The Maritime History of Goa

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The maritime history of Goa can be traced back from the time of the Great Ashoka. In the early period of over thousand years from 200 B.C. to 800 A.D., the Konkan witnessed a variety of rulers such as Bhojas, Satvahanas, Mauryas and Badami Chalukyas. The trade appears to have been existing there already in the initial form. The religious motive, spread of Buddhism enhanced the maritime activity to a considerable extent. During this period, the trading world also underwent changes of rulers and therefore the trading people. The early trade started with the Greek and was succeeded by Romans, Persians and Arabs. The evidence of trading people have been provided by sculptures and mainly by the historical coins discovered in the various parts of Goa.

Trade under Bhojas and Satvahanas

The stone sculpture of great Buddha in Dhyanamudra (Fig. 1) found in Goa at Mushir-Colvale (Bardez) is influenced by Greek art. The three and a half feet tall statue appears to have been manufactured by a Greek sculptor. The Greeks during this period carried trade on the west coast of India. Bhojas were the rulers of Konkan during this period. The ancient traditions of Bhojas about navigation and shipping are recorded in the Sanskrit work "Yuktikalpataru".

Yuktikalpataru

Around 30 BC when the Konkan Goa was under the Satvahanas and their feudatories Bhojas, Romans entered into sea trade with India. The Romans occupied Egypt and established direct trade with the ports on west coast of India. According to Pliny the Indian goods and commodities were sold in Roman market at 100 times their original price. The coins of Satvahanas and Romans obtained in Deccan and Konkan, reveal the nature of trade
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Fig. 1

existed during that period. Satavahanas reserved the sea-borne trade to their Konkan ports. Trade industry flourished under the Satavahanas and their feudatories Bhojas of Konkan Goa. Economic life was given cohesion by the Guild organisation. The Deccan products such as corn, rice, fine cotton goods, cane sugar, spices, precious stones and perfumes were exported from the Konkan ports. Chandrapur, i.e. modern Chandor of Goa, which is situated on the bank of Parora tributary of river, Zuari, was the capital of ancient Goa and the centre of ancient maritime trade.

The epoch making discovery of Monsoon winds in A.D. 45 ushered in an era of brisk seaborne trade between Roman world and the western Indian Ports.

Satavahanas fell to Konkan Mauryas who ruled the Konkan coast from 4-6 century AD. The capital of Maurya Puri is described as the "Goddess of Fortune." This indicates the maritime glory of Mauryas who ruled Goa from Kumardwipa, i.e. modern Kum大理石.

In the middle of the 6th century AD the Chalukyas of Badami (District Bijapur) drove out Mauryas from Konkan after conquering their maritime capital Puri by sea with navy. Due to strategic position and commercial importance of Goa coast, the Chalukyas ruled over South Konkan directly through their princess Indravarnan (590 AD). During this period the trade was interrupted by Persians who had settled down in colonies on the west coast of India from 5 century. The sun image discovered at Kudne (Bicholim) indicates that it was the commercial centre of Persians (Maggis). The silver coins of the Persian rulers of this period have been discovered in Goa (Fig.2).

Fig. 2

Konkan Trade under Rashtra-kutas and Shilaharas

During the 7th century after the advent of Islam and their conquest of Persia, the Arabs captured the sea trade of Konkan ports.

About 753 AD, the Chalukyas of Badami were succeeded in the Deccan by the Rashtrakutas of Malkhed. The 8–10 century AD marks the period of Rashtra-
kutas and Konkan Shilaharas. The two houses of Shilaharas viz. South Konkan of Goa and Thana Shilaharas came into prominence as maritime power in the Konkan under the Rashtrakutas. Goa was the habitat of south Konkan Shilaharas. Arab merchants Sulaiman (850 AD) states that Balaharas, i.e. Rashtrakutas as were known to them were friendly with the Arabs. Sixty years later Masudi (911 AD) describes Balaharas as Lord of Western Coast from Cambay to Konkan. The Rashtrakutas, seem to have accepted Arab traders as middle men for carrying on their sea-borne trade. The Arab sailor according to our epigraphs were called Nauvitta or Navayats who according to Masudi had settled in Malabar and Konkan coasts. Their trading settlements are described as Hanjaman Nagar (Goa Island) in some of the Shilaharas inscriptions. The description of Balipattana, the capital town of Shilahar in Chikodi copper plate of Shilahar King Avasar III is enough to conclude that it must have been a very rich and well organised maritime capital city of Goa Shilaharas. There is mention of Vadavabhu a place specifically marked for Horse Bazar. This indicates that horse trade was one of the dominant trades with the Arabs during this period. The Balipattana may be identified with Bali, south of Goa or with Valavali from Sawantwadi.

