

# Gujarat and the Sea

## A Study of the Overseas Jain Merchants in the Ancient and Medieval Periods

Gujarati business castes and communities such as the Jain, Hindu, Khojas, Bohras, Memons and Parsis have played an important part in the Indian Ocean Trade. However, it was the Jains who, in spite of the variety of sects among them, were the earliest overseas merchants. This Chapter shows that Jain monks and merchants shared common ethical values based on the philosophy and practice of ahimsa or non - violence, and this was one of the important reasons why the Jains identified themselves as a business community since the Mauryan period (322-185 BCE).<sup>1</sup> They operated as overseas merchants from ports such as Broach, Sopara, Valabhi, Mangrol, Cambay and Surat. The presence of Arab merchants in the ports and urban centres of Gujarat after the eighth century brought new dimensions to the coastal and overseas trade. Furthermore, it is shown in the chapter, how Jain businessmen interacted with their Arab counterparts, shaping the sea – culture of Gujarat. Similarly, Jain business magnates were in the forefront of overseas trade in the seventeenth century; they competed with their European counterparts – the English, the Dutch and the French.

## Gujarat and the Sea Culture

Gujarat, with its 1600 km long coastline, has played an important part in the maritime history of the world. Facing the Arabian Sea, an extension of the Indian Ocean, its ports carried on maritime trade with West Asia, South East Asia, China and East Africa at different periods in time. Historically, the Arabian Sea has linked the cultures and economies of widely dispersed peoples, allowing knowledge, ideas and beliefs to be

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1 Mehta, 2009; Dundas, 2002

freely transmitted. Gujarat was linked through its ports with ancient Sumer, Phoenicia, Mesopotamia, Iran, Arabia, Egypt, Rome, East Africa, Java, Sumatra, and China. Commercially and culturally the Indian Ocean was then, a single maritime world and Gujarat's sea culture was considerably shaped by this phenomenon. Its long coastline, agricultural fertility, availability of artisanal products and the the enterprising spirit of its merchants, along with the institutions of sreni, mahajan, sreshthin, saraf and dalal, stimulated the overseas activities of the people of this region, making it the fulcrum of maritime trade in the Arabian sea<sup>2</sup>. The emergence of ports such as Lothal in the Harappan period, followed by Dwarka, Veraval, Broach, Sopara, Nagara, Valabhi, Cambay, Diu, Ghogha, Bhadreswar, Mandavi, Mundra and Surat in different periods, shows that Gujarat has been actively engaged in international trade for at least 4000 years, with established commercial links with ancient Mesopotamia, Iran, West Asia, South East Asia, East Asia and the Roman Empire. This was because the Gujaratis had remarkable foresight and resilience in dealing with their foreign rivals including the Arabs, the Portuguese and the English. To quote M. N. Pearson :

"Gujarat had been an economically advanced area for three millennia, with an active, dynamic group of merchants. Cambay ('the Kingdom of Gujarat') was a great center from the time of Buddha at least. The Eurocentric stress on trade to Europe ignores the vast bulk of Asian trade that was not bound for Europe. And in this inner Asian trade it was the Gujaratis, not Arabs, who were dominant. Among these great merchants living mostly by sea trade, it seems that Hindus and Jains outranked Muslims... In the economy of Gujarat as a whole there is no doubt that the dominant group in all trade matters was the Vantias if only because of their numerical predominance."

*(Pearson, 1976, 10, 124)*

Gujarati navigators and merchants were familiar with certain well-defined sea routes : from China and Indonesia to Malacca; from Gujarat to the Red sea; from Malabar to the Red sea;

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2. Mehta, 1991a

from Gujarat to Malabar and intermediate ports on the western coast; from Aden to Hormuz, from East Africa to Gujarat; and from Gujarat to Hormuz. Tome Pires, a Portuguese traveller who visited India in the early sixteenth century, stated :

"Cambay (the Gujarat region) chiefly stretches out two arms. With her right arm she reaches out towards Aden and with the other towards Malacca, as the most important places to sail to, and the other places are held to be of less importance. The Gujaratis are better seamen and do more navigating than the other people of India and so they have larger ships and more men to man them. They are great pilots and do a great deal of navigation"

*(Pires, 1944,42)*

Pires' observations are supported by the fact that it was Kanji Malam, a Kutchi navigator who had piloted the ship carrying Vasco da Gama from Malindi in East Africa to Calicut in South India in 1498. Being requested by the ruler of Malindi, Malam guided the Portuguese navigator across from Africa to Calicut in Malabar.<sup>3</sup> Commenting on Gujarat's engagement with trade in East Africa, C. R. Boxer notes :

"Mozambique or Portuguese East Africa, was full of Gujarati merchants. The economic life of the East African littoral had been oriented towards India long before the arrival of the Portuguese and continued to be so for long afterwards. The gold, ivory and slaves, which the Arab traders and their Portuguese successors obtained from Bantu tribes in the interior, were purchased chiefly with Indian cotton textiles and piece – goods from Gujarat and Coromandel. The retail trade of Sofala was mostly in the hands of the Banias of Gujarat."

*(Boxer, 1956, 128-35; Also see Boxer, 1969)*

Although the pre – Portuguese and pre-Arab periods are important, little research has been done on Gujarat from about the first century BCE up to the thirteenth century CE. This is clear from the language used to describe Gujarati traders from this era. It is customary to use a generic term *bania* or *vania*

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3. Pearson, 1976, 1; Strandes, 1899, 30; Pearce, 1920, 254; Salvadori, 2000, 4-5

to describe the activities of the 'Vaishya business communities'. But the Hindu Vaishnava castes emerged at a much later stage. Before the Vaishnava Bhatias took to overseas trading in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, we hardly find any mention of Vaishnava as overseas traders. The Lohanas and the Patidars followed much later. On the other hand, contemporary Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and Chinese sources show that Jains had established their trading networks with Sri Lanka, Java, Sumatra, Malacca and also with Hormuz and Basra on the Persian Gulf and with Muscat, Aden and as far away as Mocha and other ports on the Red Sea.

