

Trade and Merchant Communities in Konkan from 14th- 17th century

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Abstract: The objective of my proposed research is to study the bilateral relationship between the trade-commerce and socio-cultural impact and transformation in medieval Konkan coast. Western and Peninsular India remained centre of attraction for traditional economist for its maritime trade via its varied port towns along with complex trading networks. What is left behind is the multi-dimensional role a trade plays (inland and maritime) in making a region as social-cultural-economic-political zone. The interlinkages and multi-layered peaceful interactions and contestations between these zones are contributing factors in diversity of the region and its inhabitants.

In temporal, the research will be covering the period 14th to 17th century, possibly early 18th century. In terms of geography, the focus remains on the Konkan coast along with its trading activities and the actors involved in it I would like to enquire into the following issues:

What were the cultural dimensions of the economic transactions in medieval Konkan?; How the maritime and inland trades guide the relations between various merchant groups?; What was the demographic ratio of Hindu and Muslim merchants and what kind of relations they had with the state?; What were the conditions that led to peaceful coexistence, alliances and contestations between the Konkani and Malabar merchants?; What actually constitutes 'Konkani' identity? Was there any single or combination of certain commodities that contributed to the prosperity of the region?

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INTRODUCTION

In the words of Annand Ram 'Mukhlis' (d. 1751), an accountant from northern India, Tijirat (trade) is better than imarat (governance) in several degrees, it leads to the life of independency, accumulation of wealth which is lawful and basis of livelihood.¹

Mukhlis being accountant was right in accessing the caliber of trade with respect to the governance (imarat), without considering the complex, fluctuating nature of trade as well with competing parties subject to varied restrictions, like imarat.

Thus, viewing trade as simple exchange process between two parties is too simplified understanding, it does not take into account the multiple roles any economic activities play in shaping the region economically, culturally and demographically as well.

Here, I would like to broaden the definition of trade and bring in its multi-dimensional roles and influences.

The apparent trade networks and economic transactions are easy to understand, beneath this lies a complex (asymmetrical; horizontal and hierarchical) interactions between two interacting parties, who carry with them a baggage full of belief systems; religious affiliations; social and cultural setup and various mediums and modes of transactions. Thus, with exchange of commodities these baggages eventually get exchanged (intentionally or unintentionally). The pragmatic considerations in various kinds of exchanges and interactions itself shapes the mode of actions and reactions.

For the purpose of the present research, the focus will remain on the coast of Konkan and various merchants' groups operating within the region during 14th to 17th century and their interaction via trade (intra and inter).

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The dominant role that peninsular India plays in the economic history is evident from the number of works published on Indian Ocean; Arabian Sea; the Coromandel and the Malabar Coast and varied merchant groups operating in the region concerned. Majority of these works analyze the trade from purely economic perspective, not to undermine the quality of these works as such kinds of analyses are itself challenging- compilation and analysis of scattered evidences is almost like solving a Jig-saw puzzle where at times pieces are lost or misfit.

Like Pliny's *Natural History* says "*But Sea of Arabia is still more fortunate; for it sends us pearls. And at the lowest computation, India and the Seres and that Peninsula put together drain our empire of one Hundred million of sesterces every year. That is the price that our luxuries and our womankind cost us!*"²

Mention should be made of Ranabir Chakravarti's *Exploring Early India Upto 1300 A.D.; Merchants of the Konkan; Coastal Trade and Voyages in Konkan; Trade, Traders and Politics in India; Europe's India* and many such works on trade, commerce and merchant communities, apart from him Satish Chandra's *Indian Ocean* is widely popular among scholars who are working on economic history, other scholars who has widen the scope of their research to bring in the global aspect of economic exchanges like K.N. Chaudhuri's *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*; Ashin Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson's *India and Indian Ocean* while Om Prakash's *Bullion for Goods; Asia and Pre-Modern World Economy; Trading World of Indian Ocean* which analyze trade both intensively and extensively as flow of money economy and lastly Sanjay Subrahmanyam's *The Political Economy of Commerce Aspects of State Formation in South India and Southeast Asia*, other works that can be cited here as well are as follows: James Trace's *The Political Economy of the Merchant Empires, State Power and World Trade* and many works of Irfan Habib, Tapan Raychaudhuri and Sushil Chaudhary.

The center of focus to economic historians remained on the regions like Bengal; Gujarat; Rajasthan; or either the coast of Malabar or Coromandel.

The focus of the above cited works remained on one side of the coin, probably the dominant side. The other side of the coin is equally interesting to look into, the socio-cultural aspects of the economy, what were the social groups that were carrying out the trade? and how their family networks and religious affiliations provided spurt or hindered the process?

What so far has been little discussed is the social basis of economic activities that are partial contributors for the prosperity and fall of trade and traders rest half lies with the political stability or upheavals, economic prosperity or degradations and the will of the ruler and ruled.

Here, lies the objective of the research.

CONTEXT

Konkan is a strip of land between Sahyadri mountains ranges in the east and Arabian Sea in the west, covering the modern states of Maharashtra; Goa and Karnataka. The narrow coastline is provided with creeks that eventually was favorable for many littoral cities like (north to south, here certain ports of Gujarat are also added: Diu and Cambay(Gujarat); Daman; Sanjan; Bassein; Bombay; Sthanaka; Alibaugh; Chaul; Zanjira; Banakot; Khed; Chiplun; Sanghmeshwa; Ratagiri; Vijaydurg; Vengurla; Goa; Bhatkal; Udipi; Manglore. They became site for cross-cultural encounters via trading activities and permanent or semi-permanent colonies of diverse merchant groups.

Konkan, as a geographical entity was not stable but subject to contractions and expansions in various time period under various contemporary travelers, like Ibn Battuta's map in his *Rehla*, marks Konkan as a small region, while the Malabar coast is stretched from Goa to tip of India, for others just above the Malabar cost lies Konkan, above which lies some another coast. Thus, there are some overlaps between the regions that fall under Konkan and Malabar Coast, for the present research, I will be considering the point from Daman to Mangalore as Konkan, but few ports of Gujarat like Diu; Surat and Cambay will also be taken into consideration owing to their strong connection with the west coast of India.

The importance of the region can be concluded from the fact that 6th century writer Cosmas in his *Christian Topography* talks important centers in south Asia like Sindhu; Saurashtra; Kalyan; Sindabor (in Goa) and five Marts of Malabar. He talks of Sindabor which was important port in the Konkan having trade relations with Gujarat and Malabar.³ Till 6th century one finds that the western peninsula was hub of Christians (those who migrated from Persia) from Sassanid Empire. This is proved by findings of archaeology in south west India and Sri Lanka- 9 crosses with Pahlavi (archaic Persian) script engraved.⁴

From 8th century onwards Muslim traders (till 13th century acted itinerant merchant groups after which one come across their permanent settlements at various regions also came in forefront- was not a homogeneous group in terms of their venture; resources and collaborations with the others.

