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**Overlapping Worlds: Coasts, Hinterlands and Forelands in India,  
16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

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## *Overlapping Worlds: Coasts, Hinterlands and Forelands in India, 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries\**

### **Abstract:**

This paper begins with the premise that there is a need to regard the coasts, the hinterlands and the forelands as overlapping worlds, each of which fed into and added value to the other. It is argued that we need to examine the link between the geography of the area and the trade across it, and therefore, the routes that criss-crossed the Indian peninsula. As a peninsula, the link of a coast and the lands both across the seas and the interior areas, the hinterlands, have also to be studied. This paper is therefore organised in three broad sections, the first dealing with historiography, the second with the various connections that existed across the worlds of land and sea, and finally, in discussing the routes that connected these areas. In the last section, a few maps will be included to illustrate the ways in which the connections were made.

**Keywords:** Deccan, networks, travel accounts, historiography

## Introduction

In a seminal article published in 1985, Michael N. Pearson made a plea for the study of littoral societies, saying that the “study of littoral society is much more holistic than that of port cities, and forces one to concentrate much more on the sea, thus avoiding the temptation to which many port city studies have succumbed, that is, the tendency to stray inland to distant markets and influences, and ignore the sea altogether”.<sup>1</sup>The study of the littoral, he believed, was particularly important, for it allowed for an understanding of the “continuum between land and sea activities, with the strip of the littoral in the middle, acting as a mediator.”<sup>2</sup>The reason for this plea was, clearly, his belief that too much attention had been devoted to the ports, and to their connections with the hinterlands, but the role of the port city, as gateway or hub, or as choke point, had been ignored. In other words, while the hinterland connections were being well studied, the connections across the sea or along the coast had generally been ignored. Therefore, what he said was needed was a ‘whiff of ozone’.

While this is the starting point for the present research, what I am trying to argue is that there is a need to regard the coasts, the hinterlands and the forelands as overlapping worlds, each of which fed into and added value to the other. Therefore, while I am not denying the need for the ozone, I also believe that there is a need to continue to examine port-hinterland connections, and not just in the traditional manner of seeing the hinterland as supplying the port with its necessities. At the same time, it is not enough to study only the hinterland connections, for we need to go beyond the seas, to what has been called the ‘foreland’, and examine the ways in which these worlds intersected and overlapped at many points. Ports then become also the points through which such overlaps can be traced and understood. That said, it is clearly necessary to begin with the ways in which ports and hinterlands have been studied, as well as the various engagements with the broader field of maritime history. What I am therefore studying here is three things – the link between the geography of the area and the trade across it, and therefore, the routes that criss-crossed the peninsula. As a peninsula, the link of coast and the lands both across the seas and the interior areas, the hinterlands, have also to be studied. This paper is therefore organised in three broad sections, the first dealing with historiography, the second with the various connections that existed across the worlds of land and sea, and finally, in discussing the routes that connected

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Pearson, “Littoral Society: The Case for the Coast”, *The Great Circle*, 7, No. 1, 1985, pp. 1-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

these areas. In the last section, a few maps will be included to illustrate the ways in which the connections were made.

### **Deccan and Historiography**

To begin with, it is necessary to define, to the extent possible, what is meant by the Deccan. Geographically, the terrain was seen as being divided into three parts – the coastal strip, (termed ‘Konkan’ or ‘Kanara’ coast depending on which on which part of the coast was being talked about), the Ghats, and the plateau region beyond the Ghats (called ‘Desh’ in Marathi literature). Early Indian texts divided the subcontinent into five major regions, of which one was *Dakshināpatha*,<sup>3</sup> but did not then further subdivide the region into smaller zones. The term as it began to be used from that early time could refer to the entire peninsula or to the more limited area from the Narmada to the Tungabhadra and Krishna rivers, which became the more common usage. South of this was *drāvidadeśa* or *Tamilakam*. Thus, ‘Deccan’ began to be distinguished from ‘south India’, which is then taken to refer to the area south of the Krishna River, till the tip of the peninsula. This has, of course, resulted in multiple problems. One is the perception of the ‘south’ and the ‘north’ of India as two distinct, unique regions, each of which had their own special times of development, and which therefore developed along different trajectories. In the 17th century, a French traveller to India, Thévenot, said that

Deccan was heretofore a most powerful Kingdom, if one may believe the Indians; it consisted of all the Countries that are in that great Tongue of Land, which is betwixt the gulfs of Cambaye and Bengala, all obeyed the same King; nay, and the Provinces of Balagate, Telenga and Baglana, which are towards the North, were comprehended within it, so that it may be said that at that time there was no King in the Indies more powerful than the King of Decan; but that Kingdom in process of time hath been often dismembered; and in the beginning of the last Age, (when the Portuguese made Conquests therein) it was divided into many Provinces, ... and the Dominions of him (who was called King of Decan) reached no further than from the limits of the Kingdom of Cambaye or Guzerat, to the borders of the principality of Goa, which did not belong to him neither.<sup>4</sup>

He went on to say that

The most powerful of the Kings of Decan, next to Viziapour, [Bijapur] is the King of Golconda. His Kingdom borders on the East side, upon the Sea of Bengala; to the North, upon the Mountains of the Countrey of Orixia; to the South, upon many countries of Bisnagar, [Vijayanagar] or Ancient Narsingue, which belongs to the King of Viziapour; and to the West, upon

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<sup>3</sup> B.C. Law, *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, Paris 1968, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in R.C. Temple (ed.), Thomas Bowrey's *A Geographical Account of the Countries around the Bay of Bengal 1669-1679*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers (rept.), 1997, pp. 135-36, f.n. 5.

the Empire of the Great Mogul, by the province of Balagate, where the Village of Calvar is, which is the last place of Mogolistan on that side.<sup>5</sup>

The Deccan as a region has thus been seen as consisting of three parts – the narrow western coastal strip, the plateau, and the wider eastern coastal strip. This definition, however, limits us to one part of the peninsula, for it does not take into account the area known in early times as ‘Tamilaham’ – the region of the far south. This, while not part of plateau, is of course an important part of the peninsula, and therefore of the hinterland region of all the ports. Another problem is that the word Deccan is often taken to mean only the western part of the plateau, i.e. the area included in the present day state of Maharashtra, and ignores the eastern part almost entirely. However, here, I have taken the Deccan to mean the entire area of the peninsula, from the west coast to the east, and broadly, the area from south of the Narmada river till the Tungabhadra river.<sup>6</sup>