Ancient and medieval Hindus and Jains had their own notions of the world, as is reflected in their writing. Wilhelm Halbfass provides an interesting example of an 'Indian' who met Socrates (469-399 BCE) in Athens and asked him about the meaning of philosophising. When the great philosopher replied that he was studying the problems of human life, the Indian laughed and explained that it was impossible to study and understand human things without considering the divine.<sup>4</sup> This was even before Alexander's invasion of India in 327 – 25 B.C. after which a systematic dialogue started between India and the Western world. My contention is that, howsoever fantastic and supernatural ancient and medieval Hindu and Jain literature may appear, it should not be dismissed by a historian. The cultural narratives provided in biographies, poems, agamas, kathas, vartas and also proverbs are useful in reconstructing the business traditions of Gujaratis which were so closely linked with their religious and cultural traditions.

That ancient and medieval Gujarat had developed port administration can be seen from the presence of terms such as *naukadhyaksa* and *navikapati* (head of ships), *hiranyasamudrayika* (customs collection on sea ports) and *atithyam* (customs at sea ports from foreign merchants). Words such as *mandapika* and *pattanam* (customs house and duties on ports), and *velakuladhyaksa* (chief customs official) show the mercantile activities of the sea port.<sup>5</sup> Gujarati proverbs such as 'a bride from Sri Lanka and a husband from Ghogha', and 'One who goes to Java returns with fabulous wealth' also reflect the

4. *Halbfass, 1990, 8*

5. *for technical terms see Jha, 1967; Majumdar, 1956*

business spirit of Gujarat.<sup>6</sup> Francois Pyrard, a French traveller who visited Gujarat in 1608, stated that the Gujarati language was the most widespread and useful accounts and business language in the Indian Ocean countries.<sup>7</sup> A little later John Fryer, who visited Surat in 1672, noticed that the Gujarati merchants were using sign language in their dealings with foreign merchants. He was astonished to see the Surat banias instructing each other with fingers covered under a piece of cloth and fixing prices of goods in a way which effectively concealed them from their European counterparts. The secret of silent bargaining was all under cloak, the prices being determined by signs that were understood by the mere pressure of fingers. Frier remarked : "Such a subtle generation is this, and so fitly squared a place is Surat port to exercise their genius in".<sup>8</sup>

From the aforestated paragraphs it can be derived that the Gujaratis had developed a sophisticated sea culture. This was reinforced by the political stability at different periods in time. In spite of occasional warfare, Gujarat was under the control of the Mauryas (322-185 BCE), the Indo – Greeks / Bactrians (185 BCE – 78 CE), the Guptas (320 – 470 CE), the Maitrakas (470-800), the Solankis (942-1200) and the Mughals (1573 – c. 1700).

With these observations we turn to the Jains.

## Jains as a Business Community

To situate the Jains in their mercantile context we need to trace their historical and sociological setting. Their identity as a community since at least the fourth century BCE can be gleaned from a host of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali and Sinhala sources which show their presence in the ports of Broach, Sopara, Veraval, Nagara, Cambay, Valabhi and Surat at different periods in time. The Jain code of conduct, propounded by Mahavira Swami (c. 540 – 468 BCE), was innovative and change – oriented. Like his contemporary Buddha (563-483 BCE), he rejected Vedic and Brahmanical authority along with the hierarchical varna structure. He rejected Brahmanical sacrifices and propagated

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6. *Majumdar, 1965, 73*

7. *Gray and Bell, 1888, 250*

8. *Crooke, 1909, 248*

non – violence. Mahavira provided an alternative to those who had a lower status in Hindu society. Paul Dundas has suggested that in its earliest period Jainism was not a purely ascetic religion and that the patterns of worship, devotion and practice which gradually emerged within it proved attractive to lay followers whose interaction with monks and nuns on a formal basis provided the means for sustaining the religion.<sup>9</sup>

One of the basic principles of Jainism is ahimsa or non-violence. An important economic result of non-violence was that its lay followers rejected agriculture for fear of ploughing under living insects and turned instead to trade. Contemporary sources show beyond doubt that there was close collaboration between monks and merchants. The latter made large donations to build temples, animal shelters, schools and bhandaras (archives). They also invited monks for the sacred four months (chaturmasa). They organized groups or sanghas for pilgrimage. The ascetics imparted moral and religious instruction, conserved old manuscripts and created new literature. The fact that their monks eulogised the achievements of business leaders in their religious works shows that the Jains had evolved a network supportive of trade and commerce.<sup>10</sup> That is why, during the sixth and the seventh centuries, there was a systematic migration of Jains from Mathura, Pataliputra and other strongholds of Jainism to the prosperous kingdom of Maitrakas of Vallabhi, where doubtless new overseas trading opportunities were available.<sup>11</sup>

The first Jain council was held at Patliputra in 265 BCE. The second and the third, held at Valabhi in 300 and 454 CE respectively, show the popularity of this port town on the Gulf of Cambay.<sup>12</sup> Jain merchants and monks were active in Vallabhi before the Maitraka rulers (470-788 CE) developed it both as a port and a centre of Buddhist and Jain learning.

Jainism laid stress on aparigraha (non-attachment to worldly things) But the business behaviour of merchants such as Jagadusha of the thirteenth century and Shantidas Zaveri and Virji Vora of the seventeenth century show that they

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9. Dundas, 2002, 115

10. Mehta, 1991, 98-99

11. Dundas, 2002, 115

12. Dundas, 2002, 22-23; 49; 71; 115

amassed fabulous wealth and exerted great influence on their respective sects. In fact a large number of Jain monks belonged to mercantile families. Hemachandracharya (1089-1173 CE), a great scholar who supported commercial activities, had undergone his diksa ceremony in the flourishing port of Cambay. Many Jain merchants and monks lived in ports such as Broach, Sopara, Cambay and Valabhi from where the merchants carried on their commercial activities.

