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## SURAT: THE PORT-CITY OF 17TH CENTURY

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Gujarat has been the region of merchants' activities and centre of export and import trade since the pre-historic times. During the Indus Valley Civilization, Lothal, with a huge dockyard, was the port *par excellence* for the trading with the contemporary civilizations of the west Asia. During the ancient times Bhrigukaccha or Bhroach was the most important port with Ujjain (Ozene) as an important emporium of its hinterland.<sup>1</sup> By the time of the Sultanate, another port Cambay emerged as a premier port, though Bhroach continued as a port of some significance. Annexation of Gujarat by Alauddin khilji definitely provided the port of Cambay with a greater hinterland of north India. Under the Sultans of Gujarat, the port was so important that the Portuguese preferred to call the province of Gujarat as "Kingdom of Cambay".<sup>2</sup> Surat which replaced Cambay by the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century remained a port *par excellence* till the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was eventually replaced by Bombay.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Surat appears to be ever thriving and always growing. In fact, the height of eminence, prosperity and popularity which Surat enjoyed during the 17<sup>th</sup> century was not achieved by any other port before.

### **Eclipse of Cambay and other ports**

Silting seems to be the most important factor in the decline of Cambay as a premier port. Because of its situation at the end of the Gulf (of Cambay) and presence of large sand banks,

<sup>1</sup> 'Periplus Maris Erythraei', in *The Classical Accounts of India* (ed. R.C. Majumdar), Calcutta, 1960, Pp-302-4

<sup>2</sup> M.S. Commissariat *Mandelslo's Travel in Western India*, 1638-39, OUP, 1931, P-6.

<sup>3</sup> For a classic account of the decline of Surat, see Asin Dasgupta-*Indian Merchants and Decline of Surat*. Weisbaden, 1979, Reprint 1994, especially chapter 3.

there has been a problem of larger ships going up to the point of embarkation directly. This natural barrier was noticed as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century by the Egyptian traveler Ibn Battuta, who himself saw the ships 'lying on the mud at ebb-tide and floating on the water at high tide'<sup>4</sup> The larger ships usually anchored either at Gandhar or Gogha and from here goods were transported in smaller boats called *tawries* to Cambay.<sup>5</sup> The process of silting continued further and seriously affected the prospect of the port. Accounts of a number of 17<sup>th</sup> century travelers conform to this development. Thevenot, who visited Cambay in 1666, says that the sea was half a league away from the town, though formerly it came up to it and this had greatly reduced the trade of the place because large ships keep miles away out in the sea.<sup>6</sup> With time silting further advanced and damaged the anchoring viability of the port, for Careri, who visited Gujarat in 1695 says "...the vessels anchor twelve miles from it (Cambay) and can not come up to the city with flood. For this reason, the ships often do not go up ..."<sup>7</sup>

The rushing tide or bore at the Gulf was also not normal, its speed being so much that, says P.Della Valle(1623), it surpassed the "swiftest race-horse." This abnormal tide was in "sharp contrast to usual tides at other places where both the rising and falling of the sea, in the flux and reflux, is done gently in full six hours"<sup>8</sup> This factor was also observed by Thevenot. He writes- "The tides are so swift to the north of the Gulf of Cambay, that a man on horse -back at full speed can not keep pace with the first wave. And this violence of the sea is one reason also why great ships go but seldom thither."<sup>9</sup>

Francois Martin, while he was crossing the Mahi River, also writes about this abnormal tide which had claimed many lives in the past -

*"We passed the river Mahi at a distance of four or five leagues from its estuary when it discharges itself into the Gulf of Cambay. The river-bed is very large but when we crossed over, it was practically dry. If, however, this passage is not timed carefully it can still prove*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, Tr. H.A.R. Gibb, Low Price Pub. Reprint 2004. Pp-228-9

<sup>5</sup> *Ain I Akbari*, Vol.I(ed. Blochman) Calcutta, 1876, P-486

<sup>6</sup> S.N.Sen(ed.) *Indian Travls of Thevenot and Careri*, National Archives of India, New Delhi, 1949, P.17

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* P.164S

<sup>8</sup> *The Travells of P. Della Valle* Ed. E. Carey, Hakluyt Society, 1892, Vol.-I, pp.103-04.