From late 15th century a new dimension added with coming of the Portuguese as new trading groups. The initial impetus provided by Barthomew Dias who rounded the Cape of Good Hope (1488) to find an all sea route to the East and the final landing of Dome Gama on the port of Calicut (1498) which further complicated the situation. The ultimate aim that surrounds all their activities was to monopolize the spice trade of the East which was in the hands of Muslim merchants operating between the west coast of India and Red Sea.

They resorted to various means ranging from peace to violence, matrimonial alliances and political diplomacy, religious freedom to forceful conversions. The means to have upper hand over the others shaped the nature and extent of Portuguese empire in Asia from 1498.

Thus, the Portuguese colonial history is an example of Quadruple struggle between the Portuguese traders-colonial traders-the native rulers-missionaries.

The guiding force behind the intense competition to monopolize various trade routes lies in the traded commodities especially Pepper and Spices, apart from them ivory; cotton, opium; precious stones generally termed as prohibited items.

King Manuel in 1520 codified the prohibition which says:

*'We forbid and order that no captain, factor, secretary of a factory, or any other official concerned with trade or justice, or any other person of whatever rank or status he may be, whether Christian or Muslim or any other, trade, or cause to be traded, or transport, pepper, cloves, ginger, cinnamon, mace, nutmeg, lacer, silk, or borax, nor in any way buy any of these things'*⁵

Such kinds of restrictions upon the concerned items by the state verify the fact of the status of these items in the global trading networks involving actors like Arabs; Portuguese; Jews; St. Thomas Christians; private traders; petty rajas of native kingdoms.

How Konkan contributed to Portuguese was not by providing these precious items of trade but as base through which they could expand and secure their position as traders in the global context. In the above-mentioned various ports accompanied by forts that Portuguese built starting with conquest of Goa (1510), and eventually moving northwards. These series of forts along the western coast of India and in other colonies of Portuguese empire were their socio-political-economic hub which at times was turned semi or permanent settlements or markets/qashbahs.

The western coast acted as an entreport, mid way between the Iberian Peninsula and the 'Spice Islands' of the southeast Asia, apart from this its strategic location and topography also made it a preferable site to merchants. The creeks along the coastline allowed the formation of small navigable rivers which were the links between the port and the inland areas of- the former dominated by the Portuguese settlers and the later by various indigenous merchant communities.

Portuguese empire in India can be said to be as one of the longest one, ending with the liberation of Goa in 1960's, these centuries of domination witnessed number of travelers who witnessed their reign personally or heard it indirectly, while equally important were the corresponding letters between the Governor and the King, say Manuel and Albuquerque, and also between the Governor and Factors posted at various factories say, Barbosa and Cunha.

Here, I would like to discuss on the nature of sources available for the reconstruction.

Keeping in view the long period of Portuguese domination (1498-1960's in Indian context) and number of port towns on the Konkan coast, the genre; nature and language of sources at our dispensation are diverse, in the genre of archaeological sources there are excavation and annual reports, inscriptions, numismatic evidences that are scientific in nature but are very much in synchronism with the history.

Shifting to historical sources, the bulks are travel accounts of missionaries, prior to Portuguese domination like that of *travels of Friar Odoric of Pordenone*, a semi-saint from Italy, who started his long journey from home country towards east (1316/18- 1328), though on a religious mission which would impact his world view and narration of events and people, but his account is in a sense that it give details of Tana (Thana), demography of its inhabitants, religious contestations and interestingly the kind of ships that exists (without iron), apart from it the Malabar and pepper and its transportation to Upper India (China).

But, he was not the first one to talk about the western coast; it was in 6th century that Cosmas an Egyptian monk's *Christian Topography*, which talks of Malabar, pepper and also of Cathay (china).

Arabs as known in history for their navigation and cartographical skills which directly contributed to them as good traders and seafarers who continues to dominate the western coast and its trade before the coming of Portuguese (did not ended abruptly but a close tussle between to monopolize the spice trade).

Their importance in 10th and 11th century in the Indian politics can be concluded from the fact that Rashtrakuta ruler Indra III appointed Arab Muslim named Madhumati (Muhammad) as the governor of Sanjana-Mandala in 926 A.D. Similarly, Kadambas of Goa under Jayakesi I appointed Arab merchant Sadhana as governor of the port Gopakappatitinam in 1053 A.D (he was grandson of Madhumati).

Thus, one can conclude that the long alliance between the native rulers and the Arabs became the cause of their influence in various spheres (the policy of appeasement and liberty followed by the rulers were guided by the pragmatic concerns on their part in return of benefits).

In 14th century, Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta's *Rehla* gives vivid description of various regions that he visited, but for present research his description of Malabar and Konkan is important for us, he talks about Sandbur (goa); Calicut; Kollam while on his way to china as an ambassador.

Rise of Portuguese to power was followed by series of forts at peninsular India, invested with a Governor and no. of factors, who consistently gives details about happenings in their region, while the governor reports all matters to the king of the Portugal.

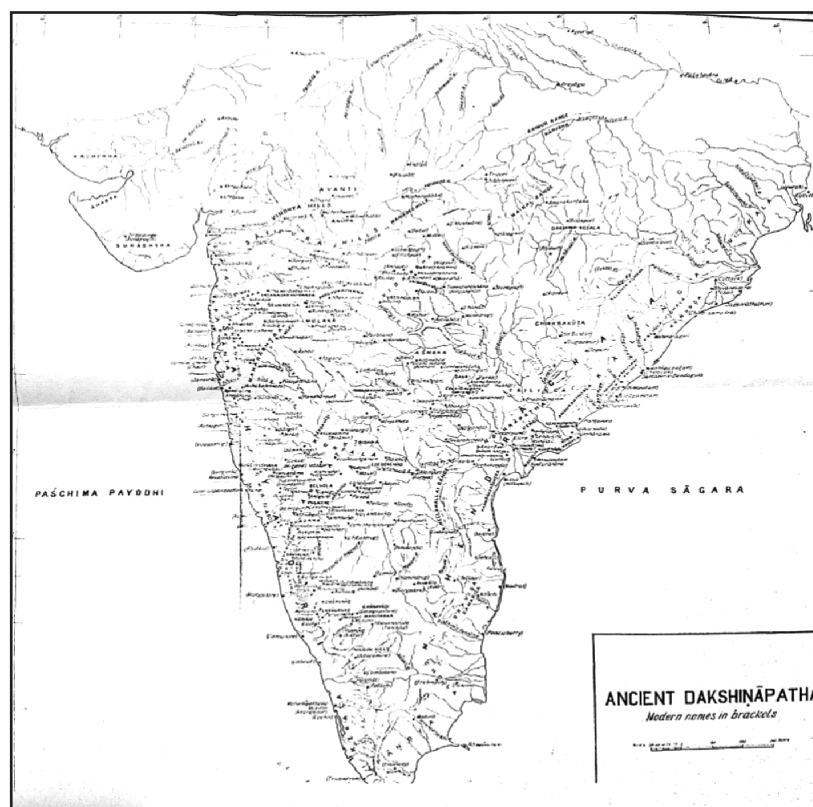
Such kinds of dealings took the form of letters and reports which are mostly in Portuguese, now available in translation as well. One such and the earliest example of Portuguese travels in India is *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, a factor at the Cannore factory during early 16th century. Other example is that of Gerson Cunha, a Goan Physician and a factor who's *Antiquity of Chaul and Bassain* is a good survey of two most important ports of Portuguese.