## Overseas activities of Jains

Jainism emerged as an important religion in Broach and Sopara. Although the author of the Periplus (first century CE) and his contemporary Pliny do not mention any Hindu or Jain caste or community, contemporary Jain chronicles provide information on the presence of Jain merchants and monks from the second century BCE to the third century CE. Broach and Sopara were an integral part of the Indo – Greek (c. 185 BCE – c. 78 CE) and the Ksatrapa (c. 78-398 CE) empires, and according to Jain sources, Vajrabhuti, a Jain acharya lived in the port of Broach during the period of the great Ksatrapa ruler Nahapana (c. 65-124 CE) who ruled over India including Gujarat and the Konkan from his capital in Malwa. He was a patron of the Jain religion. A large number of his coins inscribed with Greek words were current in ports and trade centres during his time and later. He assumed several titles including Raja, Mahaksatrapa and Swami. The author of the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea or the 'Guide to the Indian Ocean' describes Nahapana as 'Nambanus'. He also provides picturesque description of 'Baraka' (Gulf of Kutch), 'Barygaza' (Bharukachchha /Broach, modern Bharuch), Suppara (Surparaka / Sopara), 'Calliena' (Kalyan) and Syrastrane (Saurashtra). Nahapana ruled over a vast region including Ujjain and Malwa, Saurashtra, South Gujarat and Nasik in Maharashtra. Wilfred Schoff states that he was governor in Saurashtra before he held similar position at Ujjain<sup>13</sup>.

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13 *Ancient and early medieval sources include Prabhawakacharit composed by Prabhachandrasuri, Rajasekhara's Prabandhakosa and Jinabhadrasuri's Prabandhavali. For details see Sandesara, 1952; See also : Rajasekharasuri, 1935; Jinaprabhasuri, 1936; Merutungacharya, 1933; Dalal and Shrigondekar, 1925; Parikh and Shastri, 1972 – 99 – 124., Schoff, 1974, 199*

Although, as stated above, the author of the *Periplus* does not mention the caste of the Indian overseas merchants, his description of the port towns and urban centres of Gujarat and Konkan are very authentic. Indian sources add a new dimension when they state that the Jains had built temples in the ports and urban trade centres of Gujarat. The *Asvabodha* temple was constructed in the Broach port in the second century CE, and Jain monks, merchants, artisans and other pilgrims thronged it. A 5th century Jain monk scholar, Siddhasen Divakar, travelled to Broach, probably from Veraval port of Saurashtra. Also the fact that Nahapana converted to the Jain religion shows the influence the Jain merchants wielded in the overseas trade of Gujarat. It is significant that Siddhasen Divakar, who lived in the capital town of Ujjain in the Malwa region, often visited Broach port, which was then the hub of commercial activities.<sup>14</sup> According to a Jain Prakrit source, *Vasudevahindi*, composed by Sanghadasgani in the 5th century, there was a large settlement of Jain monks and merchants in Broach and Sopara, and the latter went to Sumatra, Sri Lanka, Hormuz, Aden and China for trade. This is supported by another Jain account, *Nisithachurni* composed by Jinadasgani in the seventh century, which informs us that Sopara had a flourishing *sreni* (guild) of the silk-weavers.<sup>15</sup> The Kushana emperors during the Kshatrapa period (78-398 CE) had extended their empire and Mahaksatrapa Rudradaman, the Saka ruler of Malwa (130-150 CE) ruled over a large territory including Sindh, Gujarat, the Konkan, and Malwa, linking the ports and trade routes with his vast empire. It thus seems plausible that the Jains, taking advantage of the political stability and administrative uniformity began to use Broach, Sopara and other ports for overseas trade from at least the second century BCE.

Many Sanskrit and Prakrit sources including those mentioned above show that the Jains were active in the Indian Ocean region. *Vasudevahindi* and *Sandesara*,<sup>16</sup> an example of Charudatta, a Jain merchant who visited Sri Lanka, Java, Sumatra, Aden and Muscat and returned to Sopara with a vast fortune. It

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14 Parikh and Shastri, 1972, 242 -43; 287; 360

15 Vijayapremasuri, 1929; see also *Sandesara*, 1947; *Vasudevahindi*; vols. 1 and 2, Bhavnagar, 1930-31

16 *Vasudevahindi and Sandesara*, 1047

also provides an interesting story of a 'low-caste' carpenter and navigator of Sopara who learnt how to fly eagles in the Yavanadesa, probably Greece<sup>17</sup>. Although fictitious, the story is successive of Gujarat's overseas trade culture.

Gujarat had close commercial ties with Sri Lanka. According to the Vividhatirthakalpa composed by Jinabhadrasuri (1261-1333), princess Sudarsana of Sri Lanka had visited Sopara and had built a Jain temple there. This claim is supported by scholars like A. L. Basham and G. C. Mendis who state that prince Vijaya had embarked from Sopara port to reach Sri Lanka.<sup>18</sup> This is further corroborated by Suniti Kumar Chatterji, a linguist-historian who had used Sinhala, Javanese and Prakrit sources to show the importance of Gujarat in the commercial and cultural development of South –East Asia.<sup>19</sup>

On the basis of this discussion we move to the ancient Broach port.

## Broach Port

Broach and Sopara were the most ancient and prosperous ports on the western coast of India. Broach was also a place of pilgrimage. Later on Arikamedu and Kaveripattinam on the bay of Bengal and Tamralipti in the Ganga delta also emerged as sea ports in the first century BCE. Broach was well – linked with the productive centres of India during the Mauryan (322-185 BCE), Indo – Greek Bactrian (c. 185-78 CE) and the Satavahana (50 BCE – 200 CE) periods.

Being a great port city, Broach was well administered. The port had warehouses and an array of customs officials, then known as Sulkakika. The chief customs collector, Sulkadhyaksa coordinated the activities of customs officials, clerks, accountants and labourers. Ships arriving at Broach were received by pilot boats and conducted each into a separate berth at the docks.

