sup>69</sup> He made Diu the first naval and merchant port of Arabian Sea. The day when the Portuguese attacked Diu in 1524, the army of Malik Ayaz was 3760 men, with 1850 cavaliers, 1360 lascars and four special bodies of Khorasani, Gujarati, Sindhi, Farooqi and Rumi fighters.<sup>70</sup> He is said to have never imposed any undue taxes and ensured compliance with rules relating to the safety of sea farers and their cargoes. Despite all the success he enjoyed, he never demanded an independent state or autonomy, and always accepted the overlordship of the Gujarat Sultanate. But due to the prosperity, many old ports lost their prominence and one among them was Surat under Malik Gopi.

The Portuguese leadership was also dissatisfied with him, as he stood as a protector of Diu and this hampered their interests in the region.<sup>71</sup> During his last 13 years, Diu survived two attacks by the Portuguese. At that time, the Portuguese were invincible at sea. Albuquerque had commented that Malik Ayaz was neither a suave courtier nor a person skilled in deception.<sup>72</sup> Ayaz was a very ambitious and world-class leader who, a year before he died, tried to prevent the Portuguese from building a base at Chaul, which is located near Diu.<sup>73</sup> He thought that his control over Diu could be well maintained only by keeping the Portuguese as far away as possible from his base; however, the equations very soon changed and Malik Ayaz fell out of favour with the sultan, who later was compelled to hand over Diu to the Portuguese by mid-1530s.

## Conclusion

On the eve of the Portuguese arrival in India, round the Cape of Good Hope, coastal Gujarat had a developed economy and society. With a vast hinterland stretching from the Ganga delta in the east, Deccan in the south and Kashmir in the north, it catered as the outlet for the luxurious rulers and nobles of the Delhi Sultanate, and its overland trading network extended from the Persian Gulf to the Southeast Asia and beyond. The merchants worked as communities or individuals and were organized into guilds. One of the most important reasons why Gujarat flourished was because of its ambitious and entrepreneurial merchants and traders whose presence was documented in the Indian Ocean region from ancient times. In Gujarat, purely internal forces used to work towards market intensification, accumulation of merchant capital, monetization, the guild system of artisans, and in the growth of the urban centres and the urban craft system.<sup>74</sup> But the Gujaratis, like other Indians, did not realize the importance of maintaining a navy or protecting their coastal areas. The lack of data on the maritime activities of the period in the contemporary official literature also shows a general negligence in the maritime affairs within the ruling class. The factionalism and decentralized nature of the Gujarati Sultanate and lack of political foresight of the Indian ruling class made the situation favourable for the Portuguese. The Portuguese, with naval supremacy, superior technologies and political leadership were able to gain control over the Arabian Sea as well as the Indian Ocean. The Gujarati Sultanate did not interfere until and unless their interests were hampered. The real sufferers were the merchants who had to face the Portuguese armada and their controlling policies. The opposition from the Indian rulers and

merchants towards the Portuguese mercantile activities was more economical rather than political. Gujarati society did not act as a unified society against the European aggression and the internal dynamics of the region paved the way for the Portuguese control of Gujarat.

The Portuguese came through the seas and thus began the age of European dominance in the Indian subcontinent, which continued for around 450 years, changing the course of India's history. The case of Gujarat stands true even today, as it showed the importance of maritime diplomacy and the need to secure the maritime frontiers.

## Notes

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