Epigraphic evidence points to the emergence of three types of exchange centres, called *mandapikā*, *petha* or *penthā*, and *nagaram*. The first reference to a *petha* as an administrative unit comes from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in an inscription from the Satara district of Maharashtra.<sup>7</sup> A text of the 10<sup>th</sup> century describes in great detail the attributes of a large *petha*, and in accordance with the Buddhist terminology used earlier, calls such a centre a *putabhedana* – a big commercial centre.<sup>8</sup> Such centres are further designated as *śulkasthāna* – centres which generated tolls and customs.<sup>9</sup> Inscriptions of the Kakatiyas of Warangal talk of *adda*, *santhe* and *pemta*. The first is apparently a derivative from the Sanskrit *hatta*, meaning a local market, while the second seems to be derived from the Tamil *santhai*, also meaning a local market. The last appears to be a local variation of *petha*.<sup>10</sup> What is clear from the inscriptions is that there is a clear distinction being made between the village level market or fair, which may have been very regular – there are references to *Śanivāra-santhe* – and the *petha*, which was a centre of regular and daily trade. Thus, there is clearly identifiable a market centre, often fortified, and participating in some kind of a supra-local trade network.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 108, fn 1.

<sup>6</sup> See Map 1 in Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> Ranabir Chakravarti, *Trade and Traders in Early India*, Manohar, 2007 (paperback edition), New Delhi, pp. 201-219.

<sup>8</sup> V.K. Thakur, *Urbanisation in Ancient India*, Abhinav Publications, 1981, p. 22. ‘*Putā*’ means covered boxes of merchandise, while ‘*bhedana*’ means ‘to open’. Thus, a ‘*putabhedana*’ was a place where boxes of merchandise were opened. See R. Chakravarti, op. cit, p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> R. Chakravarti, op.cit.

<sup>10</sup> *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XV, pp. 187-188.

For the study of maritime connections, a starting point is Radhakumud Mookherji's, *Indian Shipping: A History of the Sea-Borne Trade and Maritime Activity of the Indians from the earliest Times*,<sup>11</sup> one of the earliest things to focus on is the dimension of the sea. Another work of considerable importance is K.M. Panikkar's *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History*.<sup>12</sup> In the introduction to the book, he said that this 'epoch' showed a "singular unity in its fundamental aspects", which, he said, were "the dominance of a maritime power over the land masses of Asia; the imposition of a commercial economy over communities whose economic life in the past had been based not on international trade, but mainly on agricultural production and internal trade; and thirdly the domination of the peoples of Europe, who held mastery of the seas, over the affairs of Asia."<sup>13</sup>

What I would like to underline here is that both these works, seminal as they are, tend not to talk of the interplay of land and sea, and therefore neither really studies the coast. The former is a history of India's maritime links, and argues that Indians always engaged with the sea, while the latter argues the exact opposite – that, lacking any such relationship, the sea was left to the foreigners, who then took over India by accessing the country from the sea. Neither makes any mention of the coasts or coastal polities. The coasts were just 'there', geographical regions that had no particular role to play, for, lacking large tracts of cultivable land, they necessarily had a lower revenue generating capacity.

The coasts were then seen as world in themselves, isolated from and isolating themselves from, the interior. As isolated areas, they were of course marginal, and therefore dangerous. So, coasts were the haunts of pirates – the Malabar pirates, for example, about whom we find many references in the period under review. Thus it was stated that "The barks that lade at Cambay go to Diu to supply the ships at that port which are taking in goods for the Red Sea and Ormuz, and some go to Chaul and Goa. These ships are either well-armed, or are protected by Portuguese ships of war, as there are many corsairs or pirates continually cruising along that coast, robbing and plundering whatever they are able to master."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Radhakumud Mookerji, *Indian Shipping: A History of the sea-borne trade and maritime activity of the Indians from the earliest times*, London, Longmans Green & Co., 1912.

<sup>12</sup> K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498-1945*, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Kerr, *A General History and Collection of Voyages and Travels: Arranged in Systematic Order*, Vol. 7, Edinburgh, 1812.

From the late 1960s and the 1970s, the focus of study moved to the European east India Companies. Works like Tapan Raychaudhuri's *Jan Compagnie in Coromandel* (1962),<sup>15</sup> Ashin Das Gupta's many books, such as (among others) *Malabar in Asian Trade* (1967),<sup>16</sup> Michael Pearson's *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat* (1976),<sup>17</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri's *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company* (1978),<sup>18</sup> K. Glamann's *Dutch-Asiatic Trade, 1620-1740* (1981),<sup>19</sup> and S. Arasaratnam's *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740* (1986),<sup>20</sup> all explored different aspects of the European presence in and trade with India. The importance of these works is immense, for they brought to the forefront a great many aspects of the economic history of the period, as well as the nature of the links across the seas. Located within the context of European trade, they had a lot of information about the negotiations and contestations that took place in these ports. Thus, we get any amount of information on the customs duties, on the problems faced by the Europeans in their dealings with the local officials, and similar details. Ports then became the only points of contact, not just for the Europeans, but for the internal kingdoms as well. The customs duties collected at the port were an important source of revenue for these political powers, and in addition, were the points through which goods moved from the hinterlands to the wider world of trade, and vice versa. Such studies tended to further validate the study of ports, particularly as 'port cities'.<sup>21</sup> Ashin Das Gupta's study of Indian merchants at Surat<sup>22</sup> is one of the best examples of this.

What I propose to do here, is to try and examine the links between the ports and their hinterlands, and the many networks that existed across the peninsula, through a study of the routes that connected the ports and the hinterlands, and also, to the extent possible, the coastal connections, via the coastal trade. It is rather clichéd to talk of the number of ports that dot the Indian coastline. Those on the west coast were small, and often located on the creeks and inlets that existed all along the strip. They did have some natural shelter, while those on the

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<sup>15</sup> T. Raychaudhuri, *Jan Compagnie in Coromandel (1605-1690)*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 1962.

<sup>16</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961.

<sup>17</sup> M.N. Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century*, University of California Press, 1976.

<sup>18</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978.

<sup>19</sup> K. Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade, 1620-1740*, Springer, 1981.

<sup>20</sup> S. Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1986.

<sup>21</sup> This can be seen in works like InduBanga (ed.), *Ports and their Hinterlands in India, 1700-1950*, New Delhi, Manohar Publications, 1992.