Broach was not a convenient port. How dangerous was the approach to and departure from it, is graphically described by the author of the Periplus. As the part through the Gulf of Cambay towards Broach was treacherous for sailors, the king's

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17 Sandesara, 1947

18 Basham, 1951, 151-63; Mendis, 1926; Shahdulla, 1933, 731-45

19 Chatterji, 1924,72; Majmuddar, 1965,73; See also Mookerji, 1912, 49

boatmen used to solicit ships in the Arabian Sea and escort them safely to Broach for trade. The guards also provided them protection against pirates. The author of the Periplus provides an eyewitness account in the following words.

"This gulf is very narrow to Barygaza and very hard to navigate for those coming from the ocean. Because of this, native fishermen in the king's service stationed at the very entrance in well-manned large boats, go up the coast as far as Syrastrane (ancient Saurashtra; modern Saurashtra), from which they pilot vessels to Barygaza (ancient Bharukachchha; modern Broach / Bharuch). And they steer them straight from the mouth of the bay between the shoals with crews, and they tow them to fixed stations, going up with the beginning of the flood, and lying through the ebb at anchorages and in basins.<sup>20</sup>

Broach was well connected with north India by overland trade routes. The Periplus informs us From Ozone (Ujjain) is brought down to Barugaza for the supply of the country and for the export to our own markets onyx, stones, procelain, and fine muslin.<sup>21</sup> In fact the Periplus states that the merchandise was transported from regions as far as Punjab and the frontier provinces of Kabul, Kandhar and Peshawar. It describes Saurashtra as a 'fertile country, yielding wheat, rice, sesame oil, clarified butter, cotton and cloths'.<sup>22</sup> Agricultural fertility, availability of industrial products and luxury goods, trade routes and the general environment of political stability had helped sustain the development of Broach as an international port. The Periplus mentions the importance of the great Narmada River – 'the very mouth of Barygaza' – and the trading activities through ships.

No figures are available regarding the overall volume of Broach's import and export trade. But contemporary descriptive sources provide quite impressive information on the commodities exported and imported through the port. The following articles were imported from Arabia, Egypt, Constantinople and from the regions controlled by the Roman empire. Gold and silver (including Roman coins), brass, tin, lead, cinnabar (ore of quicksilver), ornaments and massaging substances, slaves, singing boys and maidens, glass, topazes, coral, Italian and Arab

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20 *Schoff, 1974, 39-40*

21 *Schoff, 1974, 42*

22 *Schoff, 1974, 39*

wines, resins and other perfumes. The merchants of the Roman Empire exported copper and glass to Broach, Alexandria, Tyre and Sidon were famous for their glass work which was used as mirrors and for decorating ships. The mineral products exported by the Romans, Greeks and Arabs were few but significant. Indians used metals chiefly for the purpose of foreign currency. They also mixed tin and lead to make mirror foil. The Roman merchants obtained tin from the mines of Lusitania and Gallaecia in Spain.<sup>23</sup>

Broach exported rice, wheat, ghee, or clarified butter, oil of sesame, cotton, teak wood, ebony, sugar, agate and carnelian goods, jewellery and ornaments, coarse cloth, fine silk and cotton textile products, brass and other metals, spices and elephant teeth.

Western consumers liked oriental jewellery, colourful garments and other goods and Broach supplied them in such a large bulk as to lead the Roman administrator Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) to warn against the drain of wealth from the Roman Empire to India.<sup>24</sup> Pliny's account is supported by the two following Sanskrit sources. A. S. Altekar has quoted the fifth century BCE account, the Surparaka Jataka Literature to show the brisk trade carried on by the overseas merchants from Broach. It states :

Translation : The merchants of Bharukaccha visit many ports in their ships for trade. They visit golden lands [Shri Lanka, Sumatra, Java, etc] and make a lot of money.

This version is supported by Kakasuri's work Nabhinandanji noddhara Prabandha which eloquently states :

Translation : The inhabitants of this land (Bharukaccha) visit many ports. They procure fabulous wealth even from small enterprises.

The maritime activity of Broach continued uninterrupted up to the seventh century, for Xuan Zang who visited Gujarat in that century, noted that the prosperity of that town was mostly on account of its foreign trade.<sup>25</sup> Broach declined thereafter, mainly because of silting.

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<sup>23</sup> Schoff, 1974

<sup>24</sup> Piny, *Natural History*, XX, p. 18

<sup>25</sup> Altekar, 1926, 35

## The Maitraka rulers and the Rise of Valabhi (470-788 CE)

Of all the states that arose from the break – up of the Gupta Empire, the kingdom of Valabhi, ruled by the independent Maitrakas, was the most durable. Valabhi, ruled by the independent Maitrakas, was the most durable, Valabhi was founded by Bhatrakas, the Gupta general in Saurashtra in 468 and the same year he shifted his capital from Girinagar to Valabhi, which had then developed as a port town. Located near the present Bhavnagar port on the Gulf of Cambay, Valabhi developed both as a flourishing port and a centre of Buddhist and Jain learning. The fact that the Jain conferences were held at Valabhishows the influence of Jain monks and merchants in that town. A contemporary work, Manjusri – Mulakalpa says that the merchants of Valabhi and other ports of Gujarat across the Arabian sea to reach foreign countries.<sup>26</sup> Dandin, who composed Dasakumarcharita in the seventh century, refers to merchants and navikapati or sea captains crossing Arabian sea. This is supported by Xuan Zang who says : "I saw many merchants in Valabhi worth millions. The rarest merchandise from distant countries is found there in abundance."<sup>27</sup>

The capital city of the Maitrakas was a fortified place; the gates of ramparts are preferred to in one inscription. There was ample open space outside the ramparts where the army could be encamped and fairs held. Along with the merchants Xuan Zang also noticed several Jain temples in the port city of Valabhi.

The prosperity of Valabhi lasted for about three centuries. The Arab invasion from Sindh on Valabhi in 788 dealt a blow to the town. In fact the Maitraka kingdom had disintegrated by that time.<sup>28</sup>

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26 *Shastri, 1955, 55-57*

27 *Altekar, 1926, 39*

28 *Altekar, 1926; Shastri, 1955, 14*

## Gujarat under the Solanki and Vaghela Rulers 942 – 1300 CE

We now come to the most spectacular port, Cambay, known as Stambhatirtha in mediaeval Gujarati literature. The Solanki and Vaghela period is also marked by the presence of Arab and Turkish merchants and of Sufis. Located between the Gulf of Cambay and the famous Mahi River, Cambay emerged as a small township in the sixth century CE, and soon grew into a port that flourished until the sixteenth century. Thereafter it declined as a result of the silting of the Gulf or Cambay, giving way to Diu.