<sup>9</sup> S.N.Sen *op. cit*, P.18

*dangerous. The tide sweeps up the river in a flash and many travellers have been swept away.”*

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Diu had the potential to emerge as the leading port of Gujarat during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was a natural port well suited for the anchorage of large ships as well as it enjoyed the political patronage of the Sultans of Gujarat. However, its serious disadvantage was that it had access to very limited hinterland and this limited its potential to cater increasing demand of merchandise. Despite this serious hindrance, the port acquired some eminence in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century particularly due the efforts of its Governor Malik Ayaz (1500-1522). M.N. Pearson has given a detailed account of Ayaz's efforts to raise Diu as premier port of Gujarat.<sup>11</sup> But with capture by the Portuguese in 1536 all hopes of this port emerging as a great entrepot vanished. Gradually it became more a base for the Portuguese to extort tribute than a trading port. It seems that by the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century the port had lost its mercantile importance. At a consultation on 8th December, 1665 the Surat Council of the East India Company noted that the port was not “frequented by merchants of any note.”<sup>12</sup>

Rander was another port with potential to succeed Cambay or Diu. But it could not survive the sack and burning of the town by the Portuguese in 1530. After this incident the port rapidly declined. Although the Dutch had established a factory here early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was abandoned later. Mandelslo who visited Surat in 1638 describes it as “a ruined city where the Dutch had a warehouse.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Rise of Surat**

The remote history of Surat is not much known. A Roman coin was reported to be found at Surat, and considering the Romans were familiar with Bhroach, there is reason to believe that they were aware of the Tapti estuary. However, any substantive evidence is lacking. However,

<sup>10</sup> Lotika Vardarajan –*India in the 17th Century (Social, Economic and Political) Memoires of Francois Martin (1670-1694)*, Manohar Pub., 1994. Vol. II, Part I, P.864.

<sup>11</sup> M.N.Pearson: *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, Berkeley, 1976, Pp.67-73.

<sup>12</sup> The English ship St. George was withheld at Diu because of the fear of the Dutch. But when no sale of the goods therein was possible, the Surat Council decided to bring its cargo to Surat by small vessels. EFI, 1665-67, Pp.25-26.

<sup>13</sup> M.S.Commissariat: *History of Gujarat*, Vol II, P.350. By the early 18th century it became a rural area, for the Mirat describes the city by saying “formerly it was a town.” *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* (Supplement) Tr. Nawab and Sedden, Baroda, 1928, P.188.

Stavorinus's has mentioned that he found "ancient and Roman coins in the money market of Surat" which raises more question than revealing anything in this regard.<sup>14</sup>

Earliest, archaeological evidences are found in the specimens of the Jaina sculptures in the Chintamani Parswanath temple of Surat and a broken image of schist, both belonging to the 13th century. These findings suggest some settlement at Surat in the 13th century, dating from the Solanki dynasty.<sup>15</sup>

From 15th century onwards Surat or Suryapura finds its mention as a human habitat in the chronicle of history. During Sultan Ahmad's period, Zafar Khan who was the governor of Gujarat appointed Sheikh Malik, called Masti Khan, as the Governor of Surat in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, it was Malik Gopi, the Surat Governor, who brought this port to some importance from obscurity in early 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> He made great effort to make it a leading port vis-i-vis Diu. Malik Gopi constructed a huge tank when he was perhaps the Governor of Surat. The tank supplied water throughout the city during 16th & 17th centuries. It attracted the attention of almost all the European travelers. This tank was one of the most popular pleasure-resorts of the city. It was magnificently built, for Thevenot compares it with the finest public utilitarian of the Roman king. "It is most certainly a piece of work worthy of a king, and may well be compared with the finest ever built by Romans for the public benefit." He further adds that the neglect of maintenance has led to silting of this tank up to six feet.<sup>17</sup>

However, after his death the port saw a period of many ups and downs throughout the 16th century. The Portuguese were a great source of disturbance in its period of infancy. It was burnt in 1530, along with Rander, by the Portuguese Captain, Antonio da Silveira. The Sultan's

<sup>14</sup> Dilip K. Chakrabarty, *The Archeology of European Expansion in India*, Gujarat, C. 16th- 18th centuries. 2003. p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> R. N. Mehta- "Urban Surat, an archaeological, topographical and typonymical perspective, in Journal of the M S University of Baroda. Cf. Dilip K. Chakrabarty. Op. Cit. Pp. 80-81.