Commercial Trade under Kadambas

The Goa Kadambas (1020-1350 AD) ruled over South Konkan as feudatories or Mahamandaleshwar of Chalukya emperors of Deccan who came into power by defeating Rashtrakutas round 973 AD. The king Shashthadev II of the Kadambas established himself at Chandrapur by defeating both Goa and Thana Shilaharas.

He was keenly interested in promoting the foreign trade which was then extended to the East African coast. Jaykeshi I who succeeded Shashthadeva II developed a powerful fleet and had to his credit number of maritime exploits. He caused Chalukyas and Cholas to become friends and around 1053 AD seem to have shifted his capital on the bank of river Zuari in the island of Goa which was the erstwhile commercial centre of Arabs i.e. Hanjaman. The new city was named as Gopakapattana i.e. Goa Velha. The Arab leader of Hanjaman, Chhadam was appointed as Governor of the city. The commercial prosperity of the city is attested by the fact that it had trade with no less than fourteen countries viz. Kadah (Malaya), Syrtem (probably Sumatra), Bengal, Pusta, Chanda (Chola). Pandya Keral, Lat, Gurjar, Zungavar (Zanzibar). Jayakeshi II (1104-1148), the grandson of Jaykeshi I styled himself as Konkan Chakravartin. Chalukya Emperor Vikramaditya offered him in marriage his daughter Mailaedevi. The next heir of this dynasty Shivachitta Permadi freed himself of the dominion of Chalukyas and proclaimed himself as Paschimasamudra-dhipathi or the Lord of the Western Ocean which is the proof of his supremacy at Sea. The commercial prosperity of these rulers is evidenced by the gold coin discovery at Chandar, Gopakapattana and other places. The coins are referred to in the records as Bhairava Gadyanaka or Saptakotish Gadyanakas. They are of pure
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gold and their weight varies from 76 to 86 grains. Another variety known as Nishte weighs about 65 grains. The smallest coin called *Pana* weighed about 6 grains.

**Vijayanagar and Muslim Interlude**

Due to Muslim penetration around 1318 AD, the Kadambas transferred the seat of Government from Gopakapattana (Goa Velha) to Chandar a spot of better protection. During the invasion of Mohammed Tughalak in 1327 AD, Chandar was also sacked and demolished. By the end of the 14th century, the Kadamba territory became a part of Vijayanagar empire. The descendant of Kadamba Chalukya dynasty seemed to have continued at Goa as naval chief of Vijayanagar. However they freed themselves by 1440 AD. According to the writing from Portuguese chronicles, probably the same year they shifted their commercial centre to the site of village Ella, modern old Goa city on the bank of Mandovi River due to silting of Zuari river. According to Pires, Goans were known for the skill of ship building and new docks were built at Govapuri Ella (Old Goa) for the construction of large ships. The city rapidly became famous for its trade in horses imported from Hormuz. These horses were in great demand in the kingdoms of Deccan and Karnatak. It is said to be the only city on the coast which enjoyed during the latter half of the 15th century a revenue of £ 10,000 (Lendas II, page 55).

Bahmani Sultans of Deccan conquered Goa in 1471 thrusting the Hindu rulers back to Honavar which was under Vijayanagar.

After the split of the Bahmani Empire, it went under Adil Shah of Bijapur who ruled till 1510 AD. According to Duarte Barbosa, the Muslim city of Goa was a place of great trade. It had a good port to which flock many ships from Mekkah, Aden, Hormuz, Cambay and Malabar country. The town was very large with good edifices and handsome streets surrounded by walls and towers. Tome Pires has also appreciated the than condition of trade in Goa. He has written about the visits of merchants from distant countries, native good seaman and skilled craftsmen in Goa who were in high demand everywhere. He writes about export of betel, calico, fine muslin, rice, areca, spices etc. in exchange of horses.

**Portuguese**

The Indian rulers since ancient times followed the policy of freedom of trade and navigation, and neglected the control of seas. This helped European powers in establishing their sea-borne empire of in India, the Portuguese captured Goa in 1510 AD. By middle of 16th century, their maritime empire of India reached its zenith and was extended from Mozambique on the east coast of Africa to Ternate in South East Asia. Goa became the entryport of Asia Trade from where spices and other goods were sent to Western countries in Portuguese home-bound ships. It also became a centre for Asian shipping. The Portuguese supplied all kinds
of European goods to this part of the country.

According to Linschoten the Goa city in 17th century had a population of 225,000 people, three fourths of which being Christian. There were merchants from almost all over the world namely Arabia, Armenia, Persia, Cambay, Bengal, Pegu, Siam, Malacca, Java, Moluccas, China and other eastern countries. There were Venetians, Italians, Germans, Flemings, Castilians and Englishmen but scarcely French. Also, there were Jews and Muslims. The travellers of the time have described the city in such glowing terms as to justify the appellation Golden Goa. With the decline and fall of the Portuguese empire the city lost its importance and gradually Mormugao has taken its place during recent years.