We get very interesting eyewitness accounts of Cambay. Al – Masudi describes it as a very successful port in his text written in 915 CE. Travelers like Marco Polo (1293 CE) and Ibn Batuta (1333 CE) have praised Cambay, which was prosperous and linked with the trading world. Portuguese traveler Duarate Barbosa visited the city in 1515 CE. He states :

"Entering by the internal river, there is a great and beautiful city that they call Cambaia, populated by Mouros (Muslims) and Gentior (Hindus and Jains). It has many beautiful houses, very high with windows and covered with tiles in our manner : The streets are laid out well, with pretty squares and large buildings".

Another Italian traveler, Niccolo de Conti who visited Cambay in 1440, mentions that the walls of the city were 12 miles in circumference.<sup>29</sup>

The Solanki rulers governed Gujarat capably with the result that Cambay developed into a flourishing port. The Jains, who were already an important business and cultural community since ancient times, became more influential because of royal patronage. A Brahman scholar, Someshwar of the thirteenth century states in his Kiritikaumudi that Vastupal (1169-1240) and his brother Tejpal were great merchants and that Vastupal was both the minister and the chief administrator of the Cambay port. Muslim chroniclers inform us that when Muhammad Ghori's mother, who had embarked for Mecca from this port,

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29 Mehta, 1991b; see also Arasaratnam and Ray, 1994

was attacked by pirates, she was saved by the naval squadron of Vastupal. In fact, this great merchant – administrator encouraged Muslim merchants to settle in Cambay, where he also had a mosque constructed for them. We thus find Cambay to be a cosmopolitan city inhabited by Jains, Hindus, Turks, Arabs, Armenians and also the Parsi Zoroastrians. The Parsis were active craftsmen and merchants even in the tenth and the eleventh centuries.<sup>30</sup>

The Jains were also well - entrenched in other ports like Veraval in Saurashtra and Bhadreshwar in Kutch. During the Solanki – Vaghela period they developed a strong cultural, religious and commercial identity. During this period the Hindu castes became more rigid. There are references to the Saiva Brahmans, Vaisnavas, Rajputs, carpenters, tailors, and also untouchables. But whereas we come across a large number of Sravakas or Jains as overseas merchants, there is hardly any mention of the Mesris or the Vaisnavas merchants. Words like 'Gurjara Mandal', 'Gurjarashtra', 'Gurjardhar' and even 'Gujarati' were commonly used by the Hindus and the Jains and even by the new Arab and the Turk emigrants, which indicates the evolving cultural identity of Gujaratis, including their language. Castes of navigators such as Kharvas, Kolis, Vaghers and Bhadelas came into prominence. The Bhadelas are now Muslims. But during this period they were not necessarily 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' because they had a stronger identity as professional navigators. From their names one cannot figure out whether they were Hindus or Muslims. No one mixed with each other more freely than the members of this maritime navigational 'group'. They exchanged food and drink.

Along with the Jains, members of the Muslim business communities – like Khojas, the Bohras and the Memons – figure in the contemporary records along with the Arabs and the Turks, most of whom had settled in the urban centres of Gujarat. The accounts of Arab and Persian geographers, merchants and travellers, including SulaimanSairafi (857 CE), Buzurg Bin Shahriyar (912 CE), Abul Hasan Ali – Masudi (915 CE), Abu Ishak Ibrahim Istakhri (951,CE), Ibn Hakul Baghdadi (976 CE), Al – Beruni (1030 CE), Al Idrisi (1100

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30. for details see Kamerkar and Dhunjisha, 2002

CE), and Muhammad Ufi (1211 CE), show that the Hindu rulers were tolerant towards non – Hindus, that is , the Muslims and the Parsis. That is the reason why the migrant communities preferred to make their home in Gujarat.

Gujarat owes to the Arab merchants the technique of paper manufacture. Arab contact with Gujarat became significant by the middle of the eight century. It was around A.D. 750 that the Arabs had acquired the science of paper – making from Chinese. It is generally assumed that Kashmir and Punjab were the first regions in India to acquire the knowledge of paper technology from Persia and Central Asia in the sixteenth century. But Niccolo de' Conti, mentioned above, categorically states :

The inhabitants of Cambay (the kingdom of Cambay) alone use paper. All other Indians write on leaves of trees of which they make beautiful.

In fact Jain and Brahman scholars had adopted paper as a writing material since the beginning of the fourteenth century. Some manuscripts of that period are still preserved in the Jain bhandaras or archives. During the Sultanate period Ahmedabad emerged as a great paper manufacturing centre. The Kagdi or paper manufacturing families of Ahmedabad believe that Arabs had settled at Kochrab (where M. K. Gandhi founded his first Ashram after his return from South Africa) and that the term "Kochrab" is derived from kuch-i-Arab, which means the settlement of the Arabs.

It follows that there was continuing interaction between Arab and Gujarati merchants. Trade relations based on products of Asia and Africa brought the two groups closer to reap the benefits of the Indian Ocean trade. But things were not so smooth and simple as they may appear. There was also competition, and the Jains competed with the Arabs and other Muslims at a time when the Arabs were the masters of the Indian Ocean. As we shall see Jagadusha, who operated from the Bhadreswar port in Kutch, sent his ships loaded with goods to Asian and African ports and acquired fabulous wealth, represents the long establishment mercantile tradition of the Jains and provides a case study of overseas business and mercantile, religious and social activities in a changing multilateral political situation.