<sup>16</sup> For efforts made by Malik Gopi, see K.S.Mathew-*Indo-Portuguese Trade and Gujarat Nobility in 16th Century: A Case Study of Malik Gopi*, IHC,1987, Pp.357-63 .

<sup>17</sup> M.S. Commissariat-*History of Gujarat*, Vol. II, P.366. The tank had dried up by the third quarter of the 17th century as is evident from its detailed description by John Fryer. See, *A New Account of Eastern India and Persia Being Nine Years' Travels*,1672-81. W. Crooke ed., London, 1912, Vol. I, P.61. During early 18th century, its bricks were used for the construction of the outer city wall 'Alampanah'. (Commissariat op. cit. P. 366). Stavorinus, the Dutch sea-captain and traveller, who visited Surat in 1775 found no trace of this tank. (*Stvorinus, Voyage to the East Indies*, Tr. S.H.Wilcock, London, 1978, Vol. II.P.472.

Governor of Surat, Khwaja Safar, built the city fort to thwart any attack by the Portuguese. The fort successfully defended the city from the Portuguese attack in 1560-61.

In early 17<sup>th</sup> century Cambay continued to dispute the imminent rise of Surat. An interesting incident of this rivalry is found in the account of Sir Thomas Roe. When he was at Surat, he found himself being persuaded by the governor of Cambay to open factory there and not at Surat. He writes:

*“This day came a handsome frigatt from Camaya with a principall servant of the Governor aboard the Generall, and with complements of frendship and desire of trade to theyr towne as a head city. He gave the Generall a present of sweetmeates and some fewe stuffs in the name of the Governor, and desiring to buy some rerietyes or toys for thyr master (the Mughal Emperor) ...telling the Generall he should find the new Governor of Suratt a clowne and a frend of our enemys (i.e. the Portugals), but that if wee would make our residence at Cambaya, we should receive notable content.”*<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, the Surat Governor charged the Governor of Cambay being in collusion with the Portuguese and persuaded Roe to settle and trade at Surat because it had become the Prince (Khurram)’s port and it would be a dishonour to the Prince to trade with Cambay in preference to Surat. *“...the (Governor of Surat) continued to perswade me to hinder any trade with the Cambayan, urdging the dishonor of the Princes port”*<sup>19</sup> It seems that the argument given by the governor of Surat made sense to Thomas Roe and as he was planning to get favourable *farmans* from the Mughal court, he decided to settle the factory at Surat so that the Prince should not get offended.

The integration of the port with the Mughal Empire after annexation of Gujarat by Akbar in 1573 contributed to its rise in more than one ways.<sup>20</sup> Apart from the physical security the port was connected with huge hinterland market. It was because this that the European Companies’ merchants could travel as far as Agra and Patna, procure goods and bring them to Surat for export. The annexation of Khandesh in 1601 to Mughal Empire further enhanced the importance

<sup>18</sup> *Embassy of Thomas Roe.*, Pp. 29-30.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* P. 42.

<sup>20</sup> However, as pointed out by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subramanyam, there is a need of caution in generalizing the Mughal factor. According to them, “neither Goa nor Masulipattanam was there within the Mughal Empire during their years of prosperity.” Alam & Subramanyam (ed.) *The Mughal State*, 1998. *Introduction*, P.13.

of the port, for it now opened an alternative route to Agra through Burhanpur, and Malwa and Gwalior. This route has been described as “*safer, speedier and cheaper.*”<sup>21</sup>