<sup>22</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, c. 1700-1750*, Weisbaden, 1979.



east coast were more exposed to the sea, but were larger, as there was more room to grow.<sup>23</sup> (see Map 2 in Appendix).

### Ports and Trade Networks

The starting point here is the studies of ports. The centrality of India to the Asian trading world, has been put forward by scholars like Kenneth McPherson,<sup>24</sup> for he pointed to the ‘complex web of relationships’ that connected the Asian peoples, in the seemingly self-contained Indian Ocean world. In a book published in 2010, *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social and Political Perspectives*,<sup>25</sup> it was argued that “With few of the traumas or pathologies and without the newness of the Atlantic, the Indian Ocean holds no comparable sway on contemporary Western or local political imaginary, either as a route to liberty or the site of redress.”<sup>26</sup> The result has been to study the Indian Ocean and its networks as a closed world, with India as its centre, which was opened to the ‘gaze’ of the non-Asian world only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with the coming of the Europeans into these waters, as direct participants in the trade of Asia. Michael Pearson initially talked of the Western and eastern Indian Ocean, but later suggested that it would perhaps be more apt to name the former the ‘Afro-Asiatic’ sea, for this would then bring to the forefront the role of Africa also in this trade.<sup>27</sup>

The point that I am raising here is the need to study the overlaps between the lands surrounding the ocean and the connections within the region. I have of course not gone into all the connections and have focussed only on the Deccan. Nevertheless, it may be useful to conceive of the Asian trading world as consisting of three broad, overlapping circles. Moving from west to east, the first segment then comprises the east coast of Africa, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf regions, and across the Arabian Sea to the west coast of India. The second stretches from the west coast of India, across the land mass to the east coast of India and beyond, across the Bay of Bengal to Southeast Asia. The third consists of the area from the east coast of India, across the Bay of Bengal, Southeast Asia and the Indonesian Archipelago

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<sup>23</sup> I have, in another context, tried to examine these ports both in the context of S. Arasaratnam’s ‘prosperity-decline curve’ theory, and Atiya Habeeb Kidwai’s port city theory, “Conceptual and Methodological Issues”, in Indu Banga (ed.), *Ports and their Hinterlands*, Manohar, 1992. See Radhika Seshan, *Trade and Politics on the Coromandel Coast, seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries*, Delhi, Primus, 2012; and Radhika Seshan, “The Deccan Ports and their Hinterlands”, in Suchandra Ghosh and Urvi Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *South Asian Urbanisms*, Routledge, forthcoming.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of the People and the Sea*, Oxford India Paperbacks, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Shanti Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal (ed.), *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social and Political Perspectives*, Routledge, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> M.N. Pearson, *Port-Cities and Intruders – The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Early Modern Era*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

to the China Seas. In this, the farthest extent could be Australia. R.J. Barendse pointed out<sup>28</sup> that ‘long-distance commerce was built on interlocking circuits of commerce’. These circuits were not limited to the ports and coasts, but stretched inland as well. The overland routes and the sea routes were in many ways complementary to each other. There was, of course, the hinterland of each port, and these hinterlands were obviously accessed over land; but there were also longer routes, such as those connecting north India with Samarqand or Damascus, which were well-known and regularly used. According to Stephen Dale<sup>29</sup> “Throughout most of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries India’s most important markets were located in the countries bordering the Indian Ocean and the contiguous land mass of the Iranian plateau and the Central Asian steppe.” Arguing that the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires managed to establish a ‘pax Islamica’, he further said that by the early decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Muscovite Russia had also become part of this network.

There is yet another dimension to these networks, and that is the smaller ones within the larger networks. These included the port-to-port trade along the Indian coast, termed ‘country trade by the Europeans’, as well as trade among the islands of Southeast Asia, for whom the sea was the major highway. There were also well-established connections between specific ports – Porto Novo on the Coromandel Coast and Manila, for instance, or Rajapur and Madagascar (which was highlighted by the fact of the notorious Captain Kidd taking shelter in Rajapur creek early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century). Certain regions were naturally far more important, as points of intersection of both larger and smaller networks, and these would include the areas around Gombroon, Basra, and Ormuz in the Persian Gulf, the entrance to the Red Sea, Gujarat and Kerala on the west coast of India, the Coromandel and Bengal Coasts, and Melaka and Aceh in Southeast Asia. There was thus a ‘grid’ of interlocking trade circuits, centred on a number of ports across the Indian Ocean. Merchant networks included the Hadrami, the Karimin the Jewish, and later, the Armenians. All of these were involved in various branches of the trade of the Asian world, as both collaborators and competitors.

It was this world that the Portuguese entered in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For the Europeans, the maritime and terrestrial worlds of Asia were much less connected than they were for the Asian traders. Lacking the networks of cultural and historical connections that had been

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<sup>28</sup> R.J. Barendse, “Trade and State in the Arabian Seas: A Survey from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century”, in *Journal of World History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Fall, 2000), pp. 173-225.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600-1750*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 4.

established over centuries of contact, their links were either in a formal manner, to the courts, or in a slightly less official manner through their agents at the court, or with various merchants at the ports. Through the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, they were unable to make their presence felt in the production areas: at least, not directly, for their requirements were filtered through the local merchants. And these merchants did not give up their positions as independent traders in favour of joining any one of the European companies. The European entry into this world resulted in some changes, involving methods of accommodating the Europeans in various ways. This last, would then have led to the emergence of different mechanisms of engagement, from translators – the ubiquitous *dubashes* of later times – the brokers, *vakils* (agents, usually at the court), and ‘chief merchants’.

Merchants may have physically restricted themselves to a single town; but the networks of contacts stretched across lands and seas. This is clear from even the earliest of the official Portuguese accounts, that of Duarte Barbosa. Early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Barbosa when talking of the port of Diu, said that it had

a right good harbour, a trading port used by many ships, with exceeding great traffic and commerce with Malabar, Baticala, Goa, Chaul, and Dabul. Ships also sail hence to Meca, Adem, Zeila, Barbora, Magadoxo, Meline, Brava, Mombaca, and Ormus with the kingdom thereof. The articles of merchandize brought hither by the Malabares are as follows: cocoanuts (great store), areca, jagra, emery, wax, iron, Baticala sugar, pepper, ginger, cloves, cinnamon, mace, nutmegs, sandal-wood, brasil-wood, long peppers, and, besides these, many silks and other wares which come from china and Malaca. From Chaul and Dabul they bring thither great store of woven cottons and linens, and take them away again to Arabia, and Persia.... they bring hither coral, copper, quicksilver, vermilion, lead, alum, madder, rose-water, saffron, gold, silver (coined and bullion) in such abundance that it cannot be reckoned.<sup>30</sup>

Barbosa’s description is echoed by other travellers, including Linschoten, who remarked in particular on the overland caravan trade between Basra and Aleppo, in which merchants of all countries, including France, Britain and Venice, participated. India was described as “very fruitfull of Ryce, Pease, and other graines, Butter and oyle of Indian Nuttes” – the only thing he missed was olive oil.<sup>31</sup> Peter Mundy, in his description of the trade of India, provided, among other things, detailed descriptions of the caravans used for internal trade, of customs duties, of the markets, and, of course, of the cloth and the range of colours available.