## Jagadusha (c. 1193 – 1226) and his times

In a report which he read to the Literary Society of Bombay in 1818, Resident of Anjar, James MacMurdo described the land and the peoples of Kutch, their customs, ports and the participation of the Jain and Bhatia merchants in Indian Ocean trade. He also described vessels of different size and shape such as batelo, baglo, ganjo and kotio, all built in the port towns of Mandvi, Mundra, Bhadreswar and Jakhau. At the time when the British scholar administrator conducted his research he did not know that a Jain scholar, Sarvanandasuri, had composed a biography of Jagadusha in Sanskrit in 1319, a few decades after the merchant's death (Khakkhar, 1896). It was only in the late nineteenth century that the Jagaducharit was discovered in manuscript form. Still, Jagadusha was a living legend in the oral tradition of MacMurdo's time. To quote MacMurdo :

"I have heard no ruins in Kutch worth mentioning excepting those of some large pagodas at Budresir, on the sea – coast, last of the Mundra port. They are considered as having been built by a Baniyan named Juggosa, about five hundred and seventy years ago, and I have been told by some gentlemen who inspected them that they are extensive and curious"

*(MacMurdo, 1878, 231).*

Jagadusha's period was marked by political instability following the decline of Solanki rule. It was also marked by the growing interaction between the Jain, Arab, Turk and Athenian merchants. The political power of rulers such as Bhimdev (1178 – 1242) and Visaldev (1242 – 1268) was confined to mainland Gujarat. Kutch was outside their control and Sindh still farther.

As already noted, Jagadusha's contemporary Vastupal was a minister of the Solanki rulers. Simultaneously he was Velakuladhyaksa or Head of the Department of Ports from 1220 until his death in 1240.<sup>31</sup> Merutungacharya, a great Jain scholar who composed the classic Prabandhachintamani in 1305, described how Vastupal competed with one Said for

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31. Mehta, 2009, 74-75

the overlordship of the Cambay port and defeated him in the Skirmish. Both Merutungacharya and Sarvanandasuri state that Jagadusha, although he belonged to Kutch, was a friend of Vastupal.

According to Sarvanandasuri, Jagadusha's father migrated from Kanthkot, a small town in Kutch, to Bhadreshwar in search of better economic opportunities. Jagadusha, being an enterprising merchant, developed overseas trade and sent his vessels loaded with goods to Basra and Hormuz on the Persian Gulf and to Aden and Muscat. He acquired great wealth and constructed temples in Bhadreshwar and also in Palitana and Girnar in Saurashtra. At the same time he organized relief works in Kutch, Sindh and Saurashtra during the famine of 1256-58, Sarvanandasuri states that Jagadusha sent carts loaded with corn to King Hamir Sumara of Sindh and Visaldev, the Solanki Vaghela ruler of Gujarat. It is likely that his political contacts helped link his domestic and overseas trade. He often visited Anhilwad Patan, the capital of the Solanki rulers.

According to Sarvanandasuri, Jagadusha competed with his rivals including the Arabs and the Turks. On one occasion he sent Jayantsinh, his Jain agent, to Uttam Ardpur or the best Hormuz port, Jayantsinh saw a 'turjushka' (either a Turk or Arab) merchant from Cambay. Both started bargaining for huge precious stone. The Jain agent started with 1000 dinars and the Turk doubled the amount. The text concludes this episode in the following words :

Jagadu's agent won the competition by paying such a fabulous Muslim Wealth (turushkalakshmi) that he constructed a mosque at Bhadreshwar.

This means that the competition between the two merchants was based on business and not religious consideration. The biography of Jagadusha, though full of exaggeration, is not a fairy tale. Sarvanandasuri provides correct political and geographical information about Sindh, Kutch, Saurashtra and mainland Gujarat. Also we are informed about the rulers and currency. Contemporary Persian, Arab and Indian sources lend support to the text. As we come to the Mughal period we start getting access to European sources on the activities of Jain overseas merchants.

## The Mughals and the rise of the Surat port

By the end of the sixteenth century Cambay had declined, giving way to an equally prominent port city of Surat. It was the nerve centre of Gujarat's prosperity from 1573, when Akbar conquered Gujarat, to about 1720. Realising the economic importance of Gujarat the Mughals governed it with considerable attention.

Surat is situated on the banks of the Tapi River. Because of silting only boats or ships with low tonnage could navigate their way to the city harbour. For this reason, the large ocean – going ships used Swally port, about 15 km from Surat, from where goods and passengers were transported to Surat by small boats. The port stood midway between the commercial centres of the Far East, Malaya, the Spice Islands and further beyond. China and Japan on one side and the ports of the Persian gulf and the Red Sea on the other. It was also used by Muslim pilgrims to Mecca. Surat's relative proximity to the manufacturing towns and villages of Gujarat and the Deccan region invested it with a special significance. It was also connected by overland routes with the great commercial and industrial city Ahmedabad and, outside Gujarat, with Malabar, Burhanpur, Jaipur, Agra, and the Malwa region.

Surat developed as an international port city attracting the Arabs, Turks, Armenians, the English, Dutch and French to settle there in large numbers. It is estimated that the city had a population of around 200,000 in the 1640s.<sup>32</sup> The commercial elite comprised Jains, Vaishnava Banias, Khojas, Bohras, Memons and Parsis. The emergence of the Vaishnava Banias in Surat and main land Gujarat and Bhatias in Kutch was a new socio – economic phenomenon. it has been established that they were influenced by the Pushtimargi Vaishnavite sect, which encouraged trade and commerce as a means to raise the social status of its followers. Its founders Vallabhacharya (1479 – 1531) and his sons Vitthalnath and Gopinath, popularised Krishna worship and at the same time spread values very similar to the Protestant ethic. That the Bhatias of Kutch lived in the Persian and the Arabian ports could be shown by

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32 for details see Gokhale, 1978, 10-11

the fact that they constructed Vishnu temples in Goombroon, Congo and Hormuz.<sup>33</sup> In Surat we find prominent Vaishnava sharafs and overseas merchants as Bhimji Parekh and Hari Vaishya. But the most powerful merchants were the Jains, their long business tradition stood them in good stead during the seventeenth century.