Letters of Albuquerque to king Manuel I and letters of medieval Jewish traders can be used both for economic and political reconstruction.

Some non Portuguese accounts of 16th and 17th century are travels of John Fryer; Pietro delle Vella; Linschoten.

Thus, the varied nature of sources available for the trade and commerce in the west coast of India and the Portuguese rule are itself reflective of the importance of the region as an socio-economic hub and the demand of traded items, where each and every travelers who stays there or passes by it does not abstain from describing it. But, reading them cautiously at times 'along the archival grain' (Ann Stoler) while at other times 'against the archival grain' or as it is popularly said reading between the lines.

Irrespective of all these limitations, these sources cannot be completely neglected for they form valuable part of Portuguese and economic history.



Source: G. Yazdani, *Early history of Deccan*

The Emergence of Konkan as an Economic-geography: pre-Portuguese era (8th to 14th century)

*The most notable places of the trade in India are these: Sindu, Orrhotha, Calliana, Sibor, and then the five marts of Male which export pepper; Parati, Mangarouth, Salopatana, Nalopatana, Poudopatana. Then out in the ocean, at the distance of about five days and night from the continent, lies Sielediba, the is Taprobane.*⁶

—Cosmas's Christian topography.

This is what an Egyptian monk in 6th century wrote about his observation during his travels. Therefore, the very mention of Sibor (Goa) is an indicator of the importance of west coast of India, especially certain ports like the Sibor and marts of Malabar for its export of Pepper as an important item of trade.

The present chapter aims to bring out the nature of political and economic setup in the Konkan region from 8th to 14th century.

It would highlight the political collaborations between various groups of merchants and between the polity and economy that forms the basis of their prosperity, and at times contributed to their downfall.

Keeping in view the long time frame (8th – 14th century), the chapter has been divided into two parts or rather two ways of looking from two different kinds of sources- Archaeological (inscriptions) to deal with the period from 6th to 12th century and for the period of 14th century travel account of Ibn Battuta has been used.

WESTERN COAST AS A POLITICAL SPHERE

Before, I discuss any inscriptional evidences of western coast or Konkan in particular first it important to know the political history of the region, the dynasties that asserted its influence over various regions and their alliances and conflict with the other dynasties the basis of any apparent political struggle but underneath rests the larger motives, to occupy areas that were strategically located, that would serve as a political-economic hub to various trading groups. Thus, as the title of the work – 'Tijirat and Konkan' - says we come across varied instances of close compact between the political and economic power or one can say the interdependence of two.

Western peninsular India was site of dynasties that either ruled independently or acted as feudatories to others and eventually established their own independent house.

The political contestations and alliances are multi-layered and speak of the region as a whole entity.

Here, the word western coast or Konkan has been used flexibly as there were temporal and regional variants to what is called Konkan, at one point some primary sources uses 'Konkan' for one particular region while the general understanding for Konkan is a long belt from Daman to Mangalore. The varied usages are evident of complex understanding of the region.

To begin with Satavahana after downfall of Mauryas, whose empire included some portions of Deccan as evident from Rock Edicts from Maski; Brahmagiri and at other places, has ruled from 300B.C – 300A.D.⁷

They were followed by Vakatakas and later the Chalukya of Badami; Rashtrakuta; Silharas of Konkan and Kohlapur; Chalukyas of Kalyani and Yadavas of Devgiri.

The founding stone of the Satavahan was laid by Simuka, he was followed by many might rulers amongst them being Gautamiputra Satakarni; Pulumavi. The dynasty ended in 3rd century when their feudatories in region of Andhra, Karnataka and Maharashtra uprooted them founding the house of Ikshvaku in Andhra; Pallavas in South and Abhiras in northern Maharashtra, Konkan and Gujarat.

The other dynasties that emerge in Deccan were the Chutu in Karnataka; Kadambas in Vanavasi and Mundas in Vidarbha.⁸

It was Vakatakas, the major dynasty that rose to power after Satavahanas in Andhra region, the foundation was laid by Vindyashakti. It has matrimonial alliances with the Guptas and the Kadambas.

In the last phase of their rule it broke down into two branches- Nandivardhana-Pravarapura and Vatsagulma respectively. The political upheaval provided opportunity to the Chalukyas of Badami (Karnataka) who rose in 6th century and continued to rule till 8th century when they were uprooted by Rashtrakutas- a feudatory from different branch of Chalukyas, they themselves were uprooted later by Chalukyas of Kalyani.⁹

Amongst Badami Chalukyas few popular rulers were Pulakesin I; Kirtivarman I; Mangalesa I and Pulakesin II the most ambitious who took possession of regions like Karnataka; Kuntala; Lata; Karhata; Vanavasi; Goa; Konkan; Mahisamandal.

Rashtrakutas took over Badami Chalukyas in 8th century A.D. The foundation of it was laid by Dantidurga, others include Dantiverman; Indra Prchakaraja; Govindraja; Indraraja; Krishna I; Dhurva; Amoghavarsa I Nrupatunga.

The maladministration and other corrupt practices provided opportunity to Kalyani Chalukyas under Taila II who dethroned Rashtrakutas in 973 A.D.¹⁰

The other dynasty of importance was Silahara with six branches. Three branches ruled over Maharashtra; North and South Konkan, the rest in Kohlapur, Satara and Belgaon. Of the Northern Konkan Branch Kapardi was the founder, he got the region as a reward from Rashtrakuta king, he made Sthanaka-Thana as his capital. In case of South Konkan, though conquered by Rashtrakuta Dantidurga but to administer it Silhara Sannaphulla was appointed with capital at Balipatana. The other branch of this dynasty was that of Silharas of Kolhapur.¹¹

By this small political history one can conclude that the coastal western India was not a political stable zone, which owes to its strategic location both beneficial for defense from internal and external threat, adding to this coastal areas and creeks forms basis of economic prosperity of numerous dynasties precisely intra and inter trade via ports.

