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MARITIME TRIBUTE
MHS@44

MONSOON MUSINGS 2022

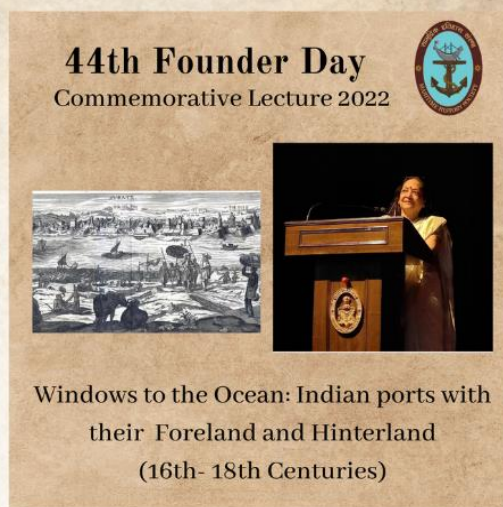
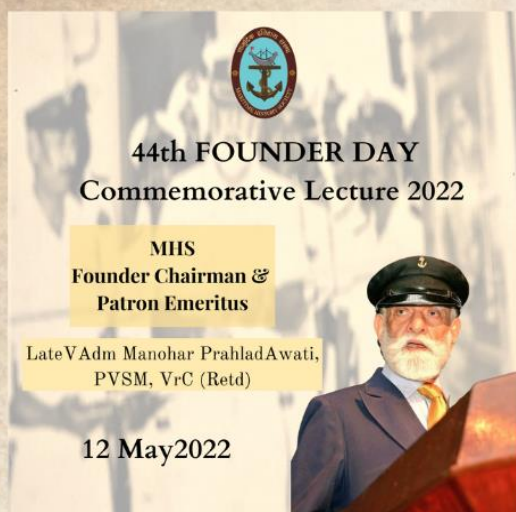
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Jewel from the Past

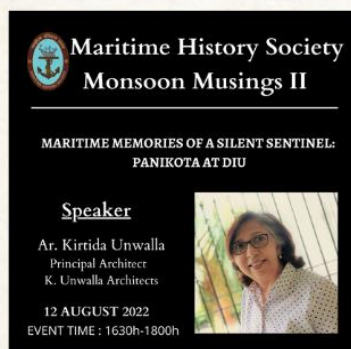
Book Review

Special Contribution

Glimpses from MHS Events



FOUNDER DAY 22



MONSOON MUSING 22



MHS EXHIBITION 22

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DIRECTOR'S DESK

We at the Maritime History Society, the academic initiative of the Western Naval Command, are committed to promoting the study of India's Maritime History. Established on 12 May 1978, by Vice Admiral MP Awati, MHS is standing true to its vision of awakening maritime consciousness amongst young Naval officers and public at large. With a legacy of four decades, the founding members, patrons, and numerous collaborators of MHS have provided excellent mentoring. Through a holistic approach of learning from the past, being aware of the present, and blazing a path for the future based on informed intellectual enrichment, we continue to delve deeper into the fields of maritime history and heritage.

Battling the pandemic by seizing new opportunities, MHS stood out with dedication to deliver maritime excellence through its educational programs and in-house library services. It provided a plethora of opportunities to its members to experience diverse expressions of creativity whilst creating a new generation of intellectuals and scholars with a maritime outlook beneficial for the country's progress. I joined as the director of MHS and took over from Cmde Roby Thomas in March 2022 and with the waning of the pandemic and gradual opening up of the social milieu, MHS too tacked from an online to a more 'in person' engagement.

MHS organised the 44th Founder Day celebration on 12 May 2022. The commemorative lecture that was held at the event was titled 'India's Sea Power and Conflict Between the 16th and 18th Centuries'. Dr Ruby Maloni, a

former Professor and Head of the Department of History at the University of Mumbai, was invited to speak at the event. In her talk titled, 'Windows to the Ocean: Indian Ports with their Foreland and Hinterland (16th to 18th Centuries)', she emphasised on the significance of Indian ports in shaping India's history.

The months of July, August and September saw the team coming forward towards organising the Monsoon Musings. The three-part lecture series is an annual event hosted by the organisation where subject matter experts deliver talks on specific elements of maritime attention.

The first Monsoon Musing Lecture Series on 8 July 2022 was delivered by Cmde BR Prakash, VSM (Retd). This event was commemorated as the 3rd Admiral JG Nadkarni Memorial lecture. The lecture examined the differences in technology and warfare techniques used by the indigenous navies after the arrival of the European Powers.

The second lecture of the series was themed 'Coastal Defence Architecture on Western Coast of India'. Renowned Conservation Architect Ms. Kirtida Unwalla delivered the talk on 12 August 2022 where she spoke about the Pani Kota at Diu and delved into facets like architecture, construction systems and technical attributes all of which contribute to Diu's designation as a significant 'Maritime Cultural Landscape'.

MHS dedicated the Monsoon Musing III as a commemorative lecture to VAdm Manohar Prahlad Awati, PVSM,

DIRECTOR'S DESK



VrC (Retd), Founder & Patron Emeritus. The lecture was held on 30 September 2022 and based on the theme "The Eksar Stele: Lapidary Memory of a Naval Battle off the Konkan Coast" which was delivered by Dr Suraj Pandit.

The Maritime History Society Team also collaborated with the Khaki Lab to organise a talk on "The Saga of INS Vikrant" by Cmde Mediona Bhada (Retd). The talk was a tribute to the iconic aircraft carrier of the Indian Navy for its contributions in the 1971 War.

Setting up a maritime museum has always been a primary charter of MHS. As a step in that direction, the MHS team toiled hard towards bringing to fruition its first gallery exhibition for school students in the month of September. Within the limited space in our premises, we set up an exhibition covering India's maritime journey from the chalcolithic period to the modern era.

MHS continues to support research in various areas of maritime studies. We are presently committed towards logical conclusion of all the various research projects on the anvil whilst also evolving new arenas for deeper research in the maritime domain.

In terms of the archive and library section, we have made significant progress. We are fortunate to have a dedicated team of young interns who have been involved in sorting and documenting all the books and artifacts held at MHS. We hope to launch an e-museum and e-library in the near future in order to further support referral and research by our esteemed members.

We remain grateful to our audience and well-wishers for their unwavering support and hope to continue curating erudite conversation on issues concerning the maritime domain in the coming months.

44TH FOUNDER DAY PROCEEDINGS

COMMEMORATIVE LECTURE

‘WINDOWS TO THE OCEAN: INDIAN PORTS WITH THEIR FORELAND AND HINTERLAND’ (16TH TO 18TH CENTURIES)

Dr. Ruby Maloni

Former Professor and Head, Department of History
University of Mumbai

Inaugural Address

Cmde Aasheesh Khanna: The Maritime History Society (MHS) has been at the forefront of promoting India's maritime history and heritage through various media, especially publications, seminars and lectures.

In the past four decades, we have contributed immensely to the literature on India's maritime history and have brought out 21 books pertaining to maritime history. These books range from a collection of essays on maritime studies to works documenting navigation techniques adopted by the Cholas, Indian Boat Design and Forms, the Maritime Heritage of Lakshadweep and Minicoy Islands, the Maritime Heritage of Gujarat, Kathiawad and Kachchh as well as that of Konkan.

Currently, we are working in unison with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to produce a comprehensive book on India's Naval History which is envisioned to be an enjoyable read for all naval history enthusiasts. At the same time two MHS books titled 'Maritime Heritage of Andaman and Nicobar' and 'Maritime Heritage of Bengal' are also on anvil. We hope that our work brings more of maritime elements into common and

intellectual discourse. MHS has also conducted lectures at various prestigious fora like the National Defence Academy and Indian Maritime University, Visakhapatnam on a diverse range of topics. MHS has also been a regular participant in the Dilli Series Seminar at Indian Naval Academy and has contributed significantly to the academic discourse on the maritime domain. Besides this, MHS on behalf of the nation and the Indian Navy with support from the Western Naval Command and Maharashtra Naval Area successfully conducted a symposium to celebrate the 75 years of Indian Independence i.e., Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav on 09 August last year.

We had also scripted a film on the 1946 Naval Uprising in collaboration with the Killers Squadrons which was aired on the eve of the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav event. As part of our outreach initiatives, MHS has been regularly participating in the Kalaghoda Festival, Mumbai. In the year 2019, we had displayed our artefacts on INS Godavari as well as installed a diorama-themed 'Peels of Time' which captures the concept of time in the maritime domain. Periodically MHS has also been curating visits at the interim MHS Gallery and the

Cooperage Naval Uprising Memorial for students, NCC cadets and academic institutes.

We have also developed a walk-through museum dedicated to naval maritime artefacts. Visits to the refurbished museum for NCC cadets and certain educational institutions have been curated during the year. Efforts are in hand to undertake civil works in order to make the museum more sustainable as also to develop adequate storage capacities for our rare and prized artefacts in archives.

Through our outreach programme, we would also like to engage with academia through the production of educational videos targeting undergraduate history students to raise maritime consciousness amongst the next generation. In due course, we intend to curate advanced walks within the heritage precinct with the predominant theme being maritime. The theme of our Founder Day discussion is 'India's Sea Power and Conflict between 16th-18th Centuries'. This era was marked by intensive colonial intervention in the territorial waters of the Indian Subcontinent. As a result, the Indian Seas became a major theatre of trans-oceanic mercantile interactions and impending conflicts between various European mercantile houses on one hand and European and non-European entities on the other. This was a century of the expedition and at the forefront of it were the European maritime nations headed by Spain and Portugal. At the heart of these expeditions was economics. The blockade of the overland route to Asia by the Ottoman Turks created a scarcity of oriental merchandise, the most important of which was the humble peppercorn. To

mitigate this barrier, the European maritime powers galvanised support from the Church and the State and undertook voyages to the Orient. The impact of this European projection was far-reaching. This was a Euro-centric standard of a new world order where the dominant sea-power would set the bar for the rest of history. This era of expedition led to discovery of new territories with merchandise and culture freely travelling between borders. This was the true victory of sea-power which brought about significant change without external manifestation of chaos.

Keynote Address

Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan:

All of us need to know about globalisation, its impact and its relevance in the study of maritime history. We need to be conscious of three broad concepts – the concept of the sea and sea power, the concept of geopolitics and the concept of globalisation. All these three together have played a huge role in history. At the centre of all of these are ports, especially warm water ports. Ports being the windows of trade are very important. Ports are windows of all kinds of opportunity as they allow you to perceive national interests, national goals, give you access, connectivity, influence and indeed give you a good chance to participate in the global system of trade competition and commerce. It is instructive for us to view at this point that everything has happened in spite of the boldness of Russia in the rush of the war against Ukraine. All of us believe that the port of Mariupol is going to make a very important impression in this war. I'm so glad that the theme for the first in the

series of lectures for this season is related to ports and that Dr Ruby Maloni has very kindly consented to be the speaker and give the invitational talk.

The term 'sea power' normally conjures images of maritime power politics, battles and men-of-war. However, we often lose sight of the fact that a vibrant mercantile community, robust coastal maritime infrastructure, availability of a navigationally feasible foreland and an economically sustainable hinterland are all essential facets of a nation's sea-power. Ports are windows to the sea and need to be understood from the foreland-hinterland matrix. India's geographical situation which was concentric to the Indian Ocean gave ports a vital role in maritime activities, especially in the commercial sphere. Although traditional seaports were already active much before European maritime powers set anchor on the Indian shores by the very end of the 15th century, the consolidation and use of the coastal contours by the Imperialist Powers is an important lesson in use of sea-power.

Lecture Proceedings

Dr Ruby Maloni: In 'The memoirs of Thomas Roe' at the court of Jehangir, he travels from Surat and is depicted as standing at the back of the queue to offer his *peshkash* to Jehangir. He seems to be saying that "I've got very petty gifts/ small gifts from England, and I don't think it can be impressive compared to the white stallions or the silk carpets being rolled out". Despite this, the English East India Company were able to secure a *firman* to trade, and gradually they were able to take overpower via the ports and become a

centralised power themselves. I would be remiss to not refer to the Maratha Navy of this period, on which a lot of commendable work has been done and much more work can be done. So, the Maratha Navy reached its zenith between the mid-17th Century to the mid-18th Century. In his seminal work on the Maratha Navy, BR Apte talks of the beautiful illustrations on *Gurabs* and *Galbats* and how they were able to fight and confront large warships of the British, due to their superior manoeuvrability vis-à-vis the large unwieldy British ships with their cannons. I must also mention Admiral Kanhoji Angre and how he played a very important role as far as the Indian presence at Indian ports are concerned, especially at Vijaydurg and the creation of a fortified coastline by the Marathas. As per *Sakpal*, Shivaji's genius lay in the creation of the Maratha Navy and Naval bases. The island of Khanderi with which Indian Naval Officers are very familiar and lies 11 miles approximately off the entrance to Mumbai. This island became very important to Marathas, the English and the Siddhis of Janjira. While the British and the Siddhis ran into conflict with Shivaji Maharaj and of course with Kanhoji Angre, they could not oust the Marathas from these fortified places, allowing the Marathas to consolidate their positions. In addition to *Gurabs* and *Galbats*, the Maratha Navy also had *Pals*, a large three-masted vessel. We should not for a moment think that the Maratha Navy consisted only of smaller and lighter ships, they also had three-masted heavy cannon-armed vessels. They combined their naval power with very good strategy, allying with different powers, including the

Portuguese to resist the British. Perhaps the only weak point of the Maratha Navy was the fact that it was a green water navy and not a blue water ocean going navy. Along with the Marathas, the Siddhis of Janjira were also a naval power of the same period, based at Janjira, very close to where we are. The Siddhis, as naval warlords for the Mughals, had a very important role to play in the maritime matters of this period with their fortifications and their vessels. Reference must also be made of the Zamorin of Calicut and their role in the Kerala Coast i.e., the Malabar Coast.

A very important Persian document called *Toufat Al Mujahidi* discussed the role played by the Zamorin of Calicut in the arrival of Vasco Da Gama to India. Vasco Da Gama, as you all know, arrived on the East Coast of Africa and did not know what to do and how to reach the Malabar Coast in his quest for spices. It was a Gujarati pilot who was able to steer the ships from the coast of East Africa from Malindi to Calicut and therefore we can see how much knowledge and experience our indigenous seafarers had at that time.

We're looking at ports as 'Windows to the Ocean' and I've tried to connect it, not just by talking of ports but also talking of foreland and hinterland of Indian Ports. Indian ports have different profiles, each port is different from the other due to the Indian subcontinent's large, elongated coastline and varied geography. Every port had a separate geographical profile. Each port also had its own commercial network, and at the same time were connected to each other creating a coastal network and long-distance network of ports in the wider

Indian Ocean Region. Therefore, I've called them as Windows to the Ocean and I think Bombay, where we are, is referred to as the gateway to the rest of the world.

It is very interesting to live in a port, to study ports and to talk about ports. Even if we talk about France, we always speak about Marseille and what kind of people live near the port of Marseille. The last point here is that each port was individually or sometimes in clusters part of the Indian Ocean network because in the 15th century, before the advent of the Portuguese, Indian mariners, Indian traders, and Indian adventurers were already connected to the larger Indian Ocean Network. Therefore, it is not that the Europeans came and connected the Indian Coast, rather they superimposed themselves on to us. We were already looking out into the world, especially from the trade and commerce point of view.