The other route which ran from Surat to Agra through Bhroach, Cambay, Ahmedabad and Ajmer has been described as difficult because of intervening desert, the interference of local chiefs through whose territories one had to pass, and the highway robbers. This disturbance remained throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. P. Della Valle (1623), on his way from Cambay to Ahmedabad, saw a large number of “beggars”, who were armed with bows and arrows. “These ruffians”, he says, “often robbed travellers whom they met alone or unarmed.”<sup>22</sup> Mandelslo faced the attack of Koli robbers on his way from Baroda to Bhroach and Thevenot described a village named Dabka as a nest of robbers in the Bhroach district.<sup>23</sup> In 1673, The Surat Council of the East India Company wrote about a glut of ivory at Surat because the merchants of Multan were fearful of the dacoits which infested the roads from Multan to Ahmedabad and thence to Surat.<sup>24</sup> In the third quarter of the century, Francois Martin observed that all the inhabitants of the countryside of Bhroach are thieves and their children are taught in the art of robbery from the very early age.<sup>25</sup> He further says that the peasantry right up to Agra has the same characteristics.<sup>26</sup> Also, the road between Baroda and Ahmedabad was infested with the *Garasia* robbers. He gives an interesting account about the *Garasia* robbers. He says that the *Garasias* trained their children in this theft-craft since childhood in such a way that they become expert in communicating through mimicking animals’ voice and gestures all about the passing travellers. He writes:

*“From their youth, the Garasias are trained to imitate animal sounds and they become so proficient in this that when they take up their respective positions during an expedition they are able to emit amazing amount of information by means of these cries. They are able to give details about the number of travellers, their suite, whether they are Muslims or Hindu and as much as*

<sup>21</sup> Shirin Moosvi “Gujarat Ports and their Hinterland: The Economic Relationship”, in Indu Banga (ed.) *Ports and Their Hinterland in India*, Manohar Pub. , 1992, Footnote no. 15, P.125.

<sup>22</sup> M.S. Commissariat-*History of Gujarat*, Vol. II, P.335.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. P.357 (Thevenot). 367 (Mandelslo).

<sup>24</sup> “The only valuable commodity that lay on the Council’s hand during the year was ivory. This was mainly due to dacoits on the roads, which had prevented dealers from Multan to Ahmedabad and Surat...” *EFI* (New Series) Vol. I, P. 231.

<sup>25</sup> Lotika Vardarajan –*India in the 17th Century (Social, Economic and Political) Memoirs of Francois Martin* (1670-1694), Manohar Pub., 1994. Vol. II, Part I, P. 861.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

can be discerned about the possession of the intended victims. A regular interchange may be carried on in this way as to whether or not the travellers should be attacked or allowed to continue on their way unmolested.”<sup>27</sup>

Topography of Surat was also an important factor in its ascendancy. River Tapi or Tapti on which mouth Surat was situated discharged less silt compared to that by the Mahi river. However Surat had a disadvantage of violent gale from time to time which proved quite destructive both to ships and the coast. One such gale, which occurred in April-May, 1674, caused the loss of about Rs.30 lakh to the merchants of Surat and in did severe financial damage to even the eminent merchants. “...a violent gale from south-west that raged for some ten days along the coast during the later part of April and the first few days of May, to the great detriment of the ports of Surat, Daman, Bassein, and Goa. Surat was greatest sufferer as most of her ships that had left for Persia, Mokha and the eastern archipelago were driven back and lost their voyages. Some of them were cast away, while others had to fling their goods overboard and rest were damaged. The loss to the Surat was said to total thirty lakh of rupees resulted in a Prejudicial scarcity of money. ...The trade at Surat suffered considerably from losses caused by the, which broke several of its eminent merchants.”<sup>28</sup>

The discovery of the Swally Hole by an Englishman named Henry Hamilton<sup>29</sup> increased the anchoring viability of the port. We know from the brief account of Surat given by Father Manuel Godinho that deep hollows were excavated in the channel of the Tapi River so that the smaller ships could anchor safely at Surat.<sup>30</sup>

Surat was the port of embarkation for the people going for the *Hajj* to Mecca. Because of this reason, the city was also sometimes referred as *Bab-al-Hajj* or “Gate of Pilgrimage”.<sup>31</sup> The Mughals arranged special ships annually and we find repeated references of the merchants preferring to load their merchandise on such ships because of the special treatment these ships

<sup>27</sup> Francois Martin –*op. cit.* P. 865.

<sup>28</sup> *EFI* (New Series), Vol. I Pp. 236-37.