It was customary for European merchants and travellers to use the generic term 'banian' for both Hindu and Jain mercantile communities. It is therefore, difficult to enumerate their numerical strength. For instance a French traveller, Jean de Thevenot described the greatest merchant, Virji Vora (1585 – 1670) as a 'Banian friend of mine, reckoned to be worth at least eight millions<sup>34</sup>. But he was actually a Jain, and a very influential leader of the Lonka sect of Jain religion. He was also the undisputed leader of the Mahajan. According to Briggs :

"Distinct from Sravakas (Jains) are the Mesri (Hindu Vaishnavas) a plodding commercial race with many characteristics bearing no meager resemblance to the Sravakas, but without the like creed, or like anxiety to have an ancestry lost in the obscurity known to their Shastras"

*(Briggs, 1849, 138).*

With the religious support of their monk scholars, Jain merchants had constructed many temples and animals asylums in Surat. In keeping with the Jain tradition Vinayavijagani composed a poem Indudutam 1642, narrating the activities of merchants and monks. His work also described Surat's customs house, harbour and flags of various nations, gardens, streets and inhabitants. The monk also describes Jain shrines and the names of donors. The picture of Surat that emerges from this hagiographical work is that of thriving port city with considerable Jain religious activities.<sup>35</sup>

Virji Vora was the most renowned overseas merchant of Surat having his agents not only in Burhanpur, Agra, Malwa and Malabar but also in the overseas regions in Malaya, Java, Sumatra, Gombroon, Aden and as far as Mocha in the north. He

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33. Mehta, 1991a, 70-73

34. Sen, 1949 , 22

35. Dhunrandharavijayaya, 1946; Sandesara, 1954

was a wholesale trader dealing in a wide range of commodities ranging from bullion to spices, ivory, cotton textiles, opium, quicksilver and even tea and coffee. A large number of brokers, clerks, accountants and peons worked in the branches of his enterprises in India and abroad. The English, Dutch and French companies considered him as the most dangerous competitor.

Virji Vora was an important figure in the civic affairs of Surat. He figured in committees which deliberated on important public issues such as building the fort and dealing with the problem of piracy. As a leader of several Mahajans, he was often consulted by the government on commercial and socio – cultural matters. In 1639 he was summoned by the Emperor Shah Jahan to give an account of the grievances he and other Hindu and Jain merchants had against the governor of Surat.<sup>36</sup> Later, reacting to Aurangzeb's fanatic religious policy which resulted in the conversion of several Hindus and Jains to Islam, Virji Vora joined hands with an influential Vaishnava business tycoon Bhimji Parekh and declared a strike in November 1669. Bhimji Parekh was also the leader of his caste, the Pushtimargi sect and the Mahajan To put pressure on the Mughal government 8000 banias (Hindu and Jain merchants) migrated to Broach. The effect of this strike can be gauged from the eyewitness account of Gerald Aungier, President of the Surat factory, who informed the London based Board of Directors.

"Ever since the flight of the Banians, the trade of Surat hath suffered great obstruction and it's the opinion of many wise men that it will prove of fatal consequence to the utter ruin of it... The people of Surat suffered great want, for the banians having found themselves under severe penalties not to pen any of their shops without order from their Mahajan, or general council, there was not any provision to be got. The tankshall (mint) and customers house shut, no money to be procure so much as for our house expenses much less for trade, which was wholly at a standstill and so it will continue till their return from Broach to Surat."

*(Mehta, 1991a, 46).*

The Mahajan led by the top Hindu and Jain business and social

leaders (Banias according to contemporary records) continued its agitation until at last the local government found no other alternative but to ask the self – exiled 'banians' to return to Surat on the promise that the government would not oppress them in future. This was the first non – violent Satyagraha, exactly 200 years before the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, who was to launch a non – violent non – cooperation movement against the British Raj in the twentieth century.

Shantidas Zaveri (1590 – 1660) was an equally great business and socio cultural leader of Ahmedabad. A Jain of the Oswal caste and Sagaragachha (monastic order), he was a court jeweller and an overseas merchant. Like Virji Vora of Surat, Shantidas Zaveri was a devout Jain who spent liberally for constructing schools and archives and for conducting pilgrimages to the Jain shrines in Gujarat. Like Virji Vora he was also the leader of his caste and sect. He was the head of the influential saraf and the jeweller Mahajans. Above all, he was also the Nagarseth or the head of the Ahmedabad city; he was a link between the government and the people. It may be remembered that the institution of Nagarseth was not 'established' by a Royal Order, but had evolved over a period of centuries. The Nagarseth owed his position to popular acknowledgment as a result of his economic standing and his services to the larger society, cutting across caste and community boundaries. Shantidas was, thus, the leader of his caste, sect, Mahajans, and the city.<sup>37</sup>

Shantidas used all his position when he commanded the governor of Ahmedabad and the English merchants to hold a talk with the Gujarati merchants and Mahajans in 1618. English pirates had robbed a ship carrying goods belonging to him and to other merchants of Ahmedabad. Shantidas brought pressure on the Mughal bureaucracy and the English merchants of the company who were stationed at Ahmedabad to settle the issue. At that time Itimad – Ud –Daula was the Subahdar or the Governor of Ahmedabad, and his son, Asaf Khan, the army leader. Sir Thomas, Roe, the British diplomat at Jahangir's court, was at that time in Ahmedabad. The pressure of the Jain leader worked and everyone assembled at the Governor's palace to discuss the issue of piracy. In the

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37 *Mehta, 1991a; Tripathi & Mehta, 1978*

course of discussion Sir Thomas Roe advised the merchants to purchase the English company's 'cartazes' for the safe conduct of the Gujarati ships carrying goods and argued that earlier Gujarati merchants had done so by purchasing 'cartazes' from the Portuguese. But the diplomat's argument did not work and a heated discussion ensued. The English merchants, led by Roe, now changed stance and advised Shantidas to use English ships in place of the 'indigenous vessels'. Itimad – Ud –Daula and his son Asaf Khan (Nurjahan's brother) and also the Muslim nobles welcomed the suggestion. In fact Itimad, the Governor, felt so jubilant that he expressed that "he never had so noble an offer; no brother could do so more"<sup>38</sup>, 195). But the Gujarati mercantile community sharply reacted that the English had an evil motive and they wanted to destroy Gujarat's indigenous shipping and navigation. According to contemporary records, Shantidas Zaveri retorted :

"We would be the Masters of four own ships. The English would never take care of our interest and they could not have that liberty nor content they desire; and besides, the ships of the countries would by that means decay if we enter into their trade'.<sup>39</sup>

Roe reported this incident to Thomas Kerridge, President of the Surat factory in the following words: "Utterly the Ahmedabad merchants have refused to fright in us". For want of political support, however, the merchants of Ahmedabad, led by Shantidas Zaveri, decided to buy English 'cartazes.'