When we look at ports their transactions are political, cultural and commercial. Political transactions inside the port-outside the port, cultural transactions inside the port-outside the port – the foreland and the hinterland and of course commercial. Naturally, each port was vibrant and dynamic with its own story not only in this period but also in other periods. Ports were very vibrant and dynamic because of the kind of people who were navigating to them. There were ship captains, sailors, chandlers, suppliers, loaders, and there were interpreters. There were a lot of different types of interpreters. The surname used in Western India 'Dubash', including by some very large Bombay merchants, means those who

knew two languages. Interpreters were very important because when the Western Powers came; the maritime powers came, the merchants came, the English East India Company came, the officials came, they couldn't speak the language and so the interpreters were very much in demand, and they could get into the good books of the Westerners throughout this period. There is scholarly work on interpreters but much more work could be done on what kind of interpreters were living at these ports.

The pre-European Indian ports were modern and alive with these different kinds of people who were navigating to these ports. Importantly there were brokers at these ports who were called *Dalals*, and other different kinds of merchants called *Shroffs*. *Saraf* or *Shroffs* are still common surnames among Gujaratis, Parsis and different kinds of communities. The *shroffs* were money changers. There were different kinds of currencies which were moving in ports –from Spanish reals to Persian currency. In Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, there is a parrot who keeps saying "pieces of eight, pieces of eight". "Pieces of eight" refers to Spanish reals which are kept hidden in a huge treasure chest. Robert Louis Stevenson and others had to resort to adventurous stories of pirates but in Indian ports there were Surat mints. Surat had a very big mint, where coins were minted. Any variety of coins of gold and silver would be brought and minted there and in India in particular because of the rich and prosperous inflow of these metals at different ports.

As a result of the inflow India became very wealthy, especially during the three centuries till the Battle of Plassey. We still have many different architectural monuments in this country to remind you of its prosperity. Some of the brokers at the ports were so rich that they constructed beautiful buildings, gardens and temples that still exist all over the Konkan Region and the Western Coast. It was the merchants who were able to get the cities, their roads, their gardens, their villas and so on. Merchants were not only indigenous or local but there were also many foreign merchants. In the pre-European period, there were many Arab merchants, dealing with spices, who were navigating to India especially in Kochi at the Court of the Zamorin. Arab merchants were master seafarers, who knew what to do and they were here in India because of the availability of excess commodities to sell in exchange for gold, silver and other precious materials.

The question that arises is 'who were running these ports?' This depended on the local power. Surat was under the Mughals and there was a *mutasaddi* which means they were governors of ports. There were *faujdars* in other places. On the eastern coast, Shahistekhan and others were looking after the particular ports, and the *subahs* in Surat and in Bengal. Among the more important *subahs* were those of Gujarat, Bengal and Kashmir. When Akbar conquered the three there was no looking back. The British knew the importance of these locations from a trade perspective and these locations have since played a very important role.

Moving along in time, to when Bombay becomes the focus, we see that Parsi merchants became very important. However, the source of this knowledge is also the British, who carried out a census of people living around Bombay and for whom knowledge is power. The British studied the ports and measured the depth of the harbour. They did this from a desire to know more about the people, geography, commerce and all the places they wanted to dominate. All the illustrations we now have, whether we like it or not, we must be thankful to the British - British Museum and the British Archives, because vernacular archives and records need more research. Unfortunately, there are still a lot of Indian records which are hidden. With the Maritime History Society publishing certain records, gradually younger scholars are able to work on these records from international and Indian universities. European records are more easily accessible - the Dutch records at Hague, the English East India Company records at the British Library, French records are available at Paris and so on. They have kept records because knowledge is power, and they wanted to rule these fertile countries and gather as much information as possible. Port information and port data were very interesting and Madras and of course Calcutta and Bombay. They had so much information on currency, on people, on land space, on land spatial allocation, which is the black town, which is the white town, how do people live, what are their rituals etc. This is a discussion which would have died if the records were not there.

On the Western Coast, we have the Gujarat Coast – the Gulf of Cambay. We have different ports of Daman and Diu, and we have Cambay which was very important, much before Surat. Cambay became an important centre for the Portuguese. From the time Vasco Da Gama came to India, most of the 15th century was dominated alone by the Portuguese. At the dawn of the 16th century, there was the germination of two joint stock companies i.e., the English and the Dutch. Once these two companies were set up, and they came to India, the Portuguese had competitors. The French were watching and decided to come to India. India was a jewel in the crown from the beginning till the end. India was attractive from a commercial point of view – it had good ports, it had good hinterland and foreland. Hinterland means that each port was located in a place that was well connected. For example, Surat has hinterland connectivity with much of Gujarat, a very fertile region for the growth of cotton. Additionally, non-agricultural and agricultural products, raw cotton, manufacturing cloth and cloth of various kinds from various areas were brought to Surat. Indigo was also an important commodity which was required to be taken back to Europe for their own cloth manufacturing. Additionally, there were spices. While Surat never had its own spices, it served as an emporium. Emporium is a good word because emporium is a place where you get various types of exotic commodities. All these commodities gave its hinterland a very good connection.

A foreland implies what lies ahead of you in the ocean in the fore. Foreland indicates whether you already have

connected sea routes, do you already have good trade routes, do you have connectivity with other places, what is your harbour line, is there silting going on? On all these factors you find most Indian ports were pretty good but were very different/ varied.

Let us talk a little more about the foreland. The foreland was shaped by the regular maritime itineraries and traditional routes. There were very traditional routes which had been set up and established centuries before. So, the Portuguese, the English, the Dutch and the French had it easy to have a set up for them already crisscrossing all over the Indian Ocean. Using traditional routes, Arab merchants, British merchants, Malabari merchants, and other merchants on the east coast were already connected and there were already fixed routine itineraries. As you know the Indian Ocean Region before sailing steamship navigation was completely navigated by the seasonal winds of the monsoons. We have a lot of work on this and how the monsoon routes, tides, vagaries and moods were known by the indigenous port authorities and by seafarers. Much of this can be gleaned from the fabulous East India Company records which are available in the Elphinstone College and in the Maharashtra State Archives. The English East India Company's sailing pattern and exports were kept in huge warehouses and were allowed to be exported only when the ships came in as per the monsoon.

Therefore, monsoons played a very important role till the advent of steamship navigation. Traversing through the Cape of Good Hope to reach India, lots of records mention the

terrible turbulence along the Cape of Good Hope. All these records are very exciting. Coming to maritime practices specific to the Indian Ocean, specific to the coast, specific to the port. There are many things which many of you are familiar with like shipbuilding on the southern coastline in both the Malabar Coast and the Coromandel Coast. Prof Anunachalam who is, unfortunately, no more was an expert and very closely connected to the Maritime History Society at a particular time. Shipbuilding on the western coast was influenced by what was happening in the other Indian Ocean ports. We have the *dhow*s which you see if you have the pamphlet for Dubai or Bahrain. These *dhow*s were historically there in the Middle East from the days of the oar, and ship construction on the west coast was of the *dhow* pattern and on the east coast, the design of the ships was in the junk pattern. The word 'junk' is used for South Asian and South China ships. If you see the tourist boats of Hong Kong, you'll see the junks sailing there. So, these are the two types of ships that influence our shipbuilding and shipbuilders and the different ports. Late Prof Arunachalam had also written a lot on the kind of nautical skills which our seafarers and shipbuilders had. The indigenous compass, use of the stars as navigational tools, and so on. While enough is known and written about it the different variations depended upon the men who lived in these ports, the men who were in the hinterland and the men who were sailing in the foreland. I am trying to look at the socio-cultural background, trying to move away from the trade and look at people. The people are very important.

The nautical skills were very basic and were based on the people inhabiting those particular ports and the hinterland. Malabar seafarers were very important and were very special as they were able to provide resistance to the Portuguese who were trying to dominate the Malabar Coast because of the spice trade. The English knew this, learnt from the mistakes of the Portuguese and kept a little away.

I have already talked about a port's power source both from a political point of view as well as from a commercial perspective. Other ports could connect with the hinterland of other ports such as Mecca, Jedda, Bandar Abbas, Malacca, Aceh and Canton. It's very interesting that at this time Indian merchants had settled in these ports. They set up temples in Persia, in Bandar Abbas and offered *pooja*. European travellers have written that there are three statues probably of three gods. The world was open, free, cosmopolitan and people could move around freely and that's very important. Commerce was the means through which they could establish themselves and create contacts. On the west Coast we have Cambay and Surat's rich hinterland. I mentioned the land routes connecting Agra and Delhi. Riverine connections were very important because at that particular period of time, water transport was a reliable and much cheaper means of transport compared to land transport. I read an article about the United Kingdom today. Great Britain and the British Isles were also connected by their rivers and canals but are now rediscovering them. England is coming back to canals and riverine transport. If you

are connected to a river, then you will find how these goods are exported and imported. In addition to being a mint, Surat was very important for Haj pilgrims. It was also called Bandar Mubarak because pilgrims could sail from Surat to Mecca and Medina for pilgrimage. It was very important for passenger traffic and was also closely connected to Persian Gulf and Red Sea Ports. In Surat, in the British cemetery, there is a mausoleum of Sir George Oxinden, the English Chief of the factory of Surat. It is a strange architectural combination of something royal and something architecturally Mughal. There are many of them. On the Konkan Coast, we have Chaul, Dabhol, Goa and Bhatkal which were important ports. Bhatkal was used for the import of horses particularly. When the Portuguese were spurned by the Zamorin, they were able to deal with the Sultan of Bijapur and were able to grab Goa. The Sultanates of Ahmednagar and Bijapur were important regional powers at that time as well. The Mughals were dealing with the Sultanates of Bijapur and Ahmednagar from the ports through which they were making their imports and exports, particularly horses. Malabar Coast had Cranganore (ancient Muziris), Cochin and Calicut as important ports and from these ports, spices were exported even during the days of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was using cotton textiles and Indian spices for incense, for burial, for their own worship and so on. Indian spices were exported from these ports much before the Portuguese, British or Dutch. Calicut was a rendezvous point for various kinds of Arab merchants, including the Kamiri merchants. Of special mention

are the Kamiri merchants of Yemen and Egypt, about whom meticulous records are kept till today in Cairo and about whom Amitav Ghosh has written in his first book. These records kept in Cairo also serve as records and source materials for our study of Indian ports. In Amsterdam there is a huge Maritime Museum which deals only with maps, globes and ships.

On the east coast we have the Bay of Bengal and the Coromandel ports. Hugli served as the link with the Gangetic Plains. Pulicat was very important for the Vijayanagara Kingdom. Masulipatinam is well known for its textile trade and from the eastern coast they had very close connections to Southeast Asia and the China Seas. The European maritime powers utilised these functions. While the English, Dutch and French had their minor presence at busy Indian Ports, what is important to note is that the penetration of these Europeans into the hinterland was very less.

Therefore, they needed merchants, Indian merchants, Indian commodity merchants, Indian commodity brokers, interpreters to go into the hinterland and to procure these commodities. They would just remain in the port and not go into the hinterland and so the Indian merchants and the indigenous seafarers would have a role in this. Even in Bombay, the ships were made by the Parsis. The British had to get the Parsis from Surat to start the

shipbuilding industry in Mumbai. Within a hundred years the Europeans were able to dominate the Indian ports. It is amazing how they did this. And the three presidencies – Madras, Bombay and Calcutta were established. Madras was established in 1639 and traded with Europe, Middle East and China. As part of its hinterland, Madras was very close to the Golconda diamond mines. They have mentioned certain high-ranking officers of the East India Company based in Madras who were stealing diamonds and then went away to England. Bombay as we know was set up and taken from the Portuguese. Calcutta was a very important port as well. It became the greatest city of the British Empire after London.

We've tried to summarise these three centuries and how I look at Indian ports as mirrors reflecting the changing geo-political and ecological patterns and commercial nature. Fluctuations, fortunes, waxing and waning of ports and obviously the change in profiles because of shipping innovations, global situations and because of mercantile behaviour. Questions arise in our minds that if the Europeans would have not come how would our Indian ports be and how would our ports operate? Three centuries is a long period of time and so we see the process of readjustment and transition from indigenous systems to colonial domination and exploitation and hegemony.



Monsoon Musings 2022

THE EVOLUTION OF WEAPONS AND NAVAL TACTICS
IN INDIA INFLUENCE OF EUROPEAN NAVIES

MARITIME MEMORIES OF A SILENT SENTINEL: PANIKOTA AT DIU

THE EKSAR STELE: LAPIDARY MEMORY OF A NAVAL BATTLE
OFF THE KONKAN COAST

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MONSOON MUSING I

ADM JG NADKARNI MEMORIAL LECTURE

THE EVOLUTION OF NAVAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS IN INDIA INFLUENCE OF EUROPEAN NAVIES

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Abstract

The paper examines the evolution of naval weapons and tactics in India between the 15th century and the late 17th century. The Age of Discovery saw extensive overseas exploration led by the Portuguese and Spanish. The arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch and English navies in the Indian Ocean heralded a change in the region. Technological advancements in weapons, ship design and building revolutionised warfare at sea. Navies of native kingdoms in India quickly evolved and adapted to these changes. The paper brings out the relevance of leadership, doctrine and technology in the formulation of tactics. The numerous naval engagements between the Zamorins and Portuguese, Marathas and ships of the East India Company, Marathas and Siddhis have been analysed to infer the tactics employed by the native navies. The native navies, principally the Zamorins, Gujarati and Marathas, were aware of their weakness and adapted tactics to fight the Western navies. They realised the futility of direct engagement and fighting on the open seas and relied on surprise attacks, luring them into the rivers and shallow waters and swarming the enemy defences. The paper concludes

that in the long run, this method of fighting proved to be a wrong strategy as sea control could never be established by the native navies in the Indian Ocean since there was no grand strategy envisaged to protect and further maritime interests in the region beyond their immediate sphere of influence - The Arabian Sea. The Indian Ocean has from time immemorial been the scene of intense commercial trade and Peninsular India has a long tradition of maritime life. Indian ships have from the beginning of history sailed across the Arabian Sea up to the Red Sea ports to maintain intimate cultural and commercial connections extending beyond the countries of Persian Gulf and Red Sea. However, this phase of intense maritime pursuit started to wane from the 13th century when most Indian kingdoms started looking inwards and shifted to a continental mindset. While the age of exploration beginning in the 15th century saw Western nations like Portugal, Spain and Dutch pushing seawards, the Indian rulers were turning away from the seas. This is brilliantly captured in the words of Sardar K. M. Panikkar who said, *"it may be truly said that India never lost its independence, till she lost command of the sea in the first decade of the 16th Century"*.