<sup>29</sup> William Hawkins (1608-13) says this. See William Foster (ed.) *Early Travels In India*, 1583-1619. Low Price Pub. Reprint 1999. Pp. 60-121. P.96.

<sup>30</sup> L.M.Moraes- “Surat in 1663, as described by Father Godinho”, in Satis Chandra (ed.) *Essays in Medieval Indian Economic History*, 1987, Pp. 140-49. See especially Pp. 141-42.

<sup>31</sup> M.S.Commissariat - *History of Gujarat*, Vol. II. P. 164.

received in Persia. Another reason was that such ships were usually not disturbed on high seas by the European Companies.

The coming of the Dutch and English and later the French<sup>32</sup>, who brought a heavy demand for the coarse clothes, indigo, saltpeter etc. and various kinds of spices which were produced in the larger mercantile hinterland of Surat was also a major factor in the rise of the port. These merchandises had a ready demand in the European countries. The coarse cloth of Surat had greater demand in the South-East Asian markets in preference to the fine cloth of the *Coromandal*. The European Companies purchased the coarse clothes from Surat for the South-East Asian markets to barter for spices, which were taken to Europe. Two English officials at Achin, George Robinson and Richard Allen, wrote a letter dated 28 February, 1622 to the Surat factory that “Goods urgently needed from Surat, as pepper is plentiful.”<sup>33</sup>

However, this overwhelming demand for the Gujarati coarse cloth was associated with the painful memory of the decline in the Gujarati shipping to South-east Asia, for the English and the Dutch monopolized this during the first quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1620’s, the shipping to the Red Sea was also monopolized by the English.<sup>34</sup> The lament of the Gujarati shipping merchants is reflected in the account of Pelseart, who visited Surat in 1627. It is worth quoting –

*“All merchants, from whatever country they come, complain most bitterly. Portuguese, Muslims and Hindus all concur in putting the blame for this state of things entirely on the English and on us [Dutch], saying that we are the scourges of the sea and their prosperity. Often enough, if we notice any shortcoming, and blame them, or threaten them, for it, the leading merchants tell us they heartily, wish we had never come to their country. They point to the number of ships that used to sail from Surat alone – every year four or five of the king’s great ships, each of 400 or 500 last (two for Achin, two for Ormuz, two for Bantam, Macassar and*

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<sup>32</sup> Manucci writes that the port became more populous after coming of the French – “thus Surat, which was inhabited by rich traders, Mohamedan, Hindu, English, Dutch, became more populous by the arrival of the French.” Op. cit. Vol. I p.61.

<sup>33</sup> EFI, 1622, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> For details, see P.N. Chakrabarti – Decay of Mughal India’s Red Sea Trade Monopoly (1619-1627) in I.H.C., 1969, pp.

those parts), besides smaller ships owned by individual merchants, coming and going in large numbers. Nowadays the total is very small.<sup>35</sup>

It is important to note that the establishment of the three great Muslim empires in the Western Indian Ocean during the 16<sup>th</sup> century – Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman – enhanced the trading linkages in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf and Red Sea and hence contributed to the rise of Surat.<sup>36</sup> The Mughals had good relation with the Safavid and Ottoman empires, which was maintained through exchanges of diplomats, eminent artists and other cultural personalities. The goods of Surat had ready market in Persia and the profit was also great.<sup>37</sup> The Surat merchants were already trading with this region when the English arrive in India. When the English tried to establish monopoly of the Red Sea trade, the merchants of Surat stopped selling goods to them and organized a “general boycott” in 1619.<sup>38</sup>

Yet another important factor which sustained Surat to remain a premier port during the 17<sup>th</sup> century was its mercantile ethos. The port city was full of merchants, brokers and *shroffs*. They were very experts in mercantile dealings. *Dubhasis* (the interpreters) were easily available to help the European merchants to strike a deal. Many brokers of Surat had working knowledge of one or two European languages. English factory records speak of a person named Dhanji who worked as Company’s linguist in 1620’s.<sup>39</sup> Ovington also refers to a *bania* who could roughly speak English.<sup>40</sup> He also says that the brokers were allowed 3% charge for their care and trouble<sup>41</sup>. The *Hundi* network was fully developed and merchants of Surat had their agents not only in the major cities of the Mughal empire, but abroad also. Mandelso, who visited Surat in 1638-39, says that, “The *banya shroffs* had their correspondents to all parts of Asia, as also at Constantinople in Europe.”<sup>42</sup> The European companies frequently used this facility to transfer

<sup>35</sup> Moreland and Geyl (tr.) Jahangir’s India, Cambridge, 1925, p-40.