Now, let's look at various epigraphic evidences to assert the importance of Konkan, the political actors involved and ports and trading and other social groups.

KONKAN IN THE INSCRIPTIONS

International trade and complex commercial networks associated with some symbolic authority are generally credited to western powers, who not only made best out of the available opportunities, at times created new one through skillfully manipulating people and power, but also made East 'Realized' its potentials.

This was also true with discovery of Cape route, arrival of Portuguese on the western coast and its sudden rise as the centre of the trade (inland and maritime).

But, was that really the case for Konkan region and its varied ports and traders?

Thus, this section tries to bring out the importance of western coast in general and Konkan in particular during pre-Portuguese years. For the purpose few selected inscriptions from the reign of Rashtrakutas; Silharas; Kadambas; Chalukyas and Yadavas has been selected published under various volumes of *Epigraphy Indica*.

As shown in the starting of the chapter, 6th century monk Cosmas does give references to varied parts of western coast which corresponds to few ports of Malabar and Konkan.

Such records does not confines to the writings of western writers, but a century later in 7th century *Aihole inscription* of Chalukya ruler Pulakesin II is of importance to assert the significance of native records. A brief description is useful for the temporal and regional knowledge of the source.

The inscription is on the east side wall of an old temple called Meguti, at Aihole in the Hungund taluka of the Bijapur. It contains 19 lines of writing, of which nearly the whole of line 18 and the short line 19 apparently are later additions. The characters belong to the southern class of alphabets; they are of the regular type of the chalukya records.¹²

The inscription is a poem by Ravikirti, who during the reign of Pulakesin Satyasraya (western chalukya- Pulukesin II), whom he describe as his patron, founded the temple of jain prophet- Jinendra, on which the inscription is engraved, uses the occasion to eulogies him via *prashasti*. As for its date, it corresponds to A.D. 634-35.¹³

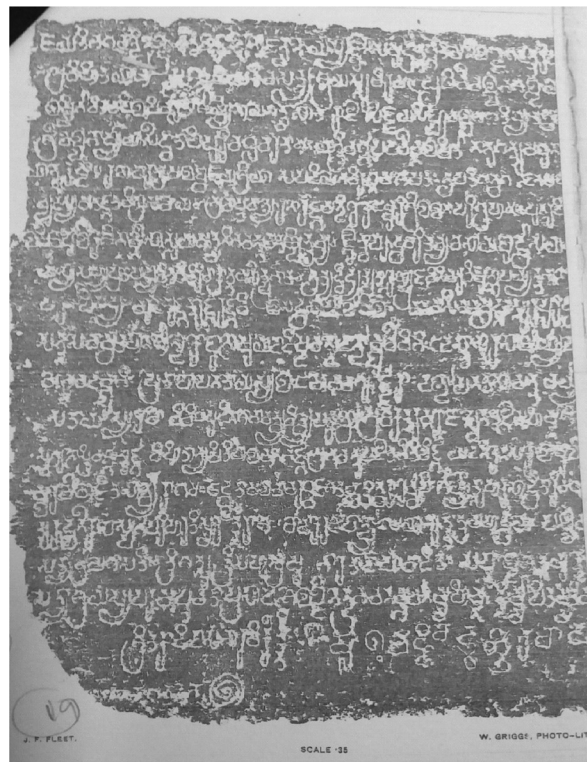
Now, coming back to the content of the inscription, following English translation of Fleet, verse (20) and (21)

Verse 20- '*In the konkanas the impetuous wave of the forces directed by Him speedily swept away the rising wavelets of pool- the Mauryas.*'

Verse 21- '*when, the radiant like the destroyer of pura, He besieged Puri, the Fortune of the western sea, with hundreds of ships in appearance like arrays of rutting elephants, the sky, dark-blue as a young lotus and covered with tiers of massive clouds, resembled the sea, and the sea was like the sky*'

Thus, as the inscription records the name of Konkan is which the patron of Ravikirti took it from Mauryas. One can conclude that the western coast was a politically contested site, for its strategic value both from the viewpoint of trade and politics.

Verse 21, state the name of Puri, it has been identified with the port town of thane, as also the inscription states with ships in number.



Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India

By 7th century A.D., western coast, Konkan and Thane were to some extent important politically and economically to then ruling dynasties. Nor the port of Puri (thane) was an isolated and passive one, as the presence of many hundred ships, is also indicative of brisk maritime activities-trade; navigation or for waging wars. This native piece of evidence can be cited as one of the earliest inscriptional pieces of evidence to record of Konkan and some of its ports (with different terminology).

During the above-mentioned period, the concerned region would have not developed so much as to give a detail description of the port or the town. Therefore, we come across a stray reference to the 'Konkan', not to be used in modern sense, for the geographical settings vary from time, for dynasties. Here, it could have meant a small area and not long coastline. Then, it can really be said that it was with coming of Portuguese, the status quo was established. It is true that with coming of Portuguese western coast became the hub of major trading activities, especially in certain items like pepper; spices, cloth and other precious metals. But one should view that arrival of western trading groups as the new challengers in the already complex situation with heterogeneous traders of different nationalities. Thus, before the arrival of Portuguese, the western coastal trade was the monopoly of Arabs, operating from the port of Aden to Southeast Asia. The urge to dominate western coast which acted at times as an entrepôt for the Arabs, arise due to the presence of other traders both natives and foreigners like Jews; Saraswat Brahmins; converted Muslims; St. Thomas Christians and other petty traders. The fear of Portuguese of the Muslims in general and Arabs in particular is testified from arrival of Vasco da Gama at the port of Calicut in 1498, he notes the Arabs domination not only in the trade but also to some extent manipulating politics to their own need.

The presence of non-natives particularly the Muslims is also evident from the inscriptions of the Rashtrakutas of Manyakhet.

On is the Charter from Chinchani, in the Thane district. They are 9 plates that form five different records. The two of five charters belong to reign of Indra III (915-28 A.D) and Krishna III (939-67 A.D) respectively.¹⁴

These are three plates each measuring 9.6 inches in length and 5.8 inches in height. They are joined together by a ring via hole in the plates. The inscription is altogether 67 lines, 16 lines on the first plate and 19 and 16 on the obverse and reverse of the second plate and 16 lines on the third plate¹⁵ the date of charter is 926 A.D.