The 16th century was a period of transition. Constantinople had fallen to the Ottomans, disrupting trade between Asia and Europe. The Age of Discovery (or the Age of Exploration) saw extensive overseas exploration led by Prince Henry of Portugal and Spain. New technology ushered a new dimension to warfare at sea. Cargo ships were armed with cannons. Even as new methods to fight at sea were evolving, galley tactics where action was at close quarters, and ramming and boarding still remained the preferred method to fight at sea during the 15 and 16th century. This paper traces the evolution of naval weaponry and tactics in the period up to the late 17th century primarily driven by the advent of European nations in the Indian Ocean. This exercise was difficult as one of the major constraints in chronicling the evolution of naval tactics in India has been the lack of literature on the subject. While the history of the Indian seaborne trade is reflected across a number of data sources like inscriptions, numismatics, travel accounts, journals of the pilots etc, it is indeed unfortunate that there is a lack of similar documentation of naval battles in India. The historiography of warfare at sea in the 16th and mid-17th century is sparse. Scholarly studies centred around the critical problems in naval warfare in this period are rare. The sources are few and often unfamiliar to naval historians. Historians who are familiar with the period and its sources are seldom interested in warfare at sea in the Indian ocean region and more focussed on events in the Mediterranean like the battle of Lepanto. In the Indian context, the available documentation about naval

battles were recorded as stories of valour to glorify and lionise the king. This is attributable to the fact that the historians or record keepers were not nautically trained or exposed to maritime concepts to document specifics for posterity and is an obstacle to any meaningful analysis of the tactics employed by navies. This is obviously borne out by the fact that the ships were referred to in general terms with no details of the weapons, tonnage and construction. Boats of the same region are referred to by various names so making a comparison is also difficult. Even basic details of the scantlings are not documented. In comparison, the historians in the West have paid great attention to these subjects and a considerable volume of material is available for analysis of tactics. When the earliest ships began to sail across oceans in pursuit of discovering new lands and expanding trade, record keepers were appointed on ships to capture the essence of these voyages. The voyages of the Portuguese armadas to India were chronicled in great detail by Gaspar Correia'sⁱ including the instructions issued by Da Gama to his captains before engagements. Similarly, the Admirals' fighting instructions to the fleet ship captains between 1530 and 1816 have been recorded and illustrated by Sir Julian Corbett for the Council of Navy Records society in 1904. So, in the absence of documentation or recorded instructions from the Admirals to their captains on fighting and progressing battles, the tactical thought, and practices of the navies of the Indian kingdoms need to be inferred, based on the type of boats and ships used, the weapons carried on these ships, the personalities

involved, the numerous naval battles fought, the areas where the naval battles were fought and their outcomes.

The paper will focus on the battles between the native and the European navies in the 16th and 17th century to try to understand the naval tactics employed by the local navies during this period.

Definition of Naval tactics

The etymological root of the word tactics is the Greek *taktika*, meaning “matters pertaining to arrangement.” Captain Wayne P Hughes, in his seminal book “Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations” explains that “The traditional definition of tactics is the art or science of disposing of or maneuvering forces in relation to each other and the enemy, and of employing them in battle”. In simple terms tactics refer to the handling of forces in battle or how to behave when you are in physical contact with the enemy. A tactician is searching for the best combination of movement, protection and the ability to hit the enemy with something lethal. In many studies, the phrase fleet tactics is used synonymously which deals with operations involving the coordination of multiple ships and aircraft, manned and unmanned, and of the sensors that support them. Captain Wayne P Hughes, while analysing the Battle of the Nile illustrates six crucial points, or cornerstones, about maritime warfare that have affected naval tactics. I shall highlight three which have a bearing on analysis of naval battles in this study - Leadership, doctrine, and technology. Leadership, morale, training, physical and mental conditioning, willpower, and endurance

are the most important elements in warfare. During any battle, the charisma of leadership transcends all else. The matter of will and endurance and the ability to inculcate these qualities in their forces is paramount measure of a combat leader. He sets the standards for morale, training, physical and mental conditioning of the sailors. Among the many naval leaders of the period, two naval leaders' standout – Kanjali Marakkar and Kanoji Angre. Doctrine is the companion and instrument of good leadership. It is the basis of training and all that that implies—cohesion, reliability in battle, and mutual understanding and support. It also is the springboard and benchmark of all tactical improvement. Doctrine enunciates policies and procedures that govern action. On a fundamental level, there can be no better definition of battle doctrine than a comprehensive and practised plan of action. Sound doctrine will establish and maintain unity amid chaos. *Doctrine is the glue of good tactics.* Technology is the third pillar of tactics. Technology drives tactics, as it impacts multiple domains on ships like propulsion, communication, weapons, sensors, etc and provides the means to combine various capabilities: firepower, staying power, speed, sailing qualities, endurance and habitability. Those who intend to use the ship, or the navy must set the priorities and decide which combinations of capabilities they prefer. Is speed more important than protection, endurance more important than firepower, are restrictions on the draught of the ship essential to fulfil certain missions? It is quite obvious that new weapon systems provide the

opportunity to transform tactics as Napoleon did with mobile artillery and the great Panzer captains did later in WWI with tanks. Advances in technology offer new weapons which ushers in new tactics. Therefore, tactics are constantly being evolved to fit the capabilities of contemporary weapons. Throughout this period, the dominant weapon of the Western navies - the Portuguese, British and Dutch was the cannon- while the native navies were still relying on melee weapons. Though they quickly inducted the cannon onboard ships, it remained of an inferior quality.

South India Landscape

It is important to understand the early sixteenth-century landscape of the South Indian peninsula. At the end of the fifteenth century and indeed during the effective period of Portuguese power in the Indian Ocean (1499-1600) Peninsular India was organised under States of considerable power and internal stability. By the end of the 14th century, the Empire of Vijayanagar had consolidated itself and extended right up to Cape Comorin. Under Deva Raya II (1422-46) it became the most powerful state of the time in India. At the time the Portuguese arrived in the Indian seas, this Empire, under Narashimha Raya, enjoyed undisputed supremacy in the entire area south of the Raichur Doab. To the north of Vijayanagar lay the Adil shah Sultanate of Bijapur. Founded by Yusuf Adil Khan (1490), a son of Sultan Murad of Turkey, who had escaped to India and had taken service under the Bahmani King, the Kingdom of Bijapur, which extended to the Konkan coast and a flourishing port at Goa. To the north of Bijapur was the powerful Sultanate of Gujarat with

its capital at Ahmedabad. Founded in 1401 by Zafar Khan, the son of a Rajput convert, the kingdom controlled the major ports of Cambay, Chaul and Surat, through which the trade of North India flowed to the West. The coastal tract at the extreme tip of the peninsula of India, separated from Vijayanagar by the impenetrable Western Ghats extending from Mangalore to Cape Comorin, was known as Malabar. It was divided into a number of petty principalities each ruled by a Raja. The important rulers were Kolathiri or the King of Cannanore, the Zamorin or the King of Calicut and Tiruvadi, the King of Venadⁱⁱ. The minor Rajahs were the Rajahs of Tanur, Cranganore, Cochin, and Quilon. The Zamorins maintained a fleet powerful enough to enforce his authority along the western coast of India. This was a trading hub from where ships sailed to the Persian Gulf and to the Red Sea, carrying spices, textiles and other products of India. The study of Indian maritime history shows that naval engagements between fleets of Indian rulers in the Middle Ages have been rare. The only naval action during this period was against pirates. The battles between the various kingdoms were largely fought on land between the armies. KM Panikkar, in his book "India and the Indian Ocean", brings out that the most common use of navies has been for the landing of ground forces for the support of operations ashore. The early Indian rulers who maintained powerful navies like the Chola Emperors, used it only for the protection of the coast, for putting down piracy, enforcement of payment of taxes to the state and, in case of war, for carrying and escorting troops across the seas. Naval engagements

on any large scale were unknown in India before the arrival of the Portuguese. It is also important to note that freedom of seas was maintained, and they primarily used to foster trade between states.

Ships and Weapons

As brought out earlier, technology is one of the foundation pillars of Tactics and often drives tactics. It is therefore essential to understand the technology available during this period and its impact on shipbuilding and armament. The latter half of the fifteenth century saw several inventions and innovations which changed warfare at sea. The two principal developments were the introduction of heavy guns at sea and innovations in sailing-ship technology. The latter improved the ability of the ship to stay at sea under adverse conditions and to use the wind as a fairly safe source of energy. The combination of the heavy gun and the improved sailing ship is usually regarded as a technological revolution of decisive importance for European expansion overseas as well as for naval strategy within Europe. Ship design underwent a transformation to increase speed, improve weatherliness and manoeuvrability and make the ship a steady and sufficiently stiff platform for gunfire. The ratios between various dimensions (length, beam, depth, the rakes of stem and stern, the width of the 'floor', etc.) and the proportions of the rig had to be adjusted to the conflicting demands of speed, seaworthiness, weatherliness, manoeuvrability and stiffness. Optimum rather than maximum was desirable in many cases: stiffness was necessary if the guns on the leeward side were to be usable when the hull

heeled over under the pressure of the wind, but too much stiffness made a ship roll violently, thus making it an unsteady gun platform. These changes in rig, hull construction and ship design gradually transformed regional types of late medieval cargo carriers into a relatively homogeneous type of seventeenth century sailing gun-armed warship. An examination of the capabilities of the adversaries shows the stark contrast between them. Shipbuilding was a well-established craft at numerous places along the Indian coastline long before the arrival of the Europeans and was a significant factor in the high level of Indian maritime activity in the Indian Ocean region.ⁱⁱⁱ Using local timber, especially teak from the forests of western India from Malabar to the Dangs of Gujarat, Indian ships were durable and well-built for commercial use, but their design and construction different from the armed European merchant vessels that invaded Indian waters from 1498 onwards.^{iv} The ships built in India were primarily constructed for trade and did not carry any armament other than personal arms like swords unlike the Portuguese ships. Though cannons were being deployed on a few ships in the West around the 14th century, it was unknown in India until the arrival of the Portuguese. The ships built in India were much larger than the Portuguese ships. The deep-sea-traders of Gujarat were generally of 100 to 150 tons while the boats of Calicut had one mast outfitted with lateen sails. Besides these, in the sixteenth century there were vessels of 600 to 1,000 tons which operated as passenger ships to ferry pilgrim traffic between Surat and Mecca.^v A description of the various types of

vessels, their form and construction to meet the Indian conditions is well explained in an article in Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain.^{vi} The hull construction was of two kinds, one which had the planking joined and sewn together with coir-thread, and the other whose planking was secured with thin nails having broadheads. The coir-sewn ships had tapering bottoms. The nail-secured boats were flat-bottomed. The planks of the sides of a ship went as high as the cargo. There were no decks inside but chambers for cargo covered with dried and woven palm-leaves to protect the ship from rain. The crew were lodged above, and none had quarters below where the cargo was stored. The coir sewn planks produced weaker ships which required higher maintenance and were not suitable for high sea operations. These merchant ships lacked the strength to withstand the shock of cannon fire. They were also not suited for the carriage of ordnance. During engagements, a vessel with sewn timbers once hit by a single well-aimed cannon shot would simply begin to break up, as the cord fastenings did not have the strength provided by the thick iron nails. The ships built in India in the 1500s did not carry any armament, since cannons were unknown in India until much later. Subsequently, when ordnance was introduced on ships it was of the lightest weight, as the recoil of a heavy cannon being sufficient to ensure that timbers would start loosening, with the vessel eventually breaking into pieces. The local ships did not have intermediate decks and therefore the only location where they could be placed were the poop and the fore end. This limited the number of guns

that could be carried on board. The heavy load of cannon high up created stability problems and in addition, the recoil during firing created stress on the joints. All these factors made them inadequate for fighting on the high seas. On the other hand, the Portuguese fleets had ships ranging from large naus, to caravels and smaller oar powered fustas and galleys. The caravel with its lateen sails, fine lines, shallow draught, and axial rudder eventually emerged as a very efficient sailing ship as it could sail close to the wind. However, the caravels were of relatively small tonnage and therefore naus were preferred for trade. The nau was a modification of the northern European cog that was adopted by the Mediterranean shipwrights. It combined the driving power of the square sail with the manoeuvrability of the lateen rig found on Genoese and Venetian galleys.^{vii} The nau was between 20 and 30 m in length; 6 to 8 m in breadth and approximately 100 to 120 ton while a caravel was between 50 and 80 ton. The nau had two decks; both forecastles and stern castles, lofty half-crescent bows; and were decorated with short, recurved beaks. Another important factor is that many of the smaller boats of the Indians were powered by rowers, while the Portuguese ships were basically driven by the wind, so the personnel in the ship could totally focus on the fight.

Weapons.

Up to the late fifteenth century fighting at sea with galleys or sailing ships meant combat with infantry weapons – longbows, crossbows, light guns, pikes, javelins and swords, and soldiers and armed seamen were the

fighting element of the crew. These were the primary weapons for naval actions until the invention of gunpowder and the cannon. The early guns in use at sea were small and primarily regarded as an infantry weapon which might inflict damage on the enemy crew or confuse them with their smoke. Heavy guns were developed as weapons for siege warfare, and they had by the mid-fifteenth century achieved considerable success against high but thin medieval fortification walls. Early guns were made of wrought iron staves formed into a tube (or a 'barrel') fastened by thick iron hoops shrunk over the tubes and were referred to as "bombards". They were first fitted onboard ships around 1410.^{viii} The tube was open at both ends and the gun was consequently breech-loaded. The loading mechanism consisted of a separate chamber into which the shot and the powder charge were placed. This mechanism as well as the thin wrought iron could not withstand high pressure from the explosive effects of gunpowder, and such guns could only be fired with weak charges of powder. This type of gun was originally intended for stone shot, often of great calibre. Gradually, iron shot became more common and during the sixteenth century stone shot was largely phased out from military and naval service. The idea of casting guns was not used in the beginning as iron is very difficult to cast effectively and because cast iron was dangerously liable to fractures. Subsequently built-up bombards for gun barrels were abandoned in favour of the modern bellmakers' techniques of casting the gun barrels. Bronze was found to be technically much easier to cast and all

over Europe there were craftsmen well acquainted with the process because of the early and widespread demand for church bells. Over time it was found that guns cast in a single piece of bronze or brass were far more reliable than the built-up bombards. Improvements in gun manufacture had yielded a cannon that in shape and general appearance was the smooth bore, muzzle loader and would dominate naval tactics for the next four centuries.

During the fifteenth century, most Mediterranean powers were utilising heavy cannon mounted on the bow or stern of a vessel and designed to bombard fortresses on shore. These were used for bombarding other vessels immediately prior to an attempted boarding and changed naval warfare forever. The large ships carried heavy cannon ranged as broadsides and a variety of smaller pieces, some of which could be mounted in longboats. The *naus* carried munitions, supplies and large numbers of soldiers and could be deployed in-shore to bombard towns or shore defences and also move troops rapidly from one point to another when a landing had to take place. Even the long boats, used by the Portuguese to land their men or to negotiate narrow river mouths, frequently carried small guns in the prow which were effective in scattering the enemy prior to a landing.^{ix} The use of artillery on ships enabled the Portuguese to exercise sea control easily in the Indian Ocean. The essential tactic employed during battles at sea during this period was close combat, either with missile weapons or boarding, although the latter was often difficult in fresh winds.

Both types of combat aimed at defeating the enemy crew and capturing the ship. Fighting power was approximately the same as men skilled in the use of infantry weapons, although seamanship was important in bringing a ship within boarding range, or close to an opponent. The gradual development of guns and more advanced sailing ships gave new options for warfare at sea. Guns meant that manpower was substituted by capital and technical development in metallurgy and chemistry. It meant that fighting power (firepower from guns) could be stored during long periods and transported for long distances. Guns and effective propulsive power from the wind also gave ships the opportunity to fight at long range, far enough to eliminate or reduce the effect of infantry weapons. Advances in sailing ship technology improved the ability of ships to sail long distances and to remain at sea even under unfavourable circumstances – heavy weather, dangerous coasts and so on.

To summarise, the combination of gunpowder, cannon, and sailing ship took naval combat from ramming, boarding and hand-to-hand action at sword's length, to pounds of cannon shot delivered at tens to hundreds of yards.

Naval Engagements over the next three centuries.

The study of Indian maritime history shows that naval engagements between fleets of Indian rulers in the Middle Ages have been rare, actually none recorded. The only naval action during this period was against pirates. The battles between the various kingdoms were largely fought on land between the armies.

The early Indian rulers who maintained powerful navies like the Chola Emperors, used it only for the protection of the coast, for putting down piracy, enforcement of payment of taxes to the state and, in case of war, for carrying and escorting troops across the seas. Naval engagements on any large scale were unknown in India before the arrival of the Portuguese. It is also important to note that freedom of seas was maintained, and they primarily used to foster trade between states.