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<sup>30</sup> M.L. Dames (tr. and ed.), *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, 2 vols., first published London, Hak. Soc. 1918-1921; New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, second reprint, 2002, pp. 128-130.

<sup>31</sup> A.C. Burnell and P.A. Tiele (tr. and ed.), *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, 2 volumes, Hakluyt Society, London, 1885, Asian Educational Services Reprint, 1988, Vol. I, p. 28.

Chaul was a port of considerable significance in both the hinterland and the foreland trade. This was described as a place which had

two cities, one belonging to the Portuguese, and the other to the Moors; that which belongs to the Portuguese is lower than the other, commands the mouth of the harbour, and is very strongly fortified. About a mile and a half from this city is that of the Moors, belonging to their king *Zamaluco*, or Nizam-ul-mulk. In time of war no large ships can go to the city of the Moors, as they must necessarily pass under the guns of the Portuguese castles, which would sink them. Both cities of Chaul are sea ports, and have great trade in all kinds of spices, drugs, raw silk, manufactures of silk, sandal-wood, Marsine, Verine, porcelain of China, velvets and scarlets, both from Portugal and Meccan, with many other valuable commodities. Every year there arrive ten or fifteen large ships, laden with great nuts called *Giagra*, [jaggery] which are cured or dried, and with sugar made from these nuts. The tree on which these nuts grow is called the Palmer tree, and is to be found in great abundance over all India, especially between this place and Goa.<sup>32</sup>

Of particular importance was the external trade from this place, where, it was said, “an infinite quantity of goods are exported for other parts of India, Macao, Portugal, the coast of Melinda, Ormuz, and other parts; such as cloth of *bombast* or cotton, white, painted, and printed, indigo, opium, silk of all kinds, borax in paste, asafoetida, iron, corn, and other things.”<sup>33</sup> Linked to this was the overseas trade, across both parts of the Indian Ocean world. The networks of connections between India and Southeast Asia, for example, have long been documented. That there existed a “complicated network of relations, both between various parts of each of the two great regions and between the two regions themselves”<sup>34</sup> is very clear. When Portuguese traders arrived in the area in the early sixteenth century, Gujarati merchants dominated the trade with Melaka from the port of Cambay. Commercial links between South Asia and Southeast Asia were so strong that, according to the Portuguese Tome Pires, Melaka could not “live without Cambay, nor Cambay without Malacca”.<sup>35</sup> Textiles were key in such a pattern of intra-Asian trade. Javanese and Malays, for instance, would not accept any other product, apart from textiles in exchange for food stuffs and spices.<sup>36</sup> In this trade, Coromandel coarse cotton was particularly important. Burma

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Kerr, *A General History and collection of Voyages and Travels: Arranged in Systematic Order*, Vol. 7, pp. 153-54.

<sup>33</sup> Barbosa, op.cit., p. 154.

<sup>34</sup> J.G. de Casparis, *India and Maritime South East Asia: A Lasting Relationship*, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1983, p. 17, cited by H. Kulke, “The Concept of Cultural Change Revisited”, in Upinder Singh and Parul Pandya Dhar (eds.), *Asian Encounters: Exploring Connected Histories*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 3-19.

<sup>35</sup> *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, Vol. 1, p. 45, cited in Riello and Roy, *How India Clothed the World*, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago: Between 1500 and about 1630*, The Hague, 1962, p. 68.

exchanged rice and silver (from Pegu) for the textiles traded by Bengali merchants.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore an overland caravan trade connected India with continental Asia. In the 1660s, 25,000-30,000 camel loads of cotton material from India reached Persia every year.<sup>38</sup> Cotton textiles changed hands several times before reaching central Asia, the Ottoman Empire, Eastern Europe and China. Perhaps one of the best descriptions of this wide-ranging network comes from a Dutch account, of the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the middle of that century, a Dutch administrator, Jan Pietersz Coen, described the nature of the Dutch participation when he said, “Piece goods from Gujarat we can barter for pepper and gold on the coast of Sumatra, rials and cotton from the coast (Coromandel) for pepper in Bantam, sandalwood, pepper and rials we can barter for Chinese goods and Chinese gold; we can extract silver from Japan with Chinese goods, piece goods from the Coromandel coast in exchange for spices, other goods and gold from China, piece goods from Surat for spices and various other trifles – one thing leads to another. And all of it can be done without any money from the Netherlands and with ships alone”.<sup>39</sup>

For the Europeans, cloth and spices were the most important items of trade, with cloth being much more important in the Indian context. We get specific names of cloth from the English and Dutch records. In the 1620s, for example, lists were sent out from Surat to Cambay, Ahmadabad and Broach, giving details of what kind of cloth was to be got for different destinations. Today, it is virtually impossible for us to understand exactly what these kinds of cloth were, for between the English rendering of the Indian names, which were more phonetic than exact, and more, the fact that most of these varieties no longer exist (at least with these names), we have no way of knowing what the differences in design were that resulted in these different names. For example, a letter sent to England from Surat, in which details of the lists sent to the various factories is given, mentions that the “Goods to be provided for Persia” was to include “In Agra: ‘Shashes’ [sashes] white and striped; ... and ‘chintes [chintzes] of sundry sortes’. In Ahmadabad: ‘chintes’ raw dutties of Dholka; ...’ In Broach : White calicoes, and ‘eramees’. In Surat : ‘round peeces called ‘butt’, shashes; ... ; ‘lacke for dyers’; dutties ; ‘chintes of Brampore’; ... gunny ; cotton wool.”<sup>40</sup> Different markets required different kinds of textiles. So, the lists of the goods to be provided in India to be sent to Bantam, mentions the following: “In Cambay: ‘Borrallies’, fine and coarse ;

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, Chicago, 1974, p. 407.