This particular charter is interesting; apart from giving genealogy may be contemporary Yadavas, other political competitors as the general content of any inscription. To our interest is verse- 16-20, that introduces a subordinate ruler to Rashtrakuta Indra III (915-28 A.D), named Madhumati who belongs to the Tajik community and that he has received entire *mandala* of Samyana from Krishnaraj (878-915 A.D.).¹⁶

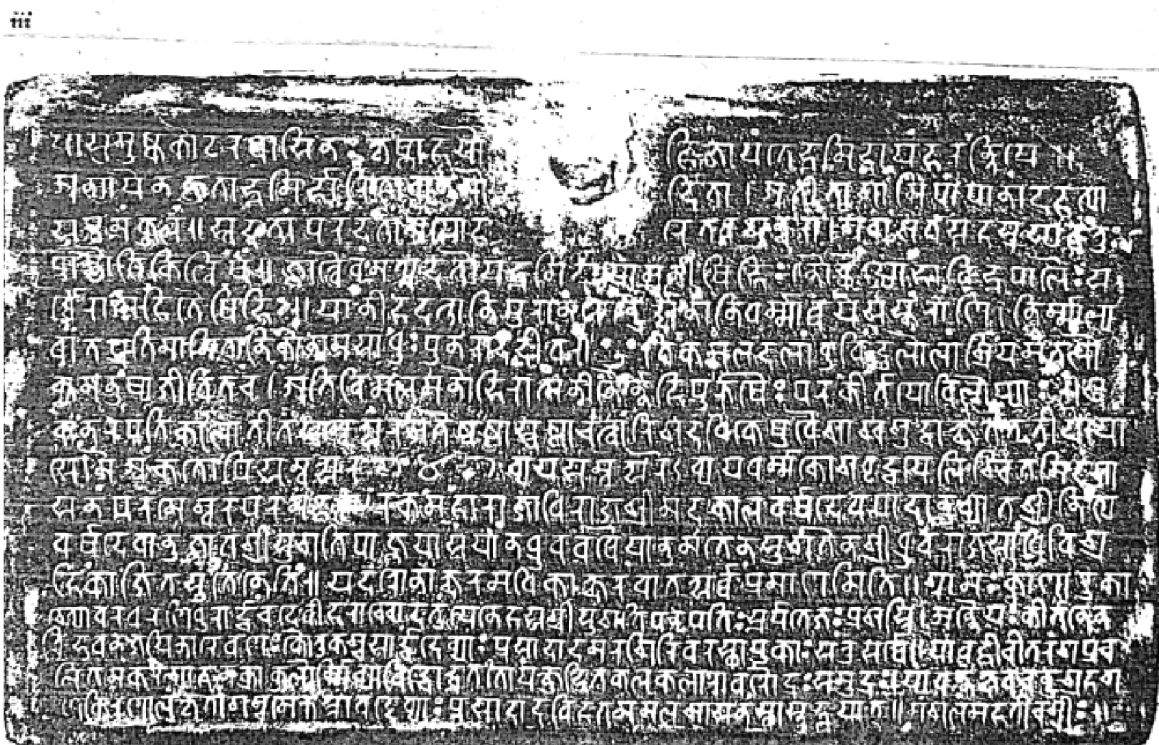
There is no doubt that Madhumati is Sanskritized version of Muhammad. He was appointed a governor of Samyana under Krishna II and continued under Indra II. It is said he conquered chiefs of all harbours of the neighborhood on behalf of his own master and placed his own officials on them. His genealogy is also given, he is son of Hiyarahara (no Arabic equivalent is found).¹⁷

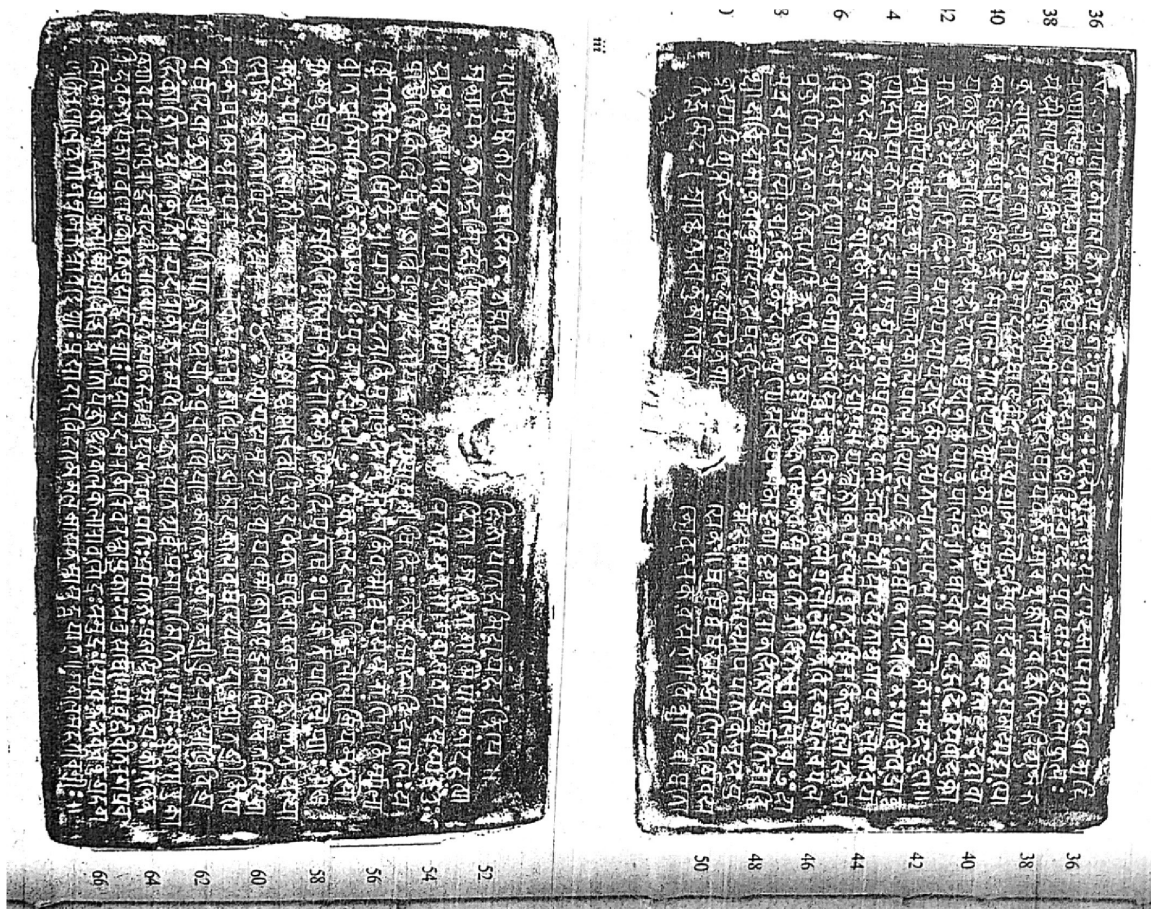
The verse 20 also says that he established free ferry on two streams- near Samyana, and feeding house at Samyana, where Sali rice, curries and ghee was catered free of cost.