Naval Engagements with the Portuguese

From the time that Vasco Da Gama landed in 1498 the Indian Ocean, the coast was witness to several naval battles between the native navies and the European powers to control the trade in the region. The one common element in all these encounters was they were rarely fought on high seas but fought close to the coast, in the creeks and rivers adjoining the sea. The important battles are examined to understand the tactics employed by the adversaries. The encounters in the 1500s brings out the stark contrast in tactics. The native navies quickly absorbed technology and altered their tactics to fight the Europeans to their strength.

First Battle of Cannanore

The ships of Vasco da Gama's First Armada and Cabral's Second Armada clashed against various ships of the local rulers during their transit between ports on the coast. However, it was the short two-day naval battle off Cannanore in 1501, which was the first fleet on fleet encounter between the Zamorin and the Portuguese. In mid-

December 1501, as the Third Armada was preparing to leave Cannanore, loaded with spices and other goods, a battle fleet of nearly 40 large ships, and 180 small ships called paraus and zambuks led by the Zamorin was awaiting to engage the Armada. Gaspar Correia gives a vivid description of this battle in his book “Lendas da India”.

He writes “The Portuguese fleet under da Nova attempted a breakout with a favourable breeze. The Armada ships fired its cannons to breach the Zamorin's line. Once a breach was opened, four Portuguese ships charged into the breach in a column formation, their side cannons blasting. The pounding from the cannons at long range and the height of Nova's ships prevented the Zamorin's ships from boarding the Portuguese ships with grappling hooks. The less seaworthy fleet of the Zamorin, pursuing the escaping Portuguese, began to splinter due to intense cannon fire”. The encounter resulted in the Zamorin's fleet losing five large ships and about a dozen oar-driven boats. Although badly outnumbered, da Nova's bold tactics, better trained and prepared men, and superior weaponry proved decisive for the Portuguese to defeat the blockade and break out of Cannanore. This battle off Cannanore assumes great significance for several reasons. The Zamorin fleet employed ancient galley tactics prevalent during the classical and medieval centuries, where boats/ships, powered by banks of oarsmen would circle each other attempting either to ram the enemy or to grapple a ship so that marines could board it and physically engage the crew against the Portuguese armed with cannons. It is

natural that a fleet which had a comparative advantage in infantry should try to board or fight at musket range while a fleet with a similar advantage in guns tried to fight a stand-off battle.^x The second take away from this short battle was the attempted blockade of a naval force. Although primitive naval blockades had been in use for millennia, this was perhaps the first instance of an attempted blockade in the Middle Ages, a concept of battle which gained significance much later in the Seven Years' War.^{xi} The Zamorin's attempt to blockade the Portuguese did not work as the Portuguese fleet managed to break through with no loss, while inflicting severe losses on the Zamorin's fleet. This can be attributed to the tactical failure of the Zamorin to accurately assess the capability of the enemy. The strength of the blockading force must be equal to or greater in strength than the opposition. A weaker force cannot establish an effective blockade. The third take away is fighting using a column formation. This battle is also historically notable for being one of the earliest recorded deliberate uses of a naval column, later called line of battle, and for being resolved by cannon fire alone.

Battle off Calicut

The next encounter was off Calicut in 1503, between the fleet formed under the orders of the Zamorin of Calicut^{xii} (comprising 20 large ships, 40 gun mounted sambuks and many smaller ships) led by Khoja Kassein an Arab corsair and the 4th Portuguese Armada of 16 ships (10 carracks and six caravels), led by Vasco da Gama. One major change in the Zamorin's ships was the induction of cannon on

board, as by this time, the Zamorin had been able to arm his ships with some cannons, albeit of poorer quality and lower range.^{xiii} The induction of cannons on ships is also recorded by Lodovico di Varthema,^{xiv} where he brings out that the Milanese armourers had supervised the casting of four or five hundred assorted cannon, many for naval use. The details of this battle are well recorded in Stanley's "The Three Voyages of Vasco da Gama" and Peter Padfield's "Tide of Empires- Decisive Naval Campaigns in the Rise of the West Vol I 1481-1654". There is a different version of this battle by KM Panikkar, but with no source quoted. According to him, Zamorin's Admiral Khoja Kassein (also known as Cojambar) was able to manoeuvre his small ships so effectively that the Portuguese were unable to direct their fire against them. The Calicut vessels surrounded the Portuguese ships like wasps, and the result was that da Gama broke off the engagement and sailed away with his ships to Europe.^{xv}

The Naval Engagement.

On sailing out of Cochin, Da Gama split his forces into groups - Vicente Sodre' with three ships and five caravels sailed close and along the shore, with instructions to sink ships he might encounter, and the second group of ten laden ships and smaller vessels sailed further out to sea with orders that in fighting with the fleet they should strive to overcome the large ships. The Zamorins fleet under Khoja Kassein was a large fleet with twenty large ships, about 50 fustas and large sambuks and many small boats, loosely organised to make more of a show than for battle. The Cojambar's flagship was in the van,

with many paraos (which are like fustas), remaining to seaward, so that their ships might shelter them from the guns of the caravels. Gasper Correra writes that with these fighting instructions under which the Zamorin's fleet sailed, resulted in the use of only two guns on the seaward side, against the caravels with ten guns. Vicente Sodre, who was running close in shore saw the Zamorin's fleet and he ordered the caravels to edge in close inshore, one astern of the other in a line, and to run under all the sail they could carry, firing as many guns as they could, while he with the ships remained behind. Each of the caravels carried thirty men, and four heavy guns below, and above six falconnets, and ten swivel-guns placed on the quarter deck and in the bows, and two of the falconnets fired astern; the ships carried six guns below on the deck, and two smaller ones on the poop, and eight falconnets above and several swivel-guns, and before the mast^ two smaller pieces which fired forwards; the ships of burden were much more equipped with artillery. During this phase the caravels either could not keep to windward of all the enemy because Kassim's smaller craft were closer inshore and many were under oars, or they did not bother to try, but keeping steerage way, sailed amongst them all firing bombards from both sides into the enemy hulls between 'wind and water', and swivels at the men massed on deck, and in the process cutting rigging, bringing down masts and yards, destroying the outboard rope and beam steering gear. In return they received small shots and showers of arrows which damaged their own sails and rigging but could not penetrate the timbers

behind which most of the men lay hidden. Only the swivel gunners were exposed, and they formed the bulk of the Portuguese casualties. This battle perhaps stands out in naval history as the first recorded sea battle fought to a pre-arranged pattern as a stand-off artillery action by squadrons sailing in close-hauled line ahead. The outcome of this first serious challenge to the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean by an Indian fleet ended in a disaster. The Portuguese inflicted heavy losses on Calicut fleet while they remained unharmed except for some casualties onboard. As in the first naval battle off Cannanore, it was superior weapons and better drills, which gave a tactical advantage to the Portuguese.

Some of the key takeaways from this battle

During the action off Calicut, Da Gama's fleet of caravels engaged the Indian fleet at extended ranges, with repeated salvos. It was a standoff engagement, with brisk fire with their heavy guns, a clear departure from the existing galley tactics. Gaspar Correia records the battle and writes 'they made such haste to load again that they loaded the guns with bags of powder which they had ready for this purpose made to measure, so that they could load again very speedily'. However, the firepower was not entirely effective as Zamorin's Admiral Kassim was able to manoeuvre his small ships so effectively that the Portuguese were unable to direct their fire against them. Of particular interest is the instructions given by Da Gama to his Captains, which may perhaps be the earliest recorded Tactical Instructions issued to the captains. According to Gaspar Correia, Da

Gama had instructed the captains 'they were by no means to board but fight with the artillery'. If it became necessary to take in sail, they were to brail the canvas up rather than lower the yards – presumably because these would interfere with the guns and provide useful grappling and boarding ladders for the enemy – and he cautioned them to provide numerous tubs of water about the decks to put out fires, which would be their greatest danger.^{xvi} This engagement is one of the first recorded instances of the effectiveness of employing a naval line of battle in combat. Gama's naus and escort caravels sailed in a line end-to-end, concentrating all their immense firepower as they passed against the twenty large Arab ships of Cojambar, sinking a number of them and causing damage to the remainder.^{xvii} Though the Portuguese were numerically inferior by a factor of three to the fleet put up by the Zamorin, they had better weapons and adopted stand-off firing tactics effectively. Da Gama's fleet of caravels engaged the enemy fleet at extended ranges, with repeated salvos^{xviii} according to a prearranged pattern. The Calicut fleet relied on sailing close, boarding and hand to hand combat to overpower the enemy. Concentration of force to implement this tactic was extremely difficult due to differing sizes, rigs and sailing speeds of the ships, which caused them to be strung out in a long line over the horizon, making it easy for the Portuguese to engage them sequentially. Earlier naval battles involved firing of a single salvo presumably immediately prior to coming alongside an enemy vessel for melee action. Firing additional salvos required reloading which would

diminish the ability of a vessel to fight in a melee action.^{xxix} However, during this battle, reloading during action has been recorded, as Vasco da Gama's fleet fought a stand-off artillery action off.^{xxx} The Portuguese had better communication between the ships as well as clarity of instruction for battle, unlike the Zamorin's fleet. This is clearly brought out by Gasper Correra "When it was mid-day the sea-breeze arose, at which the captain major fired a swivel-gun and hoisted a flag at the stern - the signal to summon the ships". Alonso de Chaves, in his discourse on sailing tactics, written in 1530, advised that while the strongest ships should attack, grapple and board, lighter vessels should 'with their artillery and munitions to harass, pursue, and give chase to the enemy.

Second Siege of Cochin

The third encounter between the Zamorin's forces and the Portuguese forces was the Battle of Cochin, also referred to as the Second Siege of Cochin. This was a series of confrontations, between March and July 1504, fought on land and sea, principally between the Portuguese garrison at Cochin, allied to the Trimumpara Raja, and the armies of the Zamorin of Calicut and vassal Malabari states. This was an important battle for both sides. For the Portuguese, loss would have meant that their entire venture in India would be over. For the Zamorin, it was in control of all ports and trade in Kerala. The Calicut fleet was composed of 160 vessels – about 76 of which were paraus,^{xxxi} each armed with two bombards,^{xxii} five muskets and 25 archers. The remaining boats were smaller, each mounted with a cannon,

and 16 soldiers.^{xxiii} The fleet was under the command of the Zamorin's nephew, Naubea Daring (Naubeadarim), with the lord Elcanol of Edapalli as second-in-command. The plan was for the fleet to slip into the Vembanad lagoon via the outlet near Cranganore and then sail down the lagoon, accompanying and protecting the infantry. The Portuguese garrison under the command of Duarte Pacheco Pereira^{xxiv} had a fleet of just 5 vessels (2 galleons, 1 caravel and 2 small boats). He had correctly concluded that access to Cochin, situated on its peninsula surrounded by saltwater creeks and channels, depended on the crossing of a few narrow fords, according to the tides. He therefore deployed the Portuguese-Cochinese forces to block the passage of the army at Kumbalam ford (Passo de Cambalão). The naval forces were distributed carefully and redeployed according to the tide.^{xxv} The exact location of the Passe de Cambalão, the fording point where Duarte Pacheco Pereira made his stand, is uncertain and disputed in various sources. Overall, the Battle of Cochin lasted some five months – from March to July, with most of the assaults concentrated in early April and early May. The naval battle was restricted to the encounters in the channels. The narrow channels selected by Pacheco gave tactical advantage to the Portuguese. It did not allow the large Calicut fleet to spread out on a broad front. Instead, they had to approach the anchored Portuguese with a very narrow front. This pitted the three Portuguese ships against only a dozen or so paraus at a time, something the superior Portuguese firepower could easily handle. The Zamorins attacked

with a wave of 20 boats, tightly tied to each other, armed with 40 bombards and 100 muskets, plus innumerable bowmen, which was always beaten back and over time the sunk and damaged paraus formed river obstacles for the next wave. The Zamorin's army, which started out at more than 60,000 strong, suffered heavy casualties: 19,000 had died, over 5,000 in fighting and 13,000 to disease, in addition to the numerous ship losses. The battle of Cochin transformed the political landscape of Kerala. The Zamorin of Calicut was humiliated as his mighty army and fleet were unable to crush a minuscule garrison of 150 Portuguese allied with Cochin.

The key takeaways from this battle from a naval point of view are:

Pereira had pulled off a brilliant victory with a numerically inferior force. Pereira, probably the first man to scientifically study the relationship between tides and lunar phases, was able to predict when each ford would be passable and to redeploy his few ships and men accordingly to meet points of attack.^{xxvi} Restricting the zone of attack by stockading fords with lines of sharpened stakes chained together and protruding from the water.

Battle of Chaul

The Battle of Chaul was a three-day naval engagement naval battle between the Portuguese and an Egyptian Mamluk fleet in March 1508 in the harbour of Chaul. The battle is well covered in Roger Crowley book "Conquerors: How Portugal forged the first global empire" and is recommended for reading. The Portuguese fleet, under Lourenço de

Almeida, son of the Viceroy Francisco de Almeida, were numerically inferior with only three small carracks, three caravels, and two galleys—about five hundred men in all and tasked with overseeing the loading of allied merchant ships in Chaul and then escort them back to Cochin. The Mamulk and Gujarati fleet under Amir Hussain comprised forty-five vessels: forty fustas and galleys, one galleon, and four carracks that had been constructed by European shipwrights at Suez. A brief description of the naval engagement is essential to understand the tactics employed by the two fleets. The Portuguese fleet was anchored in Chaul, waiting to escort the Cochin ships after loading cargo. They were caught off-guard as the lookouts mistook the distinctively European-like ships of Hussein approaching the harbour as part of the expedition of Afonso de Albuquerque, assigned to the Arabian Coast. It took time to realise it was the fleet of Hussain and prepare for battle. It took time to realise it was the fleet of Hussain, and then there was panic in the Portuguese fleet: men hurrying to rowboats to be ferried out to the offshore ships; buckling on armour; snatching up swords and preparing for battle. They gained some time as Hussain paused at the river mouth for Ayaz Malik's ships to join. However, Malik did not join initially. Hussain's fleet sailed toward the São Miguel and São António, perilously isolated in midstream from the rest of the fleet. His intention was to shatter Lourenço's flagship with a first strike and then board it. For the first time the Portuguese ships were on the receiving end of artillery bombardment in the Indian Ocean. However, the

Portuguese managed to get their act together and fired against the flagship. Under intense fire, Hussain changed his mind about attempting to board and anchored upstream on the opposite shore, followed by his other vessels. Lourenço, sensing the damage inflicted on Hussain's flagship, was determined to press home the advantage. He ordered the leading carracks to be towed toward the enemy by their oared boats. The execution was inept, as he failed to provide any support from his galleys. Hussain sent his own galleys forward, which put the fragile towboats under such a hail of fire that they were forced to withdraw. The attack had to be abandoned. At the end of the day, the two fleets were locked in a small arena, anchored on opposite banks and separated by a mere five hundred yards. Hussain had arranged his ships in a tight defensive formation. They were drawn up along the shore, chained together, prows to the river, and connected one to another by gangplanks, so that men could be moved from one ship to the next in the event of attack. This was tactical suicide. His carracks were no longer capable of using their broadside bombards; nor could they escape. Hussain had transformed his fleet from an attack force into a huddled encampment waiting for Ayaz Malik to join the battle. Ayaz was reluctant and continued to loiter offshore. In the interim, the fleet was a sitting duck. What Hussain did not know was that his opponent's thinking had been similarly warped. When the council of war reconvened on the São Miguel the next morning, with the attitude of the enemy fleet now clear, the decision was taken to attack. This required an

onshore wind, which would not arise until midday. There were two tactical options: either to bombard the Egyptian ships or to take them by storm. The council chose to fight on Hussain's terms and chose to board the Egyptian ships. Manoeuvring the sailing ships into a boarding position is a tricky operation, given the shifting winds, tidal pulls, and crosscurrents. This is exactly what happened. When São Miguel was closing in, only ten or fifteen yards away, the plan of attack fell apart. The wind shifted, and then died. The ship was drifting on the current. They anchored within range of the Hussain's flagship and were continuously subjected to a barrage of arrows. The São Miguel and São António managed to pass downstream and anchored out of bowshot. The two Portuguese galleys and the light caravel, able to manoeuvre in the slackening wind, had fared better. They bypassed their immobilized carracks and bore down on the Egyptian galleys anchored a little farther down the line. The Portuguese boarded and took over the galleys. The advantage again shifted back to Lourenço, which encouraged him to attack Hussain's flagship. But with no wind, the plan was to be towed by the ship's boats. This was abandoned, when Malik Ayaz with his thirty-four fustas decided to join the battle after a long wait outside. The next day, the Cochin ships left after they completed loading. The fleet followed down river. The São Miguel was the last and was slowed by towing one of the captured galleys. It was attacked by the light bombards of Ayaz's fustas, with one of the shots hitting the stern and causing her to be flooded. When the wind dropped, the São Miguel was at the

mercy of the current, which was pushing it toward the southern shore, where fishermen had planted rows of stakes in the water for mooring their boats. Drifting on the current, the ship became entangled among these obstacles, paralyzed by the increasing weight of the water. It was mayhem aboard the São Miguel with shots from the fustas smacking into the immobilized vessel, ultimately sinking it. The rest of the Portuguese fleet escaped, while Hussain himself barely survived the encounter because of the unwilling commitment of Malik Ayyaz to the battle. The battle ended in a Mamluk victory. This was the first Portuguese defeat at sea in the Indian Ocean as they had to retreat from Chaul with the loss of the flag ship and Lourenço de Almeida, who was killed in the melee. But the victory at Chaul was largely pyrrhic for the Mamulks, as they suffered too many losses to be able to continue the war. Hussain had lost somewhere between six hundred and seven hundred men out of a total of about eight hundred, and his fighters had come to fear the power of European gunnery. Hussain returned to Diu with Malik Ayyaz and prepared for a Portuguese retaliation.