<sup>36</sup> Asin Dasgupta, op.cit., p-3-5.

<sup>37</sup> The English Ship *Lion* returned to Surat in October 1619 and made nearly 100 percent profit. This incredible profit induced Kerridge, the then President of the English factory at Surat, to resolve to prosecute this trade, though he was earlier against this. See, England’s Quest, p-290. Cf. P.N. Chakrabarti – Decay of Mughal India’s Red Sea Trade Monopoly (1619-27) IHC, 19, footnote no. 26, p-...

<sup>38</sup> EFI, 1918-21, p-XIV. A letter says “The Surat merchants oppose the trade ‘as very prejudicial into them forbade all induced.’ To prevent it they forbade all dealing with the English the commodities suitable for the Red Sea.” Ibid. p.50.

<sup>39</sup> EFI, 1624-29, p.228.

<sup>40</sup> Ovington, A.G. Rawlinson (ed.), p.192.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>42</sup> Mandelslo, op. cit., p.

their money from one city to another. The Mughal state officials also used this facility for the same purpose.

The flourishing ship building industry was also an important factor because of the presence of skilled boat makers and the good quality of timber. Manucci wrote: "On this river (Tapti) are built very fine lofty ships in a very short time, everything necessary being found, principally excellent timber; for which reason these ships last much longer than those made in Europe."<sup>43</sup>

### **Surat as Entrepot**

An important point about Surat was that, unlike Cambay and Bhroach, it was neither a large producing centre nor itself a great market for the goods brought here. Its eminence lied in its integration with other ports of Gujarat and hinterland markets in India. It developed as a great emporium where the goods from its hinterland in Gujarat and as far as Agra and Patna were brought for sell and export by the Surat merchants and agents of the European companies. Careri, who visited Surat in 1965, says that goods produced at Ahmedabad and Bhroach were transported to Surat for final transaction. He explains the large hinterland access of Surat in a poetic manner. He writes:

*"I purposely omit to mention particularly so many countries (parts of India), which like Rivers to the sea voncey all their wealth to suratte, because of the good vent they find for it there; this being a matter well known to the Europeans."*<sup>44</sup>

Surat was also a transit port for the goods brought from various parts of the world. European travelers of 17<sup>th</sup> century vividly describe this. Thevenot says that apart from the stuffs and clothes made in the Indies, all the important commodities of Europe as also those of China were sold in its markets. Among various commodities, he especially enumerates musk, amber, incense, manna, salammoniatic, quick silver, lac, indigo and the 'root renas for dying red', and in general all those articles which foreign merchants buy for being sold in all parts of the world.<sup>45</sup> Description of Surat given by Ovington and Francois Martin also conforms to this. Ovington says, "Surat is reckoned the most famed emporium of the Indian Empire. And not only from

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<sup>43</sup> Manucci, op. cit., vol. I, p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> Careri, S.N. Sen (ed.) op.cit. p. 164.

<sup>45</sup> 'M. Jean De Thevenot's Account of Surat', in M.S. Commissariat – Studies in the History of Gujarat, 1987 (Reprint), pp. 79-96, p.95.

Europe, but also from China, Persia, Arabia and other remote parts of India, ships unload abundance of all kinds of goods...”<sup>46</sup> Francios Martin, while leaving Surat in 1684 to take charge as the Chief of the French factory at Pondicherry remarks, “I can only say that very few cities in the world can compare with Surat in the magnitude of commercial transactions... It is the miniature Babylon with men of almost every nationality thronging the streets in their costumes and speaking diverse language.”<sup>47</sup>

### Swally Port

Unlike Cambay, Surat was not a port. Its port where the ships anchored was situated about 10 miles away on the coast of the Swally village. The port was naturally fitted for anchorage of large ships. Here a fleet could ride and anchor much more safely than among the shifting shoals of Tapi or Tapi river. The custom-house (or *Alfadica* as it is called in the English factory records) was located here. The goods were uploaded or downloaded here, and after paying custom duty, were carried to Surat through road. The distance between Swally town and the water-side was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile.<sup>48</sup>