<sup>40</sup> W. Foster (ed.), *The English Factories in India*, 12 volumes, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1906-27, Volume I, p. 76.

‘tapseelesthreed’ and ‘tapseelesilke’; ‘cadia of cotton’; .... ‘pangeeta, of four covides length and one covid eleven tessuesbredth’; ‘pillgarchawder of sundry sortes’; ‘pattolas or tapchindie of cotton ....’; ‘pettolas silk’; ‘sabonychawder’[*chādar*]; .... In Ahmadabad: ‘Dutty’; ‘cassadienill’; In Agra: ‘Chowtars or semians. In Baroda: ‘Bucker’ of two different lengths,. In Broach: Baftaes narrow.”<sup>41</sup> The lists of goods to be provided for Sumatra are even more detailed, for not only do they mention the name of the cloth, but also specify where they were to be dyed. So, from Surat, they were to get “Cotton wool; ‘seribaffes’, blue, white, and red, the last to be dyed at Burhanpur”, “Surat girdles of ‘iekattpingar’; ‘byramswhitte of Derngam [Dharangaon]’; red ditto, to be dyed at Burhanpur”. From Broach, the list included “‘Canekeens’; ‘trycandees’; ‘baftas’ of various kinds.”<sup>42</sup>

The list of goods given above is to be seen, not in the variety of cloth, but in the context of the connections of the production and supply areas. Cloth was of course ubiquitous, but there are also specific goods that were requested – sugar and indigo, to name just few of them. Therefore, the next part of the paper focusses on the routes that connected some of these areas, and the methods of transport.

## Trade Routes

The preferred means of transport to get the goods to the coast seems to have been by land. We have any number of references in the records to the need to make sure that carts were available.<sup>43</sup> In this too, the famine was a matter of concern – as the Surat Council pointed out, “in this time of famine and mortality of cattle, ... a great scant of Carts must needs ensue.”<sup>44</sup> As standard practice, the carts were acquired through a contractor called an *Adaviya*, called ‘*Addowaya*’ in the records. Writing at about the same time, Peter Mundy said that there were two kinds of contracts that could be signed with the *adaviya*, “one to give him so much for his pains to go along with us to compound the Jagatt [taxes] and we pay it on our own heads; another to give him so much per cart or camel, and have to pay the said customs to his profit

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. What these varieties are, is now almost impossible to make out. Only the names *patola* and *ikat* are still familiar.

<sup>43</sup> “It will very much Concern us this year that you use all possible Expedition in the Instant procuring of Carts (before they be taken up by other Merchants) for transport of the goods which you have there in a readiness down to this Port, not so much for the necessity of being here so soon as to be sure of the Carts in time.” Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

or loss.”<sup>45</sup> The contract was to be framed in such a way that the adaviya delivered the goods to the ships in Swally, and did not just leave them till Surat.

Information is also available from the records about the number of carts and the goods that were sent down in them. For example, we find references to a caravan (called a *Caphila* and now spelt *kafila*) “Consisting of 32 Carts with 282 Bales of salt peeter”, and to more goods that were ready in Ahmedabad, to be sent down in two different caravans. What is more important is that while some of these goods were meant for shipment to England, quite a few were also meant for the Persia trade.<sup>46</sup> Both Ahmedabad and Cambay seem to have been regarded as centres for the procurement of sugar and of “green ginger and mirobalans”,<sup>47</sup> all of which were required for England. Proof of other areas of trade networks is further supplied by mention of purchase of cinnamon in Cambay, and instructions to the factors there to try and more at the price then current. As cinnamon does not grow in the Cambay region, and is to be found either along the Kanara coast or in Sri Lanka, it is interesting that we get mention of a product that seems to have reached Cambay rather more easily than it did Surat.<sup>48</sup> The continued connections of the products found in the region of Cambay is also underlined by the “Musters of long Cornelian beads that you may provide of the like to the number of two or three thousand Beads for the Discovery and Reformacion to procure them victuals at St. Lawrence, or not touching there to serve for future shippis out of England, which with the Cinamon and Cohoo must be thence dispeeded, to be seasonably here before our dispatch of the fleet for Persia.”<sup>49</sup>

Another town constantly mentioned in these records is Baroda; however, the context here is often the problems caused by the Dutch investment in calicos in the area, as well as the interference and hindrance of the governor of the region.<sup>50</sup> Prices of goods definitely responded to the impetus of demand and supply; thus the factors were told that

the alteracion in respect of price [must not] deter you from prosecuting the procureane of those quantities injoined in your list, if possible to be accomplisht... For not Amadavad alone but all places elce, as well the one through scarcitie of Indico, as the rest by the want of weavers, washers Etc.,

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<sup>45</sup> R.C. Temple (ed.), *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia 1608-1667*, Vol. II, *Travels in Asia*, London, Hakluyt Society, 1914, p. 219.

<sup>46</sup> SFR, 8 November 1630.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Mirobalans (or myrobalans) were in demand for medicinal purposes. In India, they were often used in dyeing processes.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, SFR, 9 Nov 1630.

(and consequently the want of Lynness) will come far short of the several proportions expected...<sup>51</sup>

Cotton cloth, called *baftaes*, was sourced from Cambay, Broach and Ahmedabad, through the brokers of both Surat and these towns. Another dimension of the local trade networks is made clear through these references, for payments were often made through the network of agents of the bigger merchants at Surat: for example, we have mention of the transfer of money to Agra to pay for the indigo purchased there through a Bill of Exchange drawn upon the agent of the Surat merchant Virji Vora. We therefore move to the routes connecting the various places, and the ways in which peoples, cultures, and products travelled, to create multiple overlapping networks of connections – from coast to interior, within the interior, and along the coast. I will highlight this by talking of some routes, which were of particular importance. One set of routes is that mentioned above, which underlines the links connecting various towns in Gujarat. Another set of routes was that which led inland from Gujarat (particularly Surat), via Burhanpur, particularly, as well as another set leading north and south from Surat, across the plateau, and along the coast.