The Key takeaway from this battle are

Galley tactics were the dominant form of naval tactics employed by both the fleets in this battle. Boarding was favoured, probably mainly because of the allure of capturing the ship and its merchandise as a prize. The combined Indian fleet failed to capitalise on the advantage of surprise. The pause by Hussain at the river mouth for Ayaz Malik's ships to join gave the Portuguese enough time to prepare for battle. Disagreement between the

commanders of the Mamulk and Gujarati fleets on the conduct of operations and a lack of confidence of Ayaz Malik in Hussain's abilities led to his not joining battle at the beginning of the engagement. This action resulted in the weight of attack being grossly reduced, which helped the Portuguese as for over one and half days, they had to only fight against Hussain's ships. If the ships of Malik Ayaz were brought to bear on the Portuguese from the beginning, the Portuguese would have been under severe pressure. Hussain adopted a tight defensive formation. Ships being chained together and facing the shore was a tactical blunder. The initiative and freedom to manoeuvre was completely sacrificed for a static position, which constrained the use of weapons, thus severely restricting the fire power that could be brought to bear on the enemy. The positioning of ships ensured that they could not withdraw from battle. Hussain had transformed his fleet from an attack force into a huddled encampment to fight the equivalent of a land battle.

The Portuguese despite having superior weapons failed to use them to their advantage. Though their German gunner recommended using the artillery and simply sinking the large ships, Lourenço refused and instead ordered to close in and board. The combination of winds, tide and human error was responsible for the defeat of the Portuguese fleet at Chaul.

Battle of Diu 1509

The Battle of Diu in Feb 1509 is considered as one of the most important battles in history. The author William Weir in his book "50 Battles That Changed the World", ranks this

battle as the 6th most important in history. It marked the beginning of Portuguese and subsequently Western European dominance in the Indian Ocean. The battle is well covered in Roger Crowley book *Conquerors: How Portugal forged the first global empire* and is recommended for further reading. The Portuguese fleet under Almedia had 9 naus, 6 caravels, 2 galleys and 1 brigantine, 800 Portuguese soldiers and about 400 Hindu-Nairs. While the combined fleet of the Mamulk (under Amir Husain Al-Kurdi), Gujarati Sultanate (under Malik Ayyaz), and Zamorin (under Kunjali Marakkar) had 10 carracks, 6 galleys, 30 light galleys, 70–150 war-boats and 450 Mamluks along with 4,000-5,000 Gujaratis.^{xxvii} Hussain wanted to engage the enemy at sea, while the Portuguese were still unprepared after a long voyage but was not supported by Malik Ayaz who suspected that the Egyptians would cut and run if the fight went badly, leaving him to face the consequences alone. He favoured a fight within the river, protected by shore guns and potentially with the help of the towns people which would give him the chance to escape overland.

The Engagement

When the wind picked up about 11:00 am, the engagement commenced with a general bombardment between the two forces which preceded boarding operations. The Portuguese employed an innovative gunnery tactic: by firing directly at the water, the cannonballs bounced like skipping stones. A broadside from the Santo Espírito hit one of the enemy ships by the waterline, sinking it instantly. What followed was galley tactics of ramming,

boarding and hand to hand combat. Hussain's flagship was grappled by the Santo Espírito and the Portuguese boarded for combat. Before the flagship was dominated though, another Mamluk carrack came to its aid, boarding the Santo Espírito from the opposite side. The Rei Grande slammed against the free side of Hussain's flagship, delivering direly needed reinforcements, which tipped the scales in favour of the Portuguese. Up on the crow's nests, Ethiopian and Turkish bowmen proved their worth against Portuguese matchlock crews. Many of the other Muslim mercenaries "fled at the first sight of the Portuguese". Hussain had expected the Portuguese to commit their entire forces to the grapple, so he kept the light oar ships back within the channel, to attack the Portuguese from behind when they engaged the carracks. João da Nova maneuvered the Flor do Mar to block the channel entrance and prevent the oar ships from sailing out.

The compact mass of oar ships provided an ideal target for Portuguese gunners, who disabled many ships that then blocked the path of the ones following. Unable to break through, the Zamorin's boats turned around after a short exchange, and retreated to Calicut. Slowly but surely, the Portuguese secured most of the carracks, half-blinded by the smoke. Hussain's flagship was overpowered, and many began jumping ship. The galleys were dominated, and the shallow caravels positioned themselves between the ships and the coast, cutting down any who attempted to swim ashore. One by one, their ships were captured or abandoned. Hussain's flagship eventually surrendered, by which time Hussain

himself had slipped away in a small boat and ridden off. Other vessels, in some of which the soldiers could not swim, cut their forward anchor cables and tried to haul themselves back to shore. Again, the Portuguese launched their small boats to stab and massacre men in the water, so that “the sea was red with the blood of the dead.” Some of the small Calicut dhows managed to get out to sea and away down the Malabar Coast with the doleful news. Eventually, only a single ship remained – a great carrack, larger than any other vessel in the battle, anchored too close to shore for most of the deep-draught Portuguese vessels to reach. Its reinforced hull was impervious to Portuguese cannon fire, and it took a continuous bombardment from the whole fleet to finally sink it by dusk, thus marking the end of the Battle of Diu.

The key takeaway from this Battle are:

The tactics of the Combined fleet was defensive as at Chaul. The carracks were anchored in pairs close to the shore in line, bow forward. The ships from Calicut stayed farther upstream, with the aim of falling on the Portuguese from behind once they were engaged with their big ships. The shore guns would provide further covering fire. It was assumed that the enemy would repeat the tactics employed at Chaul - board rather than engage with cannons from afar. The Portuguese refined their tactics learning from the battle of Chaul. Portuguese forces were divided in four: one group to board the Mamluk carracks after a preliminary bombardment, another to attack the stationary Mamluk galleys from the flank, a 'bombardment group' that would support the rest of the fleet, and

the flagship itself, which would not participate in the boarding, but would position itself in a convenient position to direct the battle and block a counterattack from the rear by the Muslim oared vessels with its firepower. The brigantine Santo António would ensure communications. Hussain had skilled gunners and good cannons on his carracks— but their field of fire was hampered by their static forward-facing position. The Mamulks did not take advantage of the protection provided the harbour of Diu during the engagement. The limited use of cannon in the fort to target the Portuguese fleet while it was entering the harbour was a tactical blunder. The lashing of carracks and galleys together close to shore and awaiting the Portuguese attack was another tactical blunder. They had relinquished the initiative. The Portuguese refined their tactics learning from the battle of Chaul and cannon fire was the dominant tactic in the battle.

Battle of Goa 1510

Albuquerque who replaced Almeida as the Governor of India was a man of remarkable foresight and ability. He realised the importance of Goa for controlling the trade between Malabar and the Red Sea.^{xxviii} Goa's position on the coast, between the Hindu empire of Vijayanagar in the south and the Muslim sultanates in the north, gave the Portuguese a range of opportunities for interfering in, and even manipulating, Indian politics. The constant battles with the Zamorins off the Malabar Coast made them look for a safer base. Albuquerque had received specific instructions to try to take Goa as its capture would break the alliance between Gujarat, Calicut and Egypt. In February 1510 he

launched a successful amphibious operation and took over the city. Albuquerque's initial seizure of Goa was deceptively easy. However, the city was retaken by Adil shah the sultan of Bijapur. During the retreat, they were trapped for four months in the river Mandovi due to the monsoons and could only sail out in Aug. The recapture of Goa was again a short affair of two days. An amphibious assault was carried out in Nov 1510. A three-pronged attack from sea was planned^{xxix}: one squadron commanded by Albuquerque, would attack the city defences from the west, the other two commanded by Vasconcelos and Manuel de Lacerda would assault the city's riverside gates to the north, where the main enemy force was expected to be concentrated. For the amphibious landing, the Portuguese galleys were used. They first bombarded the riverfront to clear it of enemies for the landing boats. The heavily armoured Portuguese infantry assaulted the outer defences around the riverside gates and quickly took over the city in a short span of five hours. In this engagement, artillery did make a serious impact, but it was the infantry attack and hand to hand combat that sealed the outcome. Goa was Portugal's first territorial possession in Asia and served as the main Portuguese base in the East for four and a half centuries. After the capture of Goa in 1510, the Portuguese under Albuquerque turned East to capture Malacca in 1511 and after successfully establishing a base there moved towards the Red Sea in 1513. The aim was to control the Indian Ocean and trade to Europe. No significant naval action, fleet on fleet battles took place until 1558, except

for skirmishes between the Kunjali's and Portuguese shipping and trade.^{xxx} In 1558, Luiz De Mello engaged Kunjali's fleet off Cannanore and sank the flag ship. This was followed by a blockade which could have destroyed Kunjali fleet, had it not been called off.^{xxxi} The Portuguese held sway over the Indian Ocean and India, until the arrival of the Dutch in 1595 and the British in 1612. A war of attrition between Portuguese and the Zamorin navy under Kunjali Marakkars and his successors continued over the next 90 years, through the tenures of all four Kunjalis - Mohammed Kunjali Marakkar - Marakkar I, Kunjali - Marakkar II, Pattu Kunjali - Marakkar III and Mohammed Ali Kunjali - Marakkar IV. The Kunjalis knew that their ships were no match for the big Portuguese vessels (Caravels) which were fixed with heavy guns. Therefore, they evolved tactics to suit their ships. The Caravels, built for rough sea voyages, needed sea room for manoeuvre and favourable winds for speed. These large ships were unsuitable for shallow water warfare, particularly in the creeks and rivers. The emphasis shifted from assembling a large attack force to the use of small mobile forces to seek out the enemy at their weakest point. Therefore, the Kunjali's preferred to engage the Portuguese fleet in lagoons and narrow water channels rather than on the open seas. This tactic required good intelligence and relied on surprise and the ability to rapidly withdraw and disappear from the sight of the enemy. Lookouts would be posted on vantage hill tops to get early warnings of the approaching enemy. The Kunjalis used native crafts known as Paroes, Odam and Sambooks.

These ships were small, light and could achieve greater speed. They had two masts with a large slope and a small triangular sail, carried on board pivots guns or small guns, and sometimes rowed with a strength of 50 oars. Historian and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calicut, K.K.N. Kurup, in his book, *India's Naval Traditions – The role of Kunhali Marakkars* writes: "... several of these crafts deployed at strategic points such as at entrances to rivers and (had) others hidden away near narrow channels ... 'War Paraoes' then converged upon the Portuguese ships, set fire to their sails and rendered them ineffective, inflicting heavy damage and casualties before returning to the safety of shallow waters." They preferred to sail patiently behind convoys waiting for an opportunity to attack the heavy and slower Portuguese galleons in conditions with slight winds which restricted their speeds and manoeuvrability.^{xxxii} They would use the smaller boats and their higher speeds to break engagement if the weather or the situation were not favourable to them. Despite the tactical successes achieved by the Kunjalis, it was a very limited objective in the broader context of the control of the sea. The Kunjalis were only able to deny the use of certain sea lanes or areas, often very close to the coast for a limited period of time. These tactics did not achieve control of the wider Indian ocean area, which still remained firmly in the hands of the Portuguese and was only to be lost by them on the arrival of the Dutch and English with their more powerful warships that could meet the Portuguese on equal terms. The arrival of the East India

Company and the establishment of a trading base at Surat changed the dynamics of the naval battles in the Indian Ocean during the 17th century. The first naval battle in Oct 1612 between the Portuguese and the English fleet under the command of Captain Thomas Best, was a skirmish off Swally, which formed the seaport for Surat. The only significant tactical innovation in this battle was the use of a frigate, prepared as a fire ship^{xxxiii} by the Portuguese to destroy the fleet at anchor. However, it is historically important as it marked the beginning of the end of Portugal's commercial monopoly over India trade, and the beginning of the ascent of the English East India Company's presence in India. This battle led to the establishment of a small navy by the English East India Company to safeguard their commercial interests from other European powers and also from pirates and is regarded as the root of the modern Indian Navy. There was a paradigm shift around this time in naval warfare. Hitherto cargo ships were armed with weapons and manned by sailors-cum-traders for protection against freeloaders, pirates and buccaneers. This invariably led to compromises between cargo capacity and armament capability. Armed cargo ships which earlier could stave off attacks were no longer adequate to fight against the pirates who had equally well armed ships. Ships were now being built for combat only and deployed to escort and protect cargo ships. These ships came to be called "Man-O-War", which was a naval ship that was designed for combat and not for merchant service. These ships were used to transport treasure and acted as escort to merchant ships. The

three classes of the “man of war” during the period were ship of line, Frigate and Corvette or sloop of war. It was typically heavily armed and often avoided by the pirates. The Ship of the Line is the main battleship of the Navy and the largest of the Man-O-Wars. It was a ship rigged with three masts. Its guns were arranged on three-gun decks. Depending on the time period Ships of the line carried between 32 and 144 guns arranged on three and sometimes four decks. This is because they continued to get larger from the 16th to 18th century. By the mid-18th century, the typical ship of the line had 74 guns on three decks. The Frigate was the midsized Man-O-War and rigged with three masts but was noticeably smaller than a Ship of the Line. It typically had a full battery of guns on the gun deck and a light battery on a spar deck. The Frigate would carry between 24 and 40 guns ranging in size between 12 and 24 pounders. The Corvette was typically "Brig Rigged" with only two masts and was also referred to a "Sloop of War" but should not be confused with an actual sloop. Corvettes had their guns arranged on a single fighting deck. A typical corvette would carry between 12 to 20 guns ranging between 6 to 12 pounders. As the ship carried less weapons, its ability to manoeuvre was better which made the Corvette a fast light ship that could attack quickly but not bring an enormous amount of fire power to hand.