Verse 22, states that a Brahman name Narayan Bhatta's son Annaiya was friend of Madhumati's minister Puvvaiya and he constructed a temple at Samyana, verse 23 states that he created a landed endowment with Indra's permission. Verse 27, Madhumati made a grant of village Kanaduka situated within Samyana mandala with permission of Indra III along with half a Dhura in the village of Devihara.

The purpose of this endowment was to use the income generated for the keep up of the temple and offering prayers.¹⁸

The governorship of Tajik under Rashtrakutas is first of its kind and testifies writings of other Muslim travelers. Rashtrakutas appointed Qazis to look after the religious and judicial affairs of their Muslim subjects who were mostly Arabs. Also, the name Samyana, applied both to the city and the Mandala is preserved in modern Sanjan (Goa).¹⁹





Courtesy: Archaeological Survey India

In the succeeding centuries (9th century), pivotal role was played by Arabs and other non-indigenous played peninsular India, ranging from extensive trading activities to influencing the political successions, became major cause of Portuguese envoy of so called 'Muslims', as their potent obstacle to their economic interests, this will be discussed in detail in the succeeding chapter.

As early as 9th century, Arabs had strong footing in the region to an extent of receiving an important post of governor, acting as chief to all harbors and lastly performing charity (irrespective of his religion affiliation).

The backdrop of such kind of nexus is to be viewed from the perspective Arab's status and contribution in peninsular India, the polity-economy interdependence and strategic role of Konkan coast in wider trading network should be taken into consideration juxtaposing Arabs in then peninsular India.

All these were contributing factors for the cross-cultural/cosmopolitan nature of western coast of India.

Of the port towns in the Konkan coast, we come across references to Samyana (modern Thane), like in the Chinchani copper plates not of Rashtrakutas but of under Silharas. They are three in no. dated 1034 A.D; 1048 A.D; 1053 A.D respectively. Of these three, two were issued by Modha chief, who was also the ruler of Samyana (Sanjan in the Thane district). The name Modha is derived from Modhere town in Gujarat. Therefore, these three chiefs of Sanjan were either Bania or Brahmin

Here, the copper plate dated 15th September 1034 A.D is discussed issued under Silharas who are entitled as the ruler of North Konkan, they were feudatories under Rashtrakutas as well.

This is single plate with 32 lines in Sanskrit written in prose and verses.

Line 10-14 is interesting, while ruling over Samyana, Chamundaraja passed an order regarding a grant to be made by him to his subordinates and elders of *hamyamana* (Parsee community), to courtiers and officials like Alliya (ali); Mahara and Madhumati (Muhammad), the city elders named *Sreshthin* Kesarin, Suvarna and Kakkala and to merchants like Uva, Somiya.²⁰

Thus, one can again conclude the presence of Arabs as important figures, also it introduces to the presence of Parsee having a respectable position. Sanskrit titles like *shresthi* for the merchant/ traders were equally important to the ruling house of Silharas.

Grants that above mentioned groups received can be placed in the larger geographical context. Silharas ruling from sanjan town in Thane must have been important for them to appease certain section of society particularly that facilitated smooth trading and commercial activities in the region which was strategically located and was the celebrated port of Konkan.

All that binds together varied groups and of varied nationality to each other and with the polity is the pragmatic realization of major political rivalries, more and more accumulation of wealth with depended on the free flow of trade and commerce. Permanent settlements of variety of indigenous and foreign merchants were more beneficial to the state than itinerant groups. Thus, each political contender tries to have a firm based upon which they could rest and expand their power. In case of coastal India, it was trade and benefits attached with it that compel rulers to provide certain privileges to traders, merchants and others associated with the finance in return of cooperation and monetary benefits.

A 12th century grant inscription (1115 A.D) of Silharas of Kolhapur is also worth mentioning where names like *Venugram; Konkan, Kundi; Tagara*, it also ascertains the very existence an importance of Konkan if not as coast, then as a region.

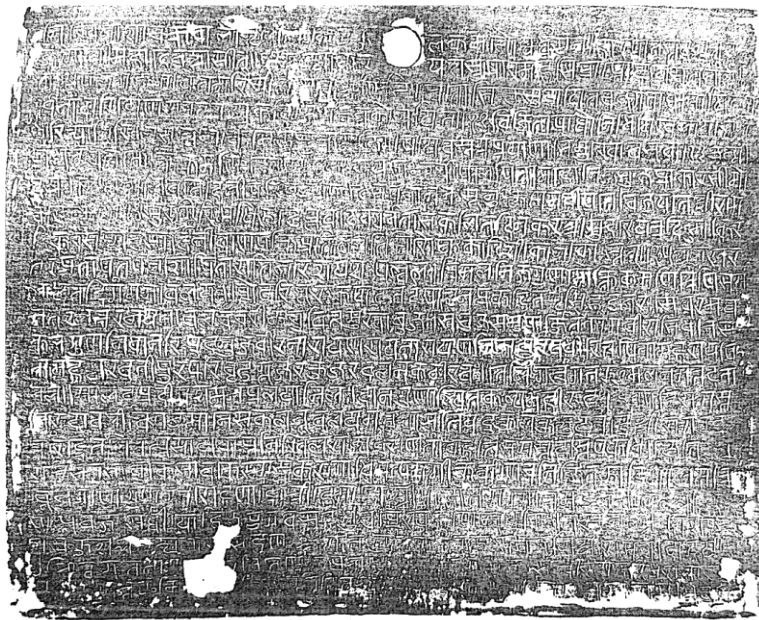
The other being the *Nidagundi inscription of Vikrakadiya VI* and Kadamba Tailapa II dated 1107 A.D. It records the donations made by various traders to Mulasthana god or the main god of the region. It is recorded under reign of western chalukya ruler Vikram VI, under whom the Kadamba prince Tailapa (lord of Banavasi) was ruling over the province of Panumgal. Apart from other names, names of traders with certain affectionate forms like *Malli; anna; aya; dhoni*. Thus, by 12th century, traders particularly in areas of Kadamba's influence acquired wealth and reputation that made them eligible to invest in temple of the native deity and using honoric titles in the inscription. They must have formed a strong support base for the day to day affairs of the state.