What has been outlined above are the Gujarat networks, but these were also linked to the Deccan. Surat was important both for the trade to north India and to Deccan, something that comes out clearly in Tavernier's travel account. It is in this connection that the maps given below are to be understood. Tavernier described the route from Surat to Agra via Burhanpur, the city that was often called the 'door' to the Deccan. (See Map 4 in Appendix). Burhanpur, lying more to the interior, was in many ways the point of intersection of the trade routes across the country, and with Tavernier, we have a detailed description of the route and the stages, and the distances between each stage.<sup>52</sup> In the 1630s, the trade at this place was particularly vibrant because of the presence of the Mughal armies; but apart from that, the region around Burhanpur was known for the production of fine cotton textiles, much in demand in both the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf regions. An extension of this route led to Masulipatnam, the chief port of the Sultanate of Golconda, thus linking Surat with the networks of production and trade across the peninsula and into the east coast as well. Yet another route was that which led from Surat to Masulipatam, thus connecting the two coasts. While Tavernier described the route from Gujarat southwards, two earlier travellers, Abdur Razzak and Nicolo Conti (see Map 3 for the latter in Appendix), described the route from

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> V. Ball and W. Crooke (tr. and ed.), *Travels in India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Baron of Aubonne*, First Indian Edition, Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1977, pp. 40-41.



Mangalore on the west coast to something he calls ‘Malepur’, possibly Mylapore in modern Chennai.

Yet another apparently well used route was along the Konkan coast. This route seems to have been less used by the Europeans, for we find very few, stray references to them. Tavernier described this route, but pointed also to the combination of land and sea routes, for he said that while the route from Surat to Rajapur was by land, after Rajapur, the road was so bad that it was better to take a boat down to Goa.<sup>53</sup> He then went on to describe the route from Goa to Golconda, via Bijapur, and then described the route to Masulipatam, via the diamond mines. What comes out clearly in his account, as in that of the Abbé Carré, is that these were all well used routes, with clearly defined halting places.

When talking of networks, especially along the coast, it is also necessary to talk of the coastal trade in small boats, moving from port to port along the coasts of India. The British called this the ‘country’ trade, a term which underlined the fact that goods that were carried on these routes were usually low cost and in small quantities, very often of food items. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we find references in the Maratha records to the shipment of coir and the leftover stalks of the sugar cane harvest from the port of Chaul to Gujarat, and the bringing back of cotton cloth from there.<sup>54</sup> Taxes, not customs duties, were charged on these goods.

Similar locality-based routes can be seen all over the country, used by merchants as well as travellers of different kinds – Streynsham Master, the President of Fort St. George, describes some of them in his diary of his journey by land from Madras (now Chennai) to Hughli – and by messengers. We find frequent references to *pattamars*, those who carried letters from one place to another, and of course to the movement of armies along these roads. (See Map 5 for one small part of such internal connections).

What I have tried to highlight here, are the connections that existed across the peninsula. Ports were undoubtedly important, but we need to understand ports not as just representative of the land-based polities, or as places where these polities established customs collecting centres, but as gateways or as hubs. As a hub, the port was the centre of a large network of connections, along the coast or into the interior, and across to the other coast.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>54</sup> The stalks were used as cattle fodder.

In a paper published in 2007, Emrys Chew argued that the “history of the Indian Ocean and its peoples was characterized by long stretches of collaboration that led to the peaceable exchange of commodities and culture, with only occasional naval conflict directed towards the domination of maritime trade.”<sup>55</sup> Can we extend this argument, and talk of the kinds of collaboration that existed within India, and across Asia? There is often a tendency to talk of either very broad networks, or very small ones, and to study these independently of one another. When we do this, are we not in danger of forgetting that such networks were not mutually exclusive. If we forget peoples and places, how do we understand connections? Where are the areas in which overlaps can be identified – only in the movement of products for trade, or as a broader overlap of thought, of cultures, of families, and of broad inter-personal and inter-social connections? And where would we locate technological exchanges, or navigation techniques, in such networks?

### **Conclusion**

In a paper published in 2010, Tansen Sen highlighted the role of conflicts and warfare as “important elements of cross-cultural interactions in precolonial Asia.”<sup>56</sup> He also remarked on the role of intermediaries in the building of trading exchanges. In these interactions, both overland and maritime routes played a part. The role of intermediaries, the place of armies and their movements in building up networks, and the location of shrines and pilgrimage centres along these routes, all marked points of intersection. The Deccan, I would argue, is a region that needs to be understood, perhaps in this light as well. This paper is a small attempt at locating the region within a wider, networked and therefore overlapping world.

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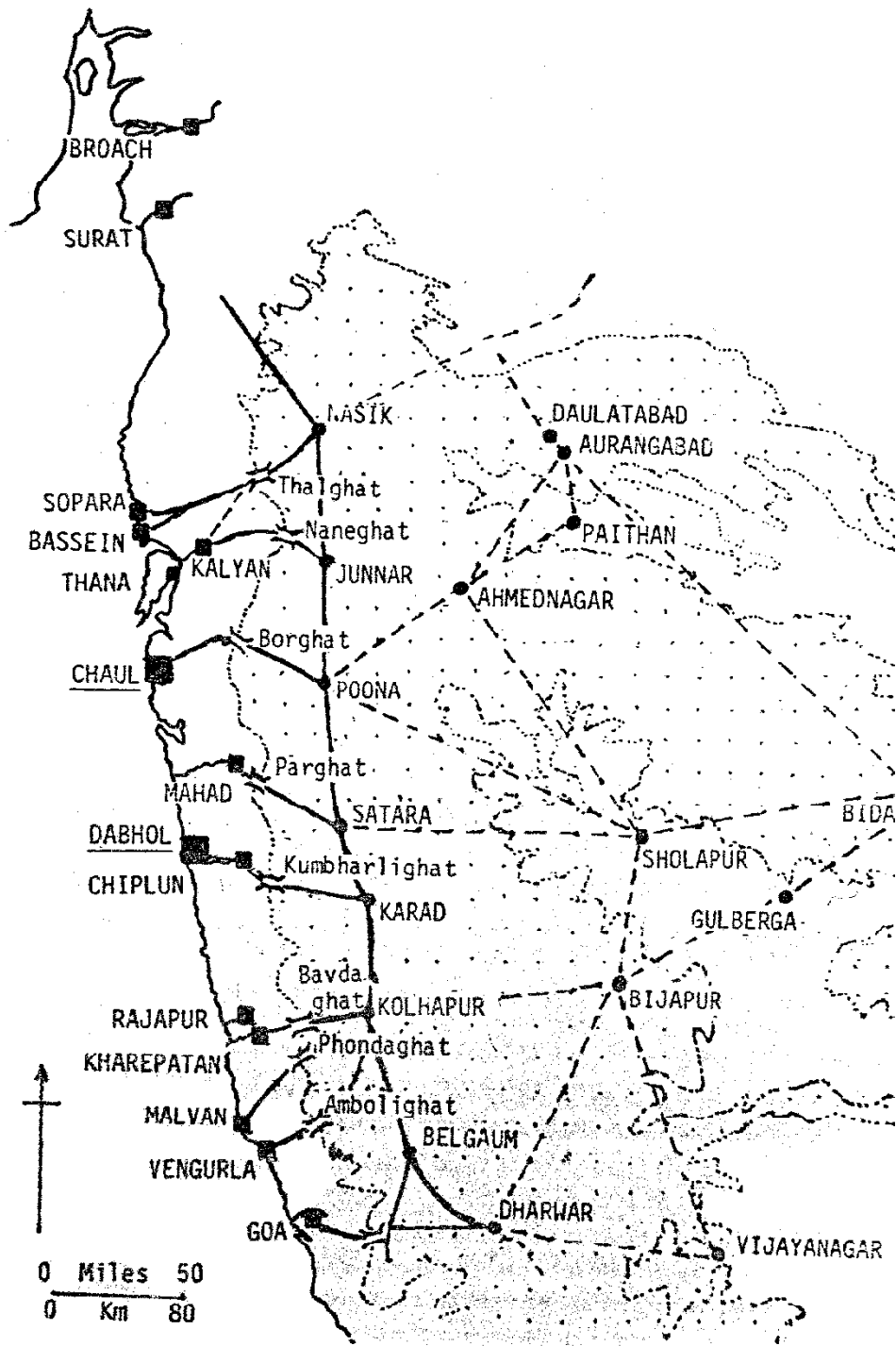
<sup>55</sup> Emrys Chew, “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: the Indian Ocean and the Maritime Balance of Power in Historical Perspective”, Working Paper No. 144, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, 25 October 2007, accessed through jstor, 13/3/2010.