According to CR Low in his book “The History of Royal Indian Navy” the Local Marine force of ten grabs and gallivats, was established in 1613 as the Indian Marine and may be dated the permanent establishment of the Service. The Indian marine then

became the Bombay Marine and later the Royal Indian Navy and then the Indian Navy. When the Indian Marine was first formed in 16J3, the Company had not a single European soldier, or Sepoy, in their pay, and the British Army had no existence, as the earliest of the regular regiments, whether belonging to the Guards or the Line, was not raised until 1660, the first year of the reign of Charles II. In the interval between the breakdown of the Portuguese authority and the establishment of British supremacy the Indian naval interests witnessed a remarkable revival.^{xxxiv} The Moghuls, the Sidi's and the Marathas built a navy to protect their commercial interests, while the Kunjalis' continued to dominate the Malabar region. Tippu Sultan also decided to build a navy consisting of 20 battleships of 72 cannons and 20 frigates of 65 cannons. In the year 1790 he appointed Kamaluddin as his Mir Bahar and established massive dockyards at Jamalabad and Majidabad. However, there are no records available of any naval engagements by Tippu's navy with the British. Another notable name during the period, which needs mention is Rani Akkappa of Ullal, who continued defying the Portuguese and trading directly with the Middle East. When the Portuguese captured a rich ship of hers returning from Mecca, she planned a secret attack. On a dark night, her fishermen soldiers, the Mogaveeras and Moplahs, got into boats, sneaked in amongst the Portuguese ships, and used thousands of agnivaans (flaming arrows) and coconut torches to set the ships on fire. The Portuguese navy had to retreat with heavy losses.^{xxxv} Of

particular interest is the Maratha navy with its base at Vijaydurg (Gheria). The Marathas under Shivaji built a small state navy starting in 1657 at Kalyan and became a dominant naval force in the 17th century on the Konkan coast. The Maratha fleet was built to counter the Mughal and Siddi fleets that were being used to provision and support land forces then in conflict with the Marathas along the Konkan Coast and a major part of his maritime activities was against the island-fort of Janjira held by the Siddhis. Subsequently, the EIC opposition to the Maratha dashtak system resulted in naval action between the forces to control trade on the Konkan coast. The Marathas adopted and extended their land-based guerrilla warfare tactics to the naval arena. On land his primary tactic was to use the rapid mobility of his cavalry to attack the supply lines of the much larger and slower-moving armies of the Mughal Emperor and his allies, a paradigm shift from the tactic expectation that both sides would embark on a 'decisive plains battle'.^{xxxvi} Instead, Shivaji refused to directly confront his enemy at their strongest point, striking out at some more vulnerable point that was often some hundreds of miles away. In a similar fashion, partly dictated by the nature of the vessels under his command, the light gallivats of his fleet struck anywhere along the Konkan Coast. Similarly, isolated ships at sea, if poorly armed, were targeted. It was Kanhoji Angre, their greatest Admiral who led their navy between 1698 and 1729 fighting a relentless battle against the British, Siddhis and the Portuguese that is of immense interest. Prof BK Apte in his book "A history of the Maratha Navy and

Merchantships" covers the naval warfare on coast of Konkan including the warships and the weapons. Quoting Robert Orme,^{xxxvii} he writes that the Maratha navy fleet consisted of gurabs and galbats, which were well suited for the shallow waters of the Konkan coast. The gurabs were three-masted and about 300 tons (smaller ones were about 150 tons) and carried broadsides of six and nine pounder guns. Two, nine or twelve pounders were mounted on their main deck, pointing forward through the portholes cut in the bulkhead in such a manner that they could be fired over the bows. The galbats were larger row boats and rarely exceeded seventy tons. They had two masts and were mounted with six or eight pieces of cannon ranging from two to four pounders. They were rowed by forty or fifty stout oars at a speed of four knots. The Marathas seem to have learnt the method of mounting artillery on board their ships from the Mohammedans, and later improved upon it by imitating their Europeans. The major naval battles fought by the Marathas were the Capture of Khanderi Island by Shivaji in 1679, the battle of Suvarnadurg in 1755 and Vijaydurg in 1756 against the combined navy of the Peshwa and the English. There were many other skirmishes and attacks on individual ships. I shall not go into the details of these engagements, as they do not offer much in terms of tactical thought. However, I shall briefly speak on the capture of Khanderi island, one of the important battles of the Marathas, which gives vital clues to the tactics employed by them. Khanderi at the mouth of the Bombay Bay was strategically located and its capture would provide the Marathas a base to

watch the movements of ships in the Bombay waters between the points of Malbar (Bombay) and Kolaba in the North and up to the forts of Korlai and Revadanda in the south. The English attempted to blockade Khanderi with twelve battleships, including Revenge, a 16-gun frigate. The Maratha fleet under Daulat Khan numbered approximately between 50 and 60. The English navy was superior to the Maratha warships in every respect except in numbers. The Maratha ships were no match for a single massively built English frigate, with big and long-range guns. However, the EIC ships had a major disadvantage when operating in the shallow waters around the island where they were outmanoeuvred by the oared gallivats. Despite the overwhelming firepower, blockade failed as the Bombay Marine was unable to prevent Shivaji's vessels using the cover of the night to freely move between Khanderi and their supply depots at Alibag and Thal. The shallowness of the sea, the soundings near Khanderi and the nature of the coast were peculiarly suited to the movements of lightly built Maratha boats. Analysing these naval battles, the tactics employed by the Marathas can be inferred and are summarised below. Marathas in their naval engagements with the Portuguese, the Siddis and the English, relied on overwhelming the enemy defences by attacking with a large number of boats and ships, as they were aware that their guns and warships were inferior to those of their enemies. They made up by striking at the weak points of the enemy with their light vessels. They never attempted to engage the English battleships on the open sea. They lured the English ships

into the creeks, and then waylaid them while other Maratha boats escaped to the island or returned to the base.

They avoided an open encounter with the Europeans because their guns were of shorter range and their ships of lesser tonnage than those of their rivals. They always aimed at the sterns of the enemy ships where guns were few and avoided the broadside. They could easily do this as their ships were light and could be manoeuvred with dexterity.

While launching an offensive they resorted to surprise attacks and night-raids. As a defensive measure they often retreated into their coastal forts. All along the coast, they had identified a number of creeks with deep back water to serve as anchorages. The entrances to the creek were guarded by forts. The forts at Bankot, Anjanvel, Jaygad, Vijaydurg and Sindhudurg are examples of excellent naval bases.

As to their method of attack and boarding the enemy-ship a graphic account is given by Orme.^{xxxviii} "Eight or ten grabs and forty or fifty gallivants crowded with men generally composed Angria's principal fleet destined to attack ships

of war or cargo. The vessels no sooner came in sight of the port or bay where the fleet was lying than they slipped their cables and put out to sea, if the wind blew, their construction enabled them to sail almost as fast as the wind, and if it was calm the gallivats rowing towed the grabs, when within cannon shot of the chase they generally assembled in their stern, and the grabs attacked her at a distance with their prow guns, firing first at the masts, and taking aim when the three masts of the

vessels just opened all together to their view, by which means the shot would probably strike one or other of the three. As soon as the ship was desmasted, they came nearer and attacked her on all sides until she struck, and if the defence was obstinate, they sent a number of gallivats with two or three hundred men in each, who boarded sword in hand from all quarters in the same instant."

Their grabs and gallivats always keep astern of target ships and closed to fire their prow guns, which were six-pounders. The Grab broke off the attack as soon as she had fired her weapon to reload. The next in line immediately attacked. This is the method they adopt till they have all fired round, when the first comes up again. The gallivats, would run in between the grabs, and keep constantly firing at the target. During the engagement, except the gunners who manage their guns, the boarding crew remained below deck.

They were not as dependent on wind as compared with the heavily gunned European ships. When the wind failed, the galbat or gurab would be rowed fast. A calm day was often a day of victory for the Marathas as their opponents with heavy ships would be calmed and forced into inaction.

The Marathas preferred the weather-gauge in engagements and knew how to take advantage of the same as they were well skilled in handling the sail. Tactically they always attempted to keep the enemy on the lee side so that they could break off easily at one's own will as the enemy was in the least offensive position. When they found themselves on the lee side, the

Marathas escaped with their oars and sails. In the battle of Suvarnadurg, the Maratha navy sailed off before the English ships could move, using every patch of cloth and catching every breath of wind. They did not rely upon sail alone but utilised oars when engaged by the heavily armed European ships in order to escape their fire.

Conclusions:

The arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch and English navies in the Indian Ocean heralded a change in the region. Their ships were armed with superior weapons and built for the rigors of long sea voyages across oceans. The native navies had much smaller ships and were initially not equipped with cannons, which tipped the battles in favour of the Western navies. The naval battles in the region continued to be fought using a combination of long-range artillery attacks and Galley tactics. Boarding was favoured, probably mainly because of the allure of capturing the ship and its merchandise as a prize. The native navies, principally the Zamorins, Gujarati and Marathas knew their weakness and adapted tactics to fight the Western navies. The Kunjali's and Marathas realised the futility of direct engagement and fighting on the open seas. They relied on surprise attacks, luring them into the rivers and shallow waters and swarming the enemy defences. They also decided the engagement duration and never shied to break away from battle when circumstances did not suit them. The hit and run tactics, fighting close to the coast and in the adjoining rivers resulted in very limited short-term gains of capturing and harassing

ships. These harassment tactics were countered by the Western navies by providing 'man of war' escorts to cargo ships and adopting convoys while transiting through pirate infested coasts, much like what is being done off the coast of Somalia today.

In the long run, this method of fighting proved to be a wrong strategy. Sea control could never be established by the native navies in the Indian Ocean. There was no grand strategy envisaged to protect and further maritime interests in the region beyond their immediate sphere of influence - The Arabian Sea. This led to focussing on building the wrong type of ships without reach or sustenance and fighting short battles rather than concentrating on the War for the Indian Ocean. The individual kingdoms were unable to defend their sovereignty at all times. This is borne out by the fact that the navies which the Kunjalis or Kanoji built did not last very long after their death. Soon enough, trade with other nations, the lifeline of the economy and national progress passed into the hands of the Europeans.

While it is pertinent to study tactics employed by the naval forces, an examination of overall strategy envisaged by the leadership is indispensable. This invariably determines the budget allocation, the shipyards and type of ships to be built, their armament, bases, training, etc. One of the main flaws in the maritime policy of Indian rulers – Mughals, Maratha as well as the Zamorins, was concentrating on building a navy to only protect the border rather than developing a navy that could project power beyond the coast. As such, the

vessels that formed that navy, while not insignificant in terms of numbers, were of limited tonnage and only effective when used close to the shoreline. The alternative, but requiring a considerable financial outlay, was projecting the power of the Empire into the wider oceans. In doing so, they would have been in a position to neutralise the European powers before they could extend their coastal holdings and wealth into a position of power over all India.

While on the other hand the EIC deployed their large and heavily armed ships to effectively connect each dispersed location to dominate a much greater area. Only by fully understanding how the EIC, and ultimately the British government, were using sea power to extend their power on land, could the native rulers overcome the threat. But they never managed to do this and therefore failed to go beyond the creation of a 'brown-water' coastal defence force as opposed to a 'blue-water' oceanic navy. While a brown-water navy might offer defence of an immediate coastline, it could never secure total control.

Ships of an ocean-going navy were, by their very nature, sturdier and more robust and the product of nations that both invested more heavily in their maritime strength and were also likely to be better prepared and better equipped for conflict. Only through the adoption of a vibrant economy supported by overseas trade can a nation seriously attend to the development of a blue-water navy. The Marathas, through their adoption of a continental mindset, were equally opposed to the development of

overseas trade which further ensured that a blue-water navy was never likely to be created.

It is indeed sad that the use of maritime power by the Cholas against the Srivijaya kingdom was all but forgotten. The Cholas had no hesitation in employing their navy to influence their neighbours or to subdue recalcitrant adversaries and bring them to vassal status when necessary and their use of their navy is a classic study in a maritime nation's successful pursuit of national security based on clear policies and strategy derived from them.

I do hope this will spur further research and analysis on the evolution of naval tactical thought in India, particularly seeking information and historical evidence from vernacular sources on the communique from the Admirals to his fleet.

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- xxiii. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cochin_\(1504\)#cite_note-22](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cochin_(1504)#cite_note-22)
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- xxv. Roger Crowley, *Conquerors: How Portugal forged the first global empire*, P 156
- xxvi. Roger Crowley, *Conquerors: How Portugal forged the first global empire*, P 156
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Snapshot from MHS Events



MONSOON MUSING II

MARITIME MEMORIES OF A SILENT SENTINEL: PANIKOTA AT DIU

Kirtida Unwalla

Principal Architect K Unwalla Architects

Let us begin with the setting of Diu in the maritime realm. In the memories that it shares with everybody, it is like a human being, a person who has travelled in time, over the centuries and has seen how the development of maritime history has travelled. For a person like me who is in the field of architectural conservation, these buildings are alive and personified in timelines and therefore the journey that these monuments, if these can be called monuments, is fascinating. It was for the first time that I was looking at a monument in the sea, within the coastal tides. It raised a question about all the memories that it had had over the years. The term Monsoon Musings forced me to look at the word Monsoons – which led me to look up to what is the meaning of the word monsoon and what it means in the context of maritime history. When an architect looks at a project like this, they have to consider it in its entirety and quite a few environments which surround the project, including cultural concerns and that is when the history of the building or the project comes alive. So cultural history is what I would call it and culture considers the inception, development and current status of the building as it exists. It has been a personal journey as a conservational architect along with a large team of others, who have continued to be associated with the conservation efforts.

The maritime context of Panikotha with its defensive systems had pre-existed in most of the Portuguese thresholds that they encountered in this country. The Portuguese adapted rather than created many of the existing defensive formations. In this case of Panikotha, the two sieges of 1538 and 1546 (or crusades, if they can be called crusades), which have been ingrained in the memories of the monument. Issues of cultural sustainability therefore become a very important component in enhancing the essence of a place, so that the memories can be preserved or embodied within the character of the buildings. The knowledge base for deriving the historical association came from primary and partly secondary sources. My own data came with hindsight. The knowledge base for the work came from these data. The approach focuses on social, architectural and historical analysis. One can wonder what an architect is doing with all these histories. This therefore enabled substantial practical work. Last, but not the least, Diu is a significant maritime cultural landscape in the Indian Ocean.

We should start by looking at the cultural aspects of the surrounding areas, not just Diu, to understand the tangible and intangible maritime settings. We all know about the journeys the Europeans undertook across the Indian Ocean over the

centuries for trade, including the Portuguese, which has fashioned the cultural milieu of the Indian Ocean. Estado Portuguesa da India or Estado India as it was called was one of the most useful, not first, occupation of the Portuguese in India. You can see the manifestation in the occupations that were happening in this area in the early 14th – 16th centuries. What it boils down to is the exact location of Daman and Diu.

Very commonly collectively called Goa, it was not actually Goa. It was the northern province, which was supreme and rich. In the entirety of Portuguese holdings, it was the foremost of economic and defensive powers. Portugal's territorial holdings were vast. Portuguese India at the time of British India's Independence in 1947 consisted of a number of enclaves on India's Western Coast – Goa, Daman and Diu.