Moving on to the next century we come across Thana plate of Yadava king Ramachandra dated 1272 A.D. It states that in the reign of Ramachandra, while Hemadri, the superintendent of all the elephant-riders was acting as chief minister of the kingdom, the village of Vaula was granted to thirty-two Brahmins by Achyuta Nayaka, governor of the Konkan.²¹

Thus, from the above cited inscriptions (9th to 13th century), one conclude, in terms of geography that Konkan like in contemporary times does not from a long coastline but like various inscriptions, it was either a town or a province governed by certain important personality(s) and lastly, if not Konkan in modern sense, references of some of its port towns like Thane, Goa, Konkan, during the above mentioned centuries, it can also be concluded whole coastline was much important even in pre-portuguese era. The quality and quantity of traded items will be discussed in the next section is ample amount of data is available, for which I heavily rely on the travel account of 14th century Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta, who not only gives details information of ranges from topography; climate; settlements; items of trade and other necessary observations that these inscriptions lack, however they can be appreciated for being one amongst the earliest evidences of western coastal towns.



Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India



Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India

MISSIONARIES AND THE TRAVELER: KONKAN IN THE 14TH CENTURY

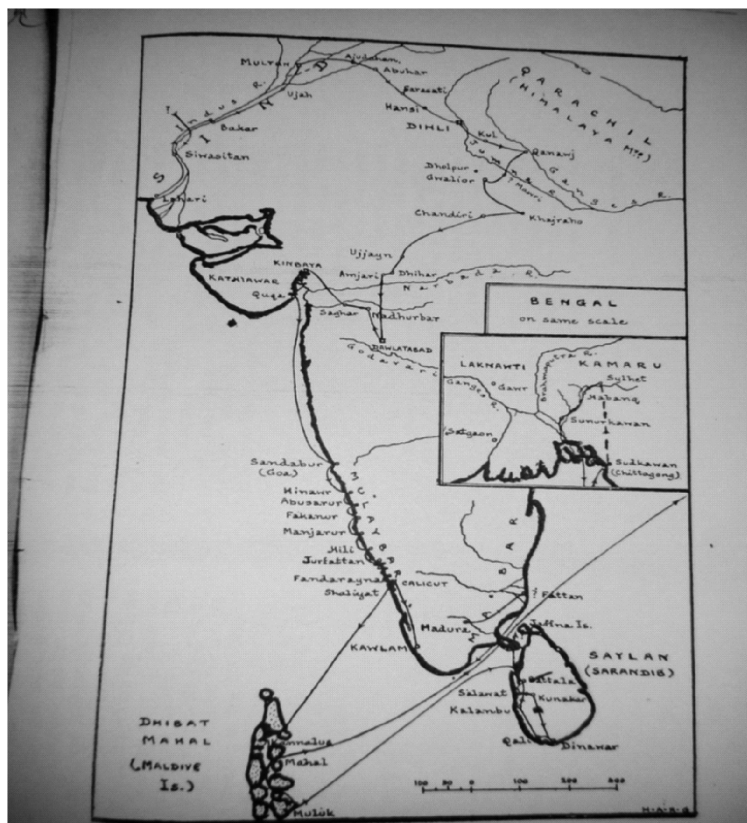
Moving away from inscriptions, this section aims at bringing in limelight the Konkani in 14th century, which later Portuguese took over. For the purpose, I am relying on the accounts of Ibn Battuta; Friar Odoric of Pordenone, letters of Jordanus the Dominican and other scattered data.

For the century concerned very less sources are available here only translated versions have been referred, while those in either Italian; Arabic or in other regional or European languages have been not touched upon due to no knowledge of these languages.

What change and continuity did Konkani observed in the concerned century?

As earlier mentioned about the presence of Muslims (Arabs), dominating the polity and economy, in the preceding centuries, their power and influence continuous to grow in the 14th century as well, which has been testified by accounts of Ibn Battuta who while travelling in Sandapur (Goa), mentions it as an island to which creeks surrounds 32 villages. He also writes, in the midst of this island are two cities, one being made by its Hindu ruler and the other by the Muslims when they first conquered it.²² Here, lies a mosque as big as that of Baghdad, which had been built under the patronage of *Nakhudas* (ship owner) Hassan, father of sultan of Hinavur (south of Goa).²³

Here, one can speculate two things, first in the concerned century the Muslim population must have grown demographically, as the need arises of a large congregational mosque, also they must from now has some permanent settlements, than earlier scenario, this contribute to the second assumption, that the permanent stay must have spurred from the profits associated from maritime trade, either directly as a trader or as ship-owner/ sailor (*Nakhudas/ nauvittakas*), they were ship owning merchants, majority of them were Arabs, whose skills in art of navigation is well known in the history, to an extent when Vasco da Gama sailed, he stopped at the east coast of Africa to hire an expert, Al Majid, an Arab.



Source: Ibn Battuta's Rehla, trans. Mahdi Hasan

Going by above mentioned evidences one might easily conclude the predominance of muslims and cooperation. But, going by Ibn Battuta's account one can say never atleast in the 14th century ruled some of the important towns, like he says, "the sultan of Gogo (goa) is a heathen, named Dunkul who had sworn allegiance to the sultan of India. Similarly, for Malabar, the sultan of Fakanar (modern Barkur) is a heathen named Bas Deo".²⁴

In Malabar and Konkan coast, the disparity between the professional and personal belief was much evident at the level of Faith. Like the Muslim yogi residing in *butkhana* (temple), in Anjidiv, had to hide his faith, which he only reveal to our traveler in symbolic form- pointing towards the sky and *quibla*. His long description of how water was served to Muslims in Malabar coast- pouring into his hand than into any vessel is another indicator of the practice of 'Othering'.²⁵

Thus, one can conclude that the pragmatic concerns tied together people of two different Faiths, of two nationalities. The cooperation was at professional level where the knowledge, skills, and connections of the Arabs were necessary to carry out long distance maritime trade and Arabs needed alliance the natives in order to have good base at the local level in polity and economy, without which they could not survive. Also, it would be wrong to assume that the differences often turn into conflicts. We have come across instances of Muslim governors giving patronage to temples, presence of temples. In case of Goa, where community of Saraswat Brahmins dominated the finances and interiors of the island, the growing profits of trade in both Malabar and Konkan, must have lead to intense power struggle to monopolize the trade profits, thus, causing some kind of differences. As far as the communal level differences are concerned Ibn Battuta does not provide much details of it, for fear of Muslim yogi in Anjidiv is a matter of debate.

Majority of sources on western coast of India are silent about Konkan coast, or if not the references are scattered as seen in case of Ibn Battuta's account. The focus of other sources remains on the Malabar Coast. Thus, it becomes difficult to reconstruct past in light of scanty evidences. Same is true about of *Odoric of Pordenone*.

A brief note about him would be important to place him in context and contribution of his account.