<sup>56</sup> Tansen Sen, “ The Intricacies of Premodern Asian Connections”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (November) 2010: 991-999.

## Appendix

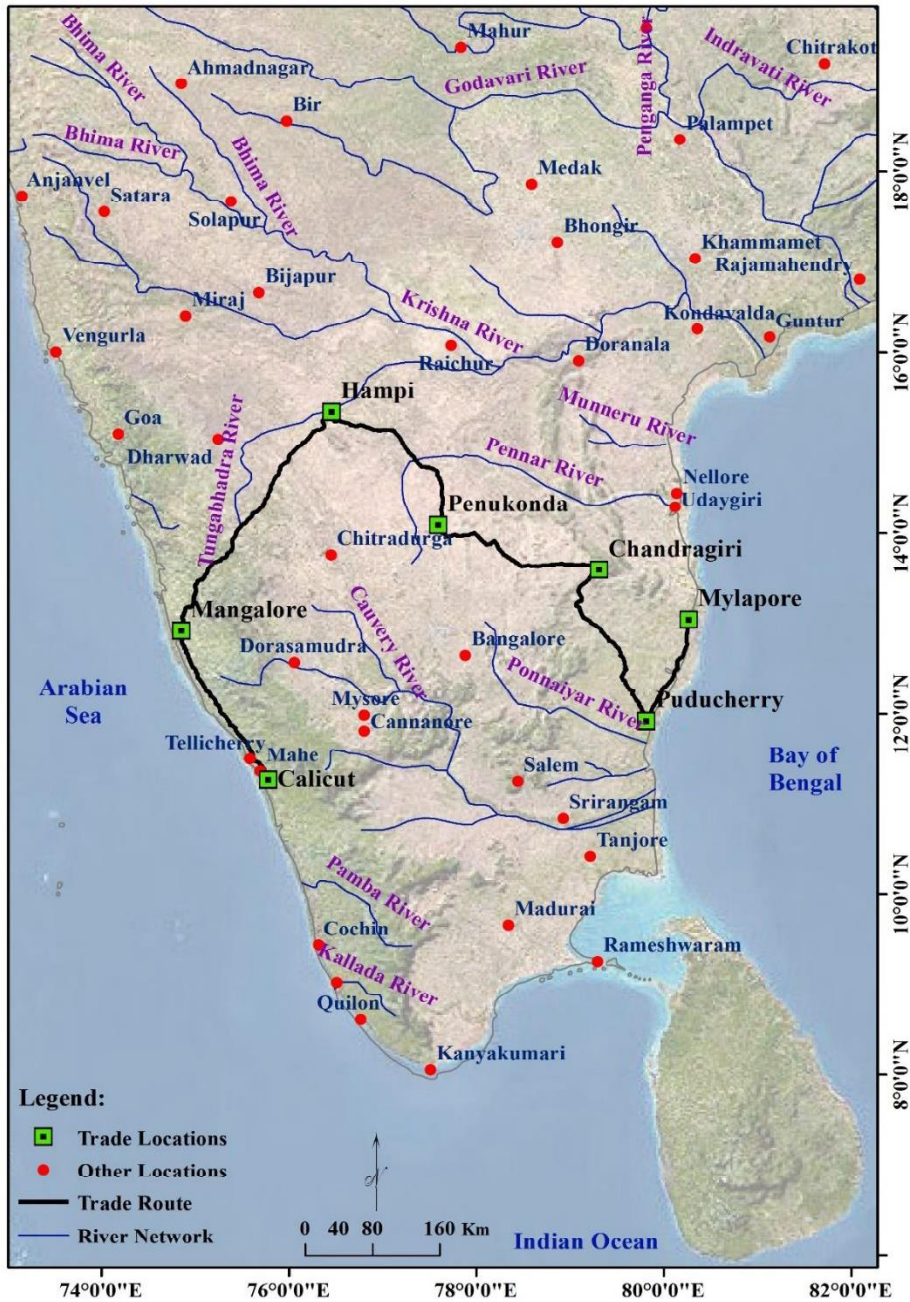


Map 1: Geography of the Deccan (Source: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), map accessed July 2017)