Then came the fortifications and the defensive systems that were set up in Diu, including construction of the fort, followed by trade establishment and finally the independence of Diu in 1961. The most recent history is of INS Khukri which was destroyed during the 1971 war. The recently decommissioned INS Khukri has been reinstated now at Diu. Based on data available from the Department of National Education of Portugal, we have a map called the district of Diu and we can see that it is not Diu town but the District of Diu. Diu town is a smaller area, the rest is the District of Diu. Geographically a very strategic location because it has the river running out to meet the ocean and also travelling on the upper part of the island therefore forming an island. The

District of Diu with reference to Panikotha – you have Panikotha at Diu and a little further down you have Simbor, another area which was under Portuguese occupation, where another Panikotha was constructed. Panikotha would translate as Fortress in the Sea. Pani Kothas or Kothas in the sea. There were two Panikothas at Diu in the same district.

At this point, the fort of St. Antony at Simbor, the condition of this fort is completely derelict. It still forms a part of the Union Territory (UT) of Daman and Diu, but the condition is poor and I don't think that there are any plans to restore it in the near future – it may just vanish. It is however an important cultural asset. So, you have Diu, Diu port and a little beyond the port, in the sea, you have Panikotha and you also have the Fort of St. Antony at Simbor. Geographically in connection with Diu, the area of Diu town is under the administration of the Diu Municipal Council under the UT Department and the rest is a district called Diu Island. In the north you have Ghogla, which is also a part of the district. When you see the municipal map of Diu, it has 30 kms of coastline with several beaches and several kilometres of protected wetlands. It has rich environmental reserves such as several hectares of forest and bird sanctuary. It is a historic city which has enjoyed many influences including Mughal and Portuguese leading to a unique and diverse culture. There is an airport which is one of the main routes to reach Diu. You can also see that most of the area is not occupied by human settlements. You only have a few small little hamlets at different locations, all of which were occupied by the Portuguese. Diu town is divided by a

fortress wall, which separates the town from the rest of the district historically. The original fort was constructed by the Sultanate and the Portuguese built over it and modified it quite a bit and the character that one sees today is largely Portuguese. It exists in a comparatively fair state. In the rest of the area, other than the town you have coastal communities that have lived in harmony right from the time of the Portuguese till date. They are surviving and thriving till today and enjoy a special political status because of the Portuguese visas that they are entitled to. This has led to people migrating and towns have been vacated. In addition to the fort, there are some very large churches of Portuguese character, 3 of which are being restored at the moment – the St. Thomas Church, St. Paul Church and St. Francis of Assisi. Of these, the St. Paul Church, the Pani Bai school and St. Francis of Assisi are what I am working on as a consultant. Panikotha sits exactly opposite the Diu Fort. Panikotha sits partly on a natural rock base, built on previous Sultanate period defensive systems. In the middle is a rectangular structure which is the tower from the original Panikotha, which has been built upon in subsequent periods. Around this are the extensions built upon by the Portuguese. It's a huge advantageous location for a defensive system into the sea and seen from almost the entire north side of the island.

So, what is the role of conservation architects? There is an international experience / philosophy under which conservation is undertaken. The most basic philosophy is that the original fabric has to be identified in all its trivialities, in its complete sense. The

changes made have to be identified and if required they have to be reversed. It's cultural setting, because any monument would have been worked upon by future users, has to be examined, because they tell the stories. The stories would be carried by the body of the building and it is important for an architect to understand all of this and this is what takes a conservation architect into the history of a building. The setting of the place in the wider environment must be noted because even that would have an influence and the prevailing sense of the building. In the case of Panikotha, this training becomes important for a conservation architect and sets it apart from the regular practice. Thus, all conservation architects would be trained in history, so that they can make a sensitive approach to conservation. So, every building and every stone would carry memories of its original state, the way it has changed its status over time and this story would be manifested in the building. Therefore, for us, every stone of this Panikotha would have a story to tell. You have to look at a building to know the memories of a structure. That is how conservation architects perform.

The specific professional scope in the case of Diu, is in the context of a smart city. While we can view the basics of a smart city project online, for any area you need to have a basic character which is to be taken forward and propagated under a smart model – it is a management model. There are many cities in India which have undertaken such a model. In most of them, if they are falling within the ambit of historicity, they have taken care of these assets. These assets have been

included in the 'smart-ness' and are what one can call as 'smart heritage'. So starting from the national level, the regional level and wider environment of a place, it slowly comes down to the individual component in each character level. It identifies, analyses and makes a programme for its well-being basically. That's what restoration would do. In every project there has to be a wider understanding of the history of the place and also partaking into the knowledge base. That is when adaptability happens. There are proposals for what Panikotha would become – a museum and also a tour for locals as well as other tourists, who want to undergo the experience of traveling in a boat, landing on the Panikotha and experiencing it. Normally, conservation professionals go by the book. India is a signatory to the conservation charter.

The concept of cultural significance is something which is extremely important so that one understands the values of the memories that Panikotha is giving out. So, all the memories can be looked at and classified scientifically and marks can be ascribed to each value and the cumulative value which emerges which we call as cultural significance of the place. This exercise has to be done very rigorously. This is when I came across the history of the place.

Maritime context of a defensive system is well documented. At Panikotha, all the defensive systems the Portuguese employed pre-existed. Since the Diu Fort pre-existed, they only built upon it, extended it and made it more useful for their purpose. This was done to Panikotha as well. It started with being called Panikotha colloquially and for

some time it was also used as a jail. It was called *Fortim de Mar* in Portuguese and also *Balu Arte de Mar*, Fortim for fortress and *Balu Arte* for the tower. These are the different names by which it was known. The locals only know the name Panikotha. Some restoration work was carried out at the plinth level in 2015. At Panikotha you can see the battlements, and the Portuguese sentry gates in the front. It was established that these were the very first bastion fortifications for Portugal's overseas expansion ever. The significance is linked to the fortifications being done for the overseas expansion by the Portuguese. These were built at the same time as those in Morocco and Spain, so you can see the cross-cultural connections in these first fortifications built by the Portuguese for these defence in the beginning of the 16th century. In the setup of the town from the river, and the connectivity, the square tower is visible. You can see the Sankal (chain) connected from the land to the fort. It was tied to the boat just as it is done currently. The engravings are very interesting. What is interesting is that the setting of Panikotha and the character has remained broadly the same since the early 16th century. The inscriptions show how the building must have been built initially on an outcrop of rock, but artificially bringing up the land. Data which has been cartographed and put into a codex along with data about other Portuguese monuments around the world. While 3 other forts had been built to the north of Diu by the Portuguese, these have not survived. What we have today are Diu Fort and *Fortim do Mar* or Panikotha. The evolution of the defensive systems of

Diu were documented. Many research based articles talk about the construction and changes that were made by the Portuguese to the main fort as well as Panikotha. The Portuguese fort at Diu, is considered to be the best fortification in the country. It has been studied in detail as far as its original structure was concerned, the way it was taken over by the Portuguese and built over to prepare themselves for the protection of the most important location for them, because their entire trading was happening in the Gulf of Cambay. Because of its economic importance, it was very necessary for them to keep it intact.

Based on the available literature, one can see the decline of the Muslims, Bahadur Shah and the way the Mughals Empire starts encroaching. Bahadur Shah, the Muslim emperor approaches the Portuguese for help and that is how the problem starts. The Portuguese were waiting because their entire trading system was in the Gulf of Cambay and this became the depository from where they could defend their interests and also continue their journey for boats coming from around the world across the Cape of Good Hope, the way Vasco Da Gama came up. The change in the maritime trade routes by the Portuguese became a very significant move. Because of this they had to keep the defences at Diu intact to control all the routes into Cambay. We know that Portuguese rulers were among the most unscrupulous – they always went for crusades, they went for battles and they did not treat the locals in an ideal way. That was their strategy. The location of the fortification was very important and

had to be maintained at any cost and that is what the Portuguese did. This is how the Portuguese settlement grew from the original Muslim localities, it became a European settlement, but largely restricted to the fort area within the walls. Inscriptions from this period are still available today. Many travellers have written accounts about how the town grew. Stones for the town and the fort were quarried locally and some of these quarries have now become tourist locations. The main fort was like an island because of the moat that was constructed around it. The moat also exists.

We had to assess the historical chronology of the maps to establish the development of the town. Panikotha was originally a circle and has developed outwards into the shape that we see today. The two sieges of Diu are significant. In history you would have heard of the famous battles of Panipat, Tarain, Plassey, but the battle in the Arabian Sea changed the course of politics. It was a big battle that led to the creation of a new world order. It changed the course of history with the Europeans coming into the Indian Ocean and the Portuguese came to stay for 450 years. It was far longer than the British occupation. The Battle of Diu of 1509 was a culmination of a global trade war. On one side were allied forces of the Sultanate of Gujarat, the Egyptians, and the Zamorin of Calicut with support of the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire and on the other side the Portuguese. It happened off the coast of India and changed the course of world history. The outcome of the war was the Portuguese occupation of the town and them constructing the fort wall, rather than building on the

existing fortifications and creating an architectural narrative that was very Portuguese. There were two moats, the principal fort had a moat and the town wall had a moat, a typical European feature and not an indigenous one. There are complete details of the battle, including the strategy used by the Portuguese. While they won the war, they did not settle there immediately and only started settling in the 1540s.

The memories of Panikotha are visible in the transformation of the form of Panikotha itself and also the form of the fort itself. In 1525 records still show that Panikotha was circular. By 1556, the current form was already in place. There are many researchers who came up and sketched. Some are exaggerated and the landscape is not accurate, but the forms are still the same. There was no fort, but there was some fortification running along the bay to which there was access through these causeways. You can also see the *sankal*, which is a very Portuguese technique of tying up boats to the *sankal*. Subsequent sketches show that the second most had been covered up. There is a huge repository of the maps, which details the representations of the maps, the material that was used, the psychology of the artists and so on. Artists took up the work of creating a codex of the monuments in India which have been used for subsequent protection efforts. From these, we need to assess how much of the original exists today.

Smart cities have goals, and the goals are favoured towards sustainability.

The maritime context of Panikota monument lies in the defensive systems that pre-existed in the specific geographic location of Diu and strategically adopted by the Portuguese to find its influence in the period of the two sieges of Diu in 1538 and 1546. The monument currently finds itself disassociated from its historic context and reflects issues of cultural sustainability and in need of investing in a wider accessibility that promotes and enhances its essence as a place of preserved memories. The knowledge base for deriving historical association has a bearing on research carried out from primary sources. This is an essential step in understanding the place as well as establishing the criteria for authenticity and assessing the current state of preservation of the monument.

The analysis that followed provided for defining the conservation and management strategy for a sustainable future. The approach focussed on social, architectural, and historical analysis and arrived at a synthesis that enables stimulation of cultural tourism and heritage conservation. Contribution of this methodology enabled substantial first-hand graphical work that was guided for creating a database of historic architecture, construction systems and technical attributes of the asset that leads to qualification of Diu as a significant “Maritime Cultural Landscape” in conformity with other such prevailing landscapes in the country.

MONSOON MUSING III

VADM MP AWATI COMMEMORATIVE SYMPOSIUM THE EKSAR STELE: LAPIDARY MEMORY OF A NAVAL BATTLE OFF THE KONKAN COAST

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Eksar is a small locality near Borivali, one of the western suburbs of Mumbai. The Hero-Stones or memorial stones are five in number and presently under worship as Gaon-devi of Eksar village or Eksar gaonthan. Initially, when these Eksar Steles were discovered, we had no idea what they are about, why they are there, what is the date of these antiquities? How suddenly out of nothing, these virtually life sized memorial stones came into existence. Each of them is not less than 5 feet in height, divided into 3 or 4 different panels. In 3 panels on a single stone, are depicted some battle scenes from the battlefield and on the third panel what we see is the hero is addressing his death followed by a 4th panel in which the hero is shown in the vicinity of the god Shiva on Kailash. There are 2 Hero-Stones which talk about the battle on the battlefield and one which talks about a naval battle. This is the first Hero-Stone which talks about a naval battle. Today we will be mainly focussing on 2 such Hero-Stones – making an attempt to understand what those are.

When we look at the ships depicted on these Hero-Stones, we can see that these are definitely not small boats, they are warships, as we understand them to be. The central image is probably that of the king or a noble or officer who has lost his life in the battle, in whose memory this memorial stone or Hero-Stone was constructed or erected. Stylistically these Hero Stones can be dated to the 12th

century AD. Now there are very few specimens of any kind of architectural form, in and around Mumbai, which date back to 12th century AD. So out of 5 complete and 2 broken Hero Stones, there are 2 Hero Stones that give us evidence of a naval battle. If we say that this is stylistically dated to the 12th century AD, we must have some proof for that. There is only one temple in the vicinity of Mumbai constructed during the Silahara Period (which is dated to 1060 AD) and that is located at Ambernath, which is far away from Eksar. When we compare some of the sculptural panels from Ambernath and their stylistic details with the depictions in the panels on the Hero Stones, we realise that these Hero Stones are probably fifty to sixty years later than the Ambernath Temple which makes them 12th century Hero Stones. They are exclusive in the sense that these are the only two Hero-Stones we have depicting naval battles, from the Eksar area. There is one more Hero-Stone in the Mahim region, presently placed in the Mahim police station, which depicts a naval battle scene. These are the three unique specimens I am going to talk about, but obviously Eksar Stele – that is the main focus of today's discussion.

When we talk about Eksar Stele, we need to understand their geographical context first. Hero-Stones are usually memorial stones erected in the memory of departed souls who lost their lives in battle and are usually

placed in the periphery or in the vicinity of a village or locality. This is because these Hero Stones are a part of the ritual life of villagers – to visit the place, remember the dead, worship and pay homage. We need to understand what kind of geographical context these hero stones were in 11-12th century AD, when these Steles were created. The Eksar Hero-Stones are located in Eksar, near the Eksar Talav or lake. These Hero-Stones were on the bank of another lake, which is now converted into a skyscraper. Today, the Eksar Steles are located inside the compound of that skyscraper, in a small area which is converted into a temple like structure. Near the Eksar Stele location is a major local landmark, which even today is known as mango grove. Beyond this mangrove grove, which today are residential colonies, lies Mandapeshwar Cave. Just beyond Mandapeshwar Cave, in a densely habited area, where there are slums, we have found remains of a Buddhist monastery. Beyond these, lies the river Dahisar, which flows to the north and comes down again, forming the water body known as the Gorai creek. So Eksar Gaonthan is bordered on the west by marshland where we have mangroves and beyond that on the other side of the Gorai creek, we have Gorai Island. On Gorai island, we have come across three land grant inscriptions from the 13th century AD talking about donation of agricultural lands. Near those land grant inscriptions what we have is a small stone engraved with depiction of some tantric Buddhist deities coming from 10th-11th century AD.

Looking at this entire landscape, what we realise is that this fertile land was either used for agriculture or as mango groves. In the Portuguese period we have many references for these particular mango groves. On the other

side of the river, we have major agricultural land referred to in inscriptions.

When we talk about any battle or conflicts, it is primarily associated with economics. We need to understand the control over resources – the why, how, when. This is relevant to the context of these Hero-Stones, and because of which we need to understand the geographical context of these particular Hero-Stones. These Hero-Stones come as a part of the cultural landscape of the Mandapeshwar caves area. From Portuguese documents, we learn that when the Portuguese confiscated the land and property of Mandapeshwar *math*, the properties of the Mandapeshwar matha were up to the Gorai region including the Gorai village. So virtually this entire landmass from Mandapeshwar to Gorai, including the creek was Mandapeshwar *math* property.