Born in 1286, he was native of Pordenone, dist. Odoric in Friuli. His travel started around 1316/1318 and returned before the spring of 1330. He was in western India after 1321. Between 1322-1328 he spent some three years in northern China. He died in 1331.²⁶

To our concern is his description of Tana (modern thane). His travels assert about the region sometimes between, 132-1330, that it was under the rule of some Muslim, but as subject to Sultan of Delhi. Secondly, presence of Parses, as he describe the funeral rituals like "they do not bury their dead, but carry them with great pomp to the fields, and cast then to the birds and beast to be devoured."²⁷

His long description of Martyrdom of four minor Friars-Thomas of Tolentino; James of Padua; Demetrius of Georgia and Peter of Sienna is itself reveal the very complex religious conflict between Muslims who in thane was the dominating group and Christians, the minority, as testified from the Friar Odoric who says when these minor friars landed, there were only 15 houses of Nestorian Christians.²⁸

It would be completely wrong to assume that the clash was universal, as the when the sultan of Delhi intervened after hearing the meted treatment to these friars and his reaction and punishment to the ruler, does reveal complexity of the picture.

What was the nature of conflict here is at individualistic level, the remarks on the Prophet, while upholding Christ above all must have instigated the anger of the Saracen ruler, also thane was scarcely populated by Christians.

In the letter of Friar Jordanus who claims that after martyrdom he baptized around 25 people between Thane and Sopara.²⁹

Therefore, one should be cautious while missionaries and other travel accounts. Each one here, Ibn battuta and missionaries' account came out for a purpose, by someone.

In each of them we come across anecdotes that are not historical, but spiritual, magical. This makes reconstruction difficult but contributes to our knowledge in different way. There are examples of exaggeration and over-simplification. They cannot be ignored but critical reading is must, not each and every aspect taken to be literally true.

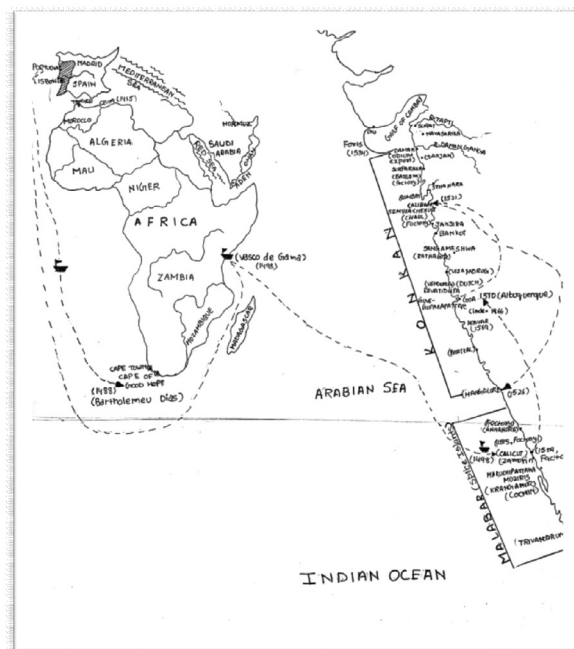
Concluding the nature of 14th Konkan, one can say that only few towns rose to prominence and were part of global trading network. As far as trade is concerned, 14th Konkan witnessed rise and strong settlements of Muslims, who acted as major partners in international trade importing and exporting varied items. Their family linkages transcended regional boundaries. Like Elizabeth Lambourn has shown way the Muslims outside *Dar ur Islam* maintain their autonomy. The accounts of Custom House of Aden reveal salaries given to religious judges (qazi) and preachers (khatibs) at 40 places along the western and south-eastern coast of India.³⁰

In case of thane, Friday mosques around at Mahim, Vasahi, Fali, Subara are important as, Yemen was source of horses for the cavalry for the Yadva kingdom. Stipends here were given to imam, khatibs and qadir to Thane mosque, while others were distributed to these above mentioned satellite settlements and one went to Yadavas capital Devgiri.³¹

Through these kinds of networks helped Muslims maintain their autonomy, connecting various trading centers all around the world, also getting support of the then ruling house.

Thus, the period witness the domination of Arabs in trade, polity. The balance of power in the western coast was balanced by the existence of indigenous and non-indigenous group-Jews and Saraswat Brahmins- acting as bankers-traders. Their social hegemony helped the Arabs to have strong footing at the grass root level. The balance of plank of Konkan rested on the trade relied upon firm balance maintained by two opposing sides. The imbalances at times had positive outcomes; it led to the infusion of new actors in the already competent environment.

This was the setup when Portuguese arrived at the Calicut.



Western coast of India, 1498-1966.

This map has been prepared by Ketiya Bhandecha while referring to varieties of secondary literature.

NOTES

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3. Cosmas, *Christian Topography*, trans. from Greek by J.W McCrindle, London, Hakluyt Society, pg. 366-367.
4. Malekandathil, Pius, *Discovery of a Pahlavi-Cross from Goa: new evidence for the Pre-Portuguese Christian settlements in Konkan*; in *Christian Orient*, vol. 23, no. 3, September 2002.
5. *Boletim do Conselho Ultramarino: Legislacao Antiga*, Lisbon, 1867, 1.
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7. Mahajan, Malti, *Deccan: society and economy*, Delhi, Sharda Publishing House, 2009, pg. 11.
8. Ibid, pg. 11-12, 21-22,
9. Ibid, Pg.38
10. Ibid, Pg.46
11. Ibid, Pg. 53-55.
12. *Epigraphy Indica*, vol. VI, ASI, 1981, Pg. 1.
13. Ibid, Pg.2-3
14. *Epigraphy Indica*, vol. 32, 1987, ASI. Pg. 45.
15. Ibid. Pg. 45-46.
16. Ibid, Pg. 45-47
17. Ibid, Pg. 47
18. Ibid, Pg. 47
19. Ibid, Pg. 50-51
20. Ibid, Pg. 63-64
21. *Epigraphy Indica*, vol. 13, 1982, ASI. Pg.199.
22. Ibn Battuta, *Rehla*, trans.Mahdi Husain, Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1976, Pg. 177.
23. Ibid. Pg. 177.
24. Ibid. Pg. 177; 184
25. Ibid. Pg. 178, 182
26. *Travels of Friar Odoric of Pordenone in Cathay and the Way Thither* (trans. & ed.) Sir Henry Yule, vol.2, Taipei, Cheng-Wen Publishing Company, 1966, P. 1-9.
27. Ibid. Pg. 114, 117.
28. Ibid. Pg. 119.
29. *Cathay and the way Thither*, trans. & ed. Henry Yule, vol. 3, Pg. 76.
30. Lambourn, Elizabeth, *India from Aden*, in Kenneth Hall (ed.) *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking in the Indian Ocean Realm*, 1400-1800, U.K, Lexington Books, 2008, Pg. 55.
31. Ibid. Pg. 70.

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