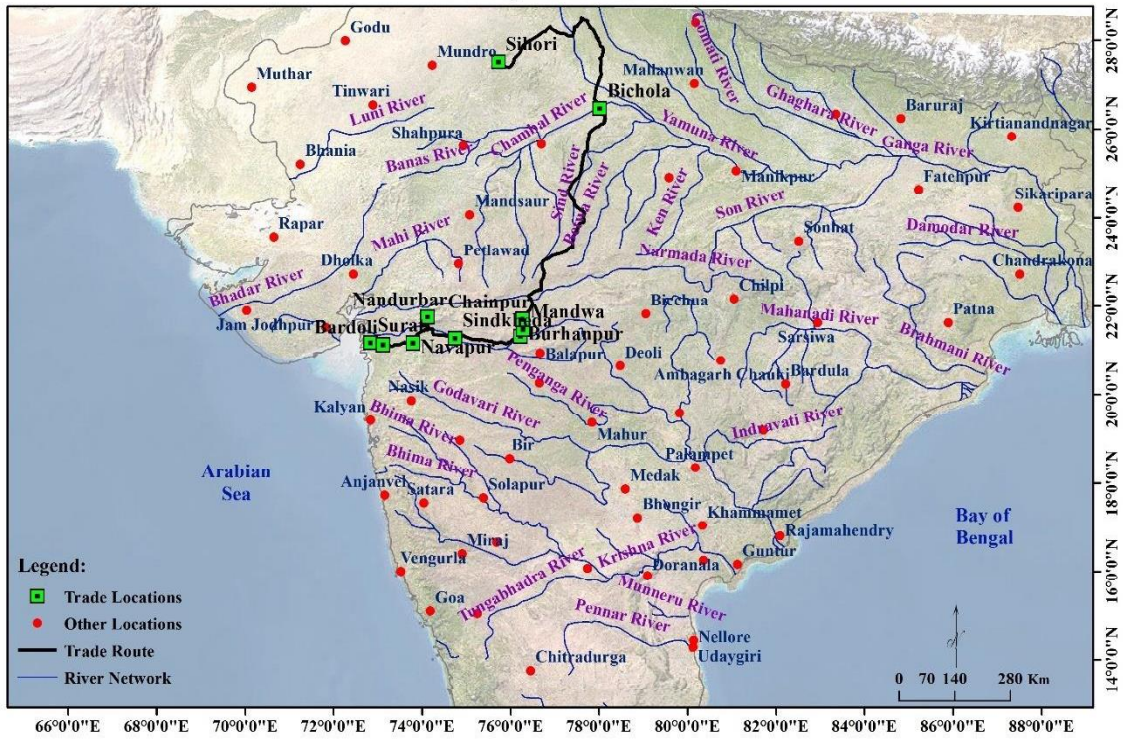
Map 2 – the Konkan Coast (based on BG Tamaskar, *The Life and work of Malik Ambar*, Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delhi, 1978, p. 354)

Routes Connecting the Deccan Ports to the Hinterland: Traveller Nicolo Conti  
[Calicut-Mangalore-Hampi-Penukonda-Chandragiri-Poducherry-Mylapore]  
Created by Mr. Kishor R. Sonawane



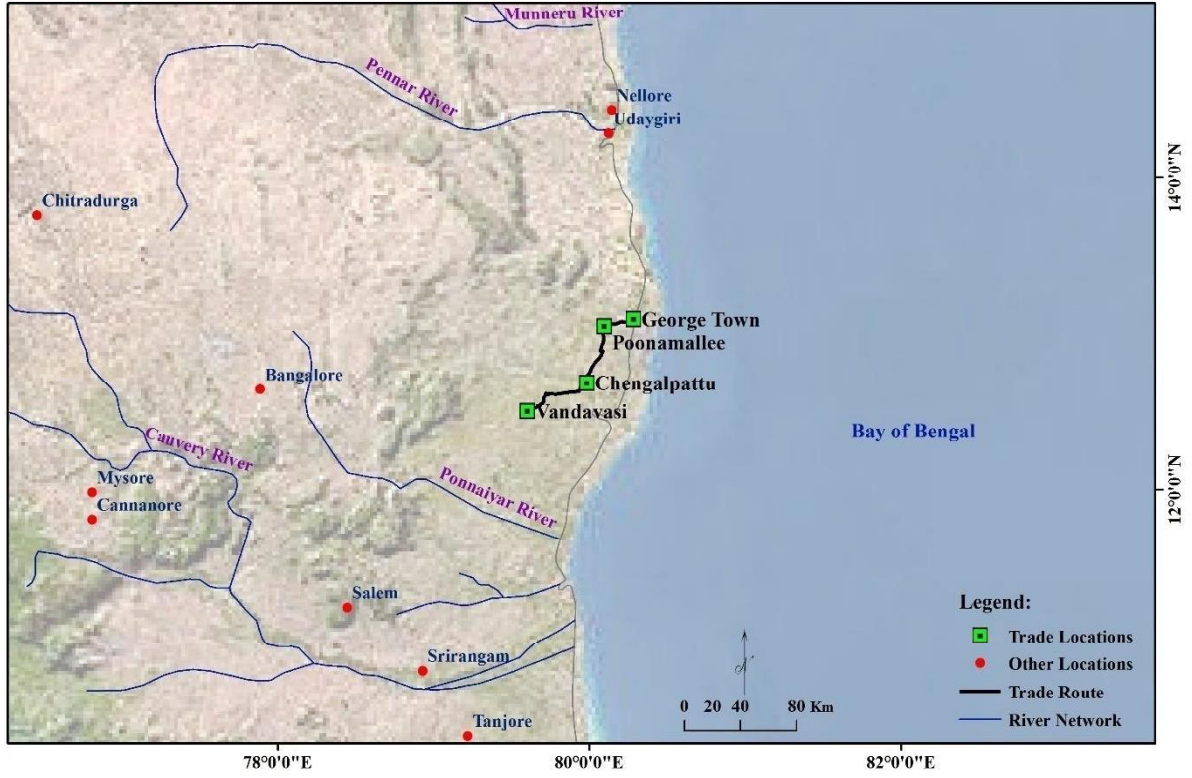
Map 3 – Nicolo Conti’s routes.

Routes Connecting the Deccan Ports to the Hinterland: Traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier  
 [Surat-Bardoli-Navapur-Nandurbar-Sindhkhed-Burhanpur-Mandwa-Chainpur-Bichola-Sihori]  
 Created by Mr. Kishor R. Sonawane



Map 4 – Route connecting Surat to Agra, via Burhanpur.

Routes Connecting the Deccan Ports to the Hinterland  
[Vandavasi–Chengalpattu–Poonamallee–George Town]  
Created by Mr. Kishor R. Sonawane



Map 5 –Section of the route from Fort St. George to the places that supplied textiles