There were also localities on the bank of mangroves, because in one of the inscriptions of Silahara there is reference to a village name called Kandaravallipallika. Kandara is a mangrove and Pallika is a settlement. People whose occupations are dependent on the mangroves and marsh land, they used to live on the periphery of mangroves in a linear pattern and such locations were called Kandaravallipallika, which is also the ancient name of Kandivali. When we talk about Eksar, we need to understand this cultural and geographical context. To understand the historical context of these Hero Stones, we need to know what or who Silaharas were. To know the economic context of these Hero-Stones, we must know what kind of agricultural activities were there in the Silahara period. Only then will we be able to understand why people fought these battles at Eksar.

Why was there a battle over a small creek, known as Gorai creek.

The story begins somewhere in the Rashtrakuta Period around 8th century AD when the Rashtrakuta emperors conquered this region, when they were ruling over virtually half of India. For three generations they ruled the region from Kanchipuram to Kannauj and Mumbai was one of the major commercial hubs. From epigraphical, archaeological and literary sources we know that Mumbai or Mumbai Metropolitan Region has been a commercial hub for ports for the last 2,300 years. Ports like Sopara, Kalyan, Chaul, Elephanta, Thane and Ghodbandar have been referred to by Roman traders and Arab traders in their travelogues. The period which we are referring to doesn't fall under the Indo-Roman trade period, it falls under the Indo-Arab trade period. The first hike in the Indian economy was brought by Indo-Roman trade during the Satvahana period from 1st century AD to 3rd century AD. The second hike was in this period between the 8th century AD and 12th century AD and that is primarily because of Indo-Arab trade. Arabs used to come to India, obviously by sea route and used to land at these ports. One of the important ports that was under their direct control was Samyana. There were Arab officers who have been officially appointed as nobles in the court of Rashtrakuta kings – Madhumati, son of Shahryar and grandson of Sugadhipa. There are copper plates reported from the Palghar area, in the north of Mumbai, which talk about the origins and nativity of these 3 personalities from Samyana. There are claims they make that they have Arab origins. The names have probably been Indianised and perhaps their original names were Muhammad, Shahryar and Subakta. They were given charge of these

posts. They were supposed to look after the coastal security against which they were enjoying certain rights – the control over certain resources and the right to exploit those resources. The Tarapur plates talk about the relations between Arabs who were Muslims and the local Hindus. Arabs are recorded to have given a donation of land grant to the temple of Bhagwati Devi and this was during the Navratri period (based on the chronology of these copper plates). There is a synthesis we see between the Arab traders / nobles who have settled here and become the feudal lords and the local people in the 8th century AD and 9th century AD during the Rashtrakuta period.

This period marks the trigger where we see Arabs gradually starting to enter this area with their ships to trade, bringing in a lot of things from Arabia – primarily horses. Arabian horses have played a vital role in Indian history because there is a reference coming from the Vijayanagara empire that the king Krishna Raja has announced that even if a horse dies during sea travel, one had to produce the tail of the horse to claim the entire amount for the horse. That is the kind of importance given to Arabian horses by the Vijayanagara kings. This was seen in the pre-Vijayanagara period as well, in the Delhi Sultanate. Arabian horses played a vital role in the strategic movement of the army. They were used to move faster and Arabian horses were one of the major reasons because of which the Rashtrakutas could control such a vast region from Kannauj to Kanchipuram for a period of 70 years. Everything begins with these three people who settled at Samyana and then their legacy can be seen in the Silahara period. Silaharas were early feudatories of the Rashtrakutas and gradually became independent rulers of Konkan. Now the

Silaharas are the people who were responsible for Eksar Stele. We know of twenty three Silaharas kings who ruled from a place called Thane or Srishtanaka – that was the capital and there they supported art and learning. Various scholars from the court of Silaharas were invited to the courts of other kings. There is reference from Kashmir about how the scholars from the Silahara court had been entertained and honoured in the court of Vijayaditya and other kings of Kashmir.

The most interesting thing about the Eksar Stele and the Silaharas is that many scholars believe that the depiction of the naval battle that we see in the Eksar Stele is associated with the last Silahara king Someshwara. Someshwara, the last Silahara king, ruled for 10 years and lost his life in a naval battle with a Yadava king or rather then prince Krishna. It is interesting to see again that this rich region of Mumbai, which was under the control of the Rashtrakutas, then the Silaharas and after them, the Yadavas. All of whom wanted to control this region just because it was a commercial hub generating a lot of revenue and taxes from trade and salt making. When we look at the last battle between Someshwara and the Yadava prince, they first fought the battle on the ground on the outskirts of Thane, after which Someshwara escaped from the battlefield and fled to sea and was chased by the Yadava princes. One of the Yadava princes was responsible for killing Someshwara in the ensuing sea battle. Some scholars believe that probably the depiction in the Eksar Stele is that of the last battle of Someshwara and probably the main figure that we see in one of the Steles is the last Silahara king – Someshwara. This is a hypothesis and there is no concrete evidence to prove

this. Though stylistically these Steles fall in the 12th century AD, Someshwara falls somewhere in 13th century AD, though it is disputed. While not all scholars have accepted the link between the Eksar Stele and Someshwara, one thing is clear that a major battle was fought at Eksar over the control over the resources in the Eksar region. From some old maps of the Deccan, prepared by Prof Arunachalam, we get a fair idea about why Mumbai – Borivali was so important. You can see the concentration of ports in the region. Over a period of time, the old ports were continued and new ports were introduced so there are smaller and larger ports which were involved in the Arab trade. Vessels were travelling to these ports bringing in good money and prosperity to the people. In addition to the sea route connections of this region, there is also evidence linking Sopara port with the land route and the eastern ports. This entire commercial hub was linked with the eastern Indian hub around Dhaka and Calcutta, basically Bangladesh and West Bengal. We have found bronzes in these areas coming to us from eastern India, which are stylistically eastern Indian bronzes dating back to the 8th century AD. These were the Eastern Indian masterpieces brought to Sopara and installed in one of the Stupas around this region. For example, a bronze image of Tara, found in BARC in the 1960s and presently in the possession of CSMVS. Also, we have eastern Indian bronzes found in this region with inscriptions which talk about *Gouda-desh* – which is eastern India. There is also a stone image of Avalokiteshwara which is now in the possession of the State Department, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Govt of Maharashtra, which was founded at BARC and has again come from

Gouda-desha. There is an inscription found in the Kanheri area which is dated to 9th century AD and talks about a donor coming from *Gouda-desha*, settling here and giving donations for 24 years. There are also the Nalanda Seals, which we have found from Kanheri. There is more than enough evidence to talk about sea trade and the land routes coming to Borivali, Sopara, Ghodbunder, Thane, Kalyan, Chaul, Elephanta and Mahim.

There are numerous battles which were fought on this coast. These battles were fought to keep control over trade and resources and to keep control over the means of exploiting these resources. Most of the objects traded at these ports were imported first and as middlemen, the local people having made good money, exported them again. There were things coming from eastern India, northern India, central Asia and south Asia. There are sea routes linking Mumbai with Sri Lanka, South-East Asia and now we have epigraphical and literary sources suggesting that our sailors have reached even up to Japan by 8th-9th century AD. The major source of income was the horse trade. It was not that we were not producing anything in this region – this region is rich in semi-precious stones which were used as a raw material for making beads, ornaments and so on. We get good quality wood for construction of boats, which we see happening even in the Portuguese and pre-Portuguese periods when local rulers like Alu Nakhava took over the region. As a ruling king the source for his revenue was either salt or ship building. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, when he decided to launch the Indian navy, it was in the Kalyan creek where the ships were built. We know that through the ages, this area was known for ship building. So, these were the

export and import items primarily of this region.

There are inscriptions and literary sources which talk about various kinds of people living in this area, who were producing certain items used by local people and these objects were sold. For example, Tailika, the oil pressers. An Arab trader mentions the good quality of oil which one can purchase from the Chaul area. There were professions including those associated with the royal court which we know about from literary and other sources. From these we have some idea who were the people living in this area, and about whom the archaeological evidence is available to us. When we talk about archaeological evidence or antiquities, there is no face, there is no name, no personality associated with that, so we must create that connection between the known people of that period and the contemporary antiquities.

Mumbai has been a salt producing centre for the last 2000 years. Even today we have *mithagars* around Mumbai. Despite the enormous cost of land in this region, we still can afford to have *mithagars* and that shows how precious salt is. There are numerous legends associated with Mumbai salt, including Buddhist legends, Jain legends and even folklore which talks about Mumbai salt over the last 2000 years. There are three important places from the Silahara period which are associated with salt. *Lavaneteta*, *Lavanacharika* and *Lonavataka*. *Lavaneteta* – the modern Lonad, in the vicinity of Kalyan, was probably a *mithchowki* of 6th-7th century AD which continued as a salt chowki till 14th century AD, because we have epigraphical evidence from 12th century AD referring to Lonad as *Lavaneteta*. *Lavana* is salt and *Teta* is the bank. The name probably derives

from the salt that was brought to this particular place and from Lavaneteta was exported. Such salt chowkis or *mithchowkis* are seen even today around Mumbai. If you travel from Borivali to Goregaon or Andheri, there are at least 3 bus stops which you see, which even today are known as *mithchowki* or salt *chowki*. Britishers also made use of these salt chowkis very efficiently to collect tax. This is what was bringing in money that is why people wanted to hold the city of Mumbai.

Some of the foreign travellers who have recorded the prosperity of this region are Al Masudi and Marco Polo. Al Masudi talks about Persians and Arabs staying together at Chaul. This is an interesting fact. Persians or Parsis came to India because Arabs removed them from their homeland and then in India they were staying together with Arabs, very peacefully, next to each other. That is what Al Masudi records in 10th century AD and that talks about prosperity and the control of the administration. Marco Polo underlines a very interesting episode in the history of Thane. When he visited Thane, he saw that numerous goods were being imported and exported from Thane and Thane region. He talks about Ghodbandar, which is a Rashtrakuta port now being used by 12th-13th century AD kings for commercial trade. He also talks about pirates. Marco Polo is the first traveller who talks about pirates in Mumbai. He says there is piracy, and the local king made a pact with these pirates. He records that if any ship was sailing without the official permit of the king, the pirates were given permission to loot it in whatever way they want. The only condition that was put on these pirates was they had to surrender or submit all Arabian horses from the ship to the king. The rest of the loot could be kept by the pirates. When we study

this in the light of Kautilya's Arthashastra, we realise that what he is talking about is not actually piracy. Kautilya tells us that when it concerns coastal security, the king should outsource it to the local communities. So, he need not to pay to the local communities for keeping his own coastline safe. Though it sounds dicey, this is what Marco Polo talks about. For example, *Mahikavatichi Bakhar* or The Mud Trap contains references to this practice. There are references of Gorai creek and the Dahisar creek in *Mahikavatichi Bakhar*, where a local king was to be treacherously killed and the contract was given to the local fisherman community, who oversaw coastal security. When the king was sailing towards the mud island, he was killed in the ship. The contract stated that the fisherman who killed the king would be given social upliftment. There are references that coastal security was outsourced to local communities in the 11th century to 15th century.

There are two travellers who have recorded how precious Arabian horses were in their respective travelogues - Al Barauni and Ibn Batuta. These horses were so precious, that there were dedicated ports for the horse trade – Ghodbandar. We know from archaeological evidence that the antiquity of Ghodbandar goes back to the 7th century AD. There are some sculptural fragments and architectural remains which we have found at Ghodbandar just behind the present Portuguese period port. These remains talk about how the landscape was used by political powers to control natural resources.

We have conducted a survey of Mumbai city to understand what kind of life people lived in 11th and 12th century AD as part of a major project taken up by the University of Mumbai and Sathaye College. Our students have virtually surveyed the entire

Marol area, a densely populated region. Within this area are located ancient habitation sites and antiquities and the remains dating back to the 11th-12th century AD, all falling within the city of Mumbai. Similarly in the city of Thane which has been surveyed by our colleague and his group, we have these antiquities dating back to 11th-12th century AD. To give the statistics, we surveyed the entire region of Mumbai and we have more than 400 antiquities dating back to this particular period and it's a huge number. These antiquities have come to us from old temples and old structures. There are parts of Jain temples, pillar brackets and fragments of sculptures. There is another group which has surveyed the Goregaon region where we have found antiquities dating back to the 11th-12th century AD. There are broken remains of a *gadhegar*, which can be stylistically traced back to 12th century AD and which is probably the land grant relating to Ram Mandir, which has lent its name to the present train station. There were remains of a temple around 200 meters from the Ram Mandir station dating back to 11th -12th century AD. There are also the two inscriptions which we found at Gorai which talk about the land donations which I had talked about in the beginning. There are villages which are referred to in the land grants in the vicinity of Gorai and the Gorai village itself from where agricultural land is given in donation to some noble families of Brahmins. There are three intact donation steles and two broken steles we have found. Unfortunately, the broken steles could not be deciphered. We do not know the contents of those steles but possibly those were land grants. Based on the sites where we have found archaeological remains dating back to 11th-12th century, it can be

clearly inferred that there was a major habitation in Mumbai in 11th and 12th century AD. When we reconstructed the picture, we realised that there were not less than seventeen temples in Mumbai similar to the one in Ambernath. One can imagine that if there are temples like Ambernath or monasteries like Kanheri, Mahakali and Mandapeshwar surviving on the surplus produced by the villages or cities, the quantity of surplus which was produced here. This density of archaeological remains is supposed to be the highest in India when we look at any landscape. When our students surveyed the Sopara region, there were 363 antiquities we have documented from the Sopara and Vasai region. Similar number of antiquities have been documented from Kalyan. Around 200 antiquities have been documented in Chaul. It's a huge quantity of antiquities and the density is unbelievably high. In comparison, Delhi with the highest number of protected monuments, when Delhi surveyed, not even 1/4th of these antiquities were found. When we talk about Marol, we find antiquities virtually lying under the trees, like a 13th century AD inscription, which is currently worshiped as a Shanidev, every Saturday with oil being poured on the inscription. Marol police camp, we have virtually the entire foundation of the temple exposed. This is a local belief. Similarly, the Eksar Steles are now worshipped as a *Gaon-devi* of Eksar Gaonthan and the main Stele is now worshipped as Devi Ekvira. So once a year there is a fair of Devi Ekvira and all villagers gather. Thankfully this fair has saved those steles because there was an attempt to deface those steles once in the past and the villagers gathered to protect their goddesses. Then we have land grant steles coming from the Aarey area. When we surveyed the national

park, again there are a large number of antiquities that have come to light, though these belong to a different time period.

Now we come to the last battle of King Someshwara. We know about this battle from literary sources like *Prabandhachintamani* and *Kumarapalacharita*. These texts do not talk about this battle but deal with King Kumarapala or some Jain muni. However, in the entire narration, there are references such as “the fellow fought very bravely as Someshwara fought in his last battle” in *Prabandhachintamani* and *Kumarapalacharita*. We see scholars associating these references with Eksar Stele. In *Mahikavatichi Bakhar*, which we have discussed previously, there are numerous such references where we see the local Kolis being given the charge of the coastline and kings giving them certain honours and certain privileges to enjoy. This is a practice that we see in the Maratha period as well. So, the Angres were given the area to rule over virtually and then they were kept in charge of the Maratha Navy. There were certain villages that were given to the Angres to enjoy the revenue of and then Angres were working virtually as nobles in the Maratha Army. This was the structure that goes back to the 12th 13th century AD as *Mahikavatichi Bakhar* suggests. So local rulers were hiring local people, local communities and we see that Hambirarao and Alu Nakhava are two important post-Silahara kings who have come on the horizon in the 14th century after the fall of the Silaharas.

Hambirarao, whose inscription we have found in BARC, apart from five other inscriptions regarding him, which are known to us on the Konkan coast, was one of the local rulers. He was followed by a ruler called Alu Nakhava of whom two inscriptions are very