But the incidents of piracy continued unabated Sir Thomas Roe who was still in Ahmedabad expressed his joy that "the city merchants are wary of us as it is, and indeed we see we have impoverished their ports, and wounded all their Traders, so that by much persuasion of the governor, the merchants go to sea".<sup>40</sup>

A major crisis happened in September 1635, when English pirates fell upon two ships carrying the goods of Shantidas Zaveri, Virji Vora and the other Gujarati overseas merchants. The ships were owned by Mirza Mahmud, the Surat merchant.

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38 Foster, 1906 – 27, (1618-21

39 Foster, 1906-27, (1618-21), 2-7

40 Foster, 1906 – 27, (1618 – 21), 13).

As the Surat episode is relevant to the theme, it deserves mention. Like Ahmedabad, Surat also enjoyed a strong Mahajan tradition. Virji Vora was the undisputed leader of Surat and its mercantile Mahajans. Pressurised by him, Subahdar Muizz-ul-Mulk (Mir Musa) summoned President William Methwold, President of the Surat Factory, and his English associates to the court to explain the misdeeds of the pirates. In the words of Methwold :

"In the Durbar I found a saddle assembly of dejected merchants, some looking through me with eyes sparkling with indignation others half dead in the sense of losses."

*(Foster, 1906-27, Vol 5, (1634-36), 232).*

But Virji Vora was as firm in Surat as Shantidas Zaveri had been in Ahmedabad, for the very reason that their overseas trade had been adversely affected. On his advice, the Governor of Surat asked Kerridge to come with an account of losses sustained by each of the Surat merchants. The latter were also asked to come to the Durbar with the figures. But the English were in no mood to obey the Mughal authority. Upon the refusal of Kerridge, Mir Musa appointed a committee of the prominent political and business leaders including Mir Bahar or the harbour master, Mutsaddi or the administrator of the port, Nskhudo or the captain of the ship, Virji Vora and a few other Hindu, Muslim and Jain merchants to safeguard the interest of the merchant community. They computed the loss at 107,000 Rupees. Upon the refusal of William Methwold to repay the claimed losses, Governor Mir Musa imprisoned him for eight days after which date he was released on the promise to pay up the losses.<sup>41</sup>

The Ahmedabad merchants had learned their lessons from experience. When, in 1636, the ship carrying their merchandise was again sacked, they complained against the pirates and demanded compensation from the English factory for their losses. The vociferous merchants succeeded in bringing pressure on the Governor. This was essentially political pressure and the merchants and their Mahajans succeeded in eliciting support of the ruling authorities. Shantidas had himself suffered a loss of

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41 *Gokhale, 1978, 155*

35,000 Rupees and he left no stone unturned to recover his and other merchants' losses. Many Ahmedabad overseas merchants had suffered losses. What followed is best described by Benjamin Robinson, chief of the Ahmedabad factory who reported to the Surat President on 24.4.1636 :

"All this city is full of tumult, curses, and exclamations against us before this governor (Saif Khan) about the junk of Dio by diverse banians merchants, the proprietors of her ladeing whereof Shantidas here is a chief one and hath earnestly by asked us to acquaint you with his loss of monies, so that we howerly expect to be haled to prison, and doe wonder we are not shut up this time. The governor sent and threatened us the other day and, after much pretended kindness towards us for our liberty, he charged us to send an express with advise into you of these peoples demands, which is 20,0000 rupees, and must presently be satisfied."<sup>42</sup>

Three weeks later, on 15.5.1636 Robertson sent another report to the English authorities at Surat wherein he stated that 'Shantidas, the great Banian is very powerful at the Mogul Court. The English East India Company found it very difficult to pacify him. The merchants and their Mahajans, under the leadership of Shantidas Zaveri, forged an alliance with the political authorities. The governor put Benjamin Robertson and his colleagues in prison and confiscated their goods and property. The English were strictly forbidden from crossing the walled city. President Methwold crisply reported to the court of Directors in London. "In Ahmedabad our friends have tasted the same sauce as at Surat".<sup>43</sup>

Shantidas and the Ahmedabad merchants recovered their loss. Shantidas had played a pivotal role during this dramatic episode and this was due to his links with the Mahajans on the one hand and his influence on the Mughal ruling class on the other. Shantidas and Virji Vora belonged to different cities and sects, but they shared certain core business and moral values that Jainism had developed over a period of centuries.

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42. *Foster, 1906 - 27, Vol 5. (1634-36), 196-7*

43. *Foster, 1906-27, Vol. 5 (1634-36), 232 - 6*

## Conclusion

From the earliest times down to the present, Jains have pursued far – flung trade opportunities even as they have patronized religious learning and practices. Trade and piety have not been in conflict. Instead, the one has contributed to the other, with merchants building temples, sponsoring scholars, and fostering pilgrimage, even as monks depended on and eulogised the patronage of their mercantile donors. Indeed, the link between Jainism and trade is seen not just in the success of individual Jain merchants, or the use of trade profits to support Jain religious institutions. It has been established in this chapter that Jains have, more broadly, helped to build up Gujarat's culture of overseas trade and Gujarat's traditions of public charity for the common good. From the earliest times, Jains have made contacts with foreign communities and negotiated religious patronage in ways that have fostered cooperation among different groups, even as they competed in economic terms. As such, the role of Jains in the history of Gujarat and the Sea needs more attention from scholars.