Although Swally was a village, but during trading season (i.e. from October to April)<sup>49</sup>, it gave the appearance of a ‘country fair’, says Thomas Herbert. He writes that all the *Banya* merchants pitched their booths or straw huts in large numbers all along the sea-front. Hence all important merchants and European companies had separate booths for their warehouse, stables and other adjuncts.<sup>50</sup>

Major renovation seems to have been made at Swally during the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, for Peter Mundi who visited Surat second time in 1656 writes:

*“Here on Swally sands I found some alteration since my last being in this place, which was in February anno 1633 (vol.-II, pp.311-13), the Presidentts tent being remooved a great deal*

<sup>46</sup> *A voyage to Surat in the year 1689*, A.G. Rawlinson (ed.), London, 1939, p.131.

<sup>47</sup> Francois Mrtin, Lotika Vardarajan, op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Mundy, vol.-II, p.11.

<sup>49</sup> Mandelslo also says that the trading at the coast was from October to April and no work was possible from May to September due to wind and tempests., “But from May to September, there is no staying on those coasts, by reason of winds and tempests, accompany’d by extraordinary thunder and lightening which reign there during all that time.” Mandelslo’s Travels in Western India (1638-39), M.S. Commissariat, *History of Gujarat*, vol.-II, p.9.

<sup>50</sup> M.S. Commissariat, *History of Gujarat*, vol.-II, chapter XXX, p.346.

*farther up and pitched upon a rising ground, a specious place enclosed, wherein are courts, yards, warehouses, chowtrees, ballaconnas (i.e. Bala Khana – an upper room, upper story), etts., (that is) to say elevated rooms fairely built of bricke, timber, etts. to sit, eat, drincke, discourse and take the aire, covered with tiles; a platforme alsoe with ordnance. The bazare likewise completely built with handsome streete of shoppps, covered with bricke tiles allso.*”<sup>51</sup>

The Swally port was also a centre for the small Banyas to sell large variety of goods in small market of bazaar. Herbert says that they sold calicos, china (a type of cloth), satins, porcelain, escritaires or cabinets of mother-or-pearl, ebony, ivory, agates, carnelian, etc.; also rice, sugar, plantains, and arrak.<sup>52</sup> John Fryer who arrived at Swally from Bombay in 1674 also describes the city as thriving with smaller merchants. He writes “As soon as you have set your foot on shore, they (Banyas) crowd in their service, interposing between you and all civil respect, as if you had no other business but to be gulled; ...enduring servility foul words, affronts and injuries for a future hope of gain; expert in all the studied arts of thriving and insinuation. ... These generally are the poorer sorts, and set on by the richer to trade with the seamen for the meanest things they bring.”<sup>53</sup>

### **City Walls**

The city of Surat had a very poor defence-wall before the attack of Shivaji in 1664. Thomas Herbert, who visited the city in 1627, says that the town was enclosed by a mud wall.<sup>54</sup> Rev. John L’Escalot’s Letter to his brother George, dated 26<sup>th</sup> January 1664 describing Shivaji’s exploit of Surat, quoted selectively in EFI, says about the poor defence wall –

*“The whole towne is unfortefied, either by art or nature... Their care hath beene soe little to secure it by art that they have only made against the cheefe avenues of the towne some weake and ill built gates, and for the rest in some parts a dry ditch easely pasable by a footman, wanting a wall or other defence on the inner side; the rest is left soe open that any signe of a ditch is perceivable.”*<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Peter Mundy, op. cit, vol-V, p.70.

<sup>52</sup> M.S. commissariat, History of Gujrat, vol.-II, p.346.

<sup>53</sup> J. Fryer, o.cit., vol.-pp. 211-12.

<sup>54</sup> See Commissariat- History of Gujarat, op.cit., Chapter-XXX, p.345.

<sup>55</sup> EFI, 1661-64, p.307.

After Shivaji's first sack of Surat in January 1664, Aurangzeb ordered building of a strong wall of ten feet thick and ten feet high. Thevenot says that the city had hitherto only dilapidated mud walls, but he saw the walls, ordered by Aurangzeb, being constructed.<sup>56</sup> This wall called Sheherpanah or "The Safety of the City", took fifteen years to be completed. John Fryer who visited the city first time in 1674, saw it still under construction and its damaged part (by Shivaji's second sack of Surat in 1670) being repaired. He says that seven hundred men had been assigned at this period for (construction of ) the walls with European gunners at every gate, which were six in number besides 36 bastions with half a dozen great guns apiece and spiked timber being piled upon the top to repel the sealers. However, when he returned to the city in January 1679, he saw it completed.<sup>57</sup>

However, this wall was not strong enough to defend. The comments by Francois Martin and Careri bear testimony to the fact that this wall was very weak. While Martin describes it as "a very badly constructed wall", Careri says it a "Weak wall."<sup>58</sup> It was due to this reason and the increasing Maratha menace to the city that, in 1717, Farrukhsiyar ordered, Haider Quli Khan, the then Governor of Surat, construction of a new line of fortification which enclosed both the city and the extensive suburban areas which was known as Alampanah or the "Safety of the World."<sup>59</sup> This new safety wall inclosed the newly developed suburban areas such as Ghastipur, Rampura, Haripura, Mahidharpura, Begumpura, Salabatpura, Rustampura, Sagarampura, Rudrapura, and Nanpura.<sup>60</sup> This was also referred to as "outer wall", the earlier on (Sheherpanah) being no called the "inner wall".

### CityGates

There were three chief gates of the city of Surat. Of these, according to Thomas Herbert, one led to Variav and Cambay, another to Burhanpur and the third to Navasari and hence to

<sup>56</sup> M.S. Commissariat- *History of Gujarat*, op.cit., Chapter-XXX, p.361.

<sup>57</sup> John Fryer, William Crooke (ed.), vol.-I, p.248, vol.-III, pp. 161-62.

<sup>58</sup> F. Martin, Lotika Vardarajan (ed.), op.cit., p.1004; Careri, S.N. Sen (ed.), op.cit., p.163.

<sup>59</sup> M.S. Commissariat, *History of Gujarat*, op.cit., p.391-92. The construction of this fortification is recorded in a beautiful inscription in the Persioan verse, carved in relief on a long slab of white marble, which was found by R.D. Banerji of Archaeological Survey of India in 1921, in the 'Mughal Sarai' building at Surat, and which is now located in the National Museum of Mumbai (earlier the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay). See, paper entitled *Two Persian Inscriptions from Surat* by C. R. Singhal in *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica*, 1925-26, pp.12-13. Cf. Commissariat, op.cit. footnote no. 25, p.391. *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* clearly says that the foundation of the *Alampanah* was laid by Haider Quli Khan in 1716 and the ceremony was performed by Syed 'Aqil Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, tr. M.F. Lokhandawala, op.cit., p.373.

<sup>60</sup> R.N. Mehta, *Medieval Archaeology*, Ajanta Publication, 1979, p.98.

Gandevi, Bulsar and Daman.<sup>61</sup> Mandelso also describes the three gates of the city in similar way.<sup>62</sup> William Finch,<sup>63</sup> John Fryer and Peter Mundy also describe the city gates in a similar way. But interestingly Peter Mundy says that there were seven gates.

*“There are 7 Gates belonging to it vizt. Baroche Gate, out of which goe many a Englishman that never return, it being the way to our place of Buriall. This Gate leadeth to Ahmudavad and so go to Agra that way; Brampore (Burhanpur) Gate lending to Brampore, Decan and to the English garden without the Towne; Nunsaree (Nausari) Gate to Nunsaree etts. (and other) Sea townes to the Southward, and the way to the great Tanke (perhaps reference to the famous Gopi Talav) with others which I omit.”*<sup>64</sup>



<sup>61</sup> Commissariat, History of Gujarat, op.cit., Chapter-XXX, pp.345-46.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Chapter –XXXI, p.350.

<sup>63</sup> William Foster (ed.) *Early Travels in India*, 1583-1619, Low Price Publication, (Reprint, 1999) p.134.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Mundy, op.cit., vol.-II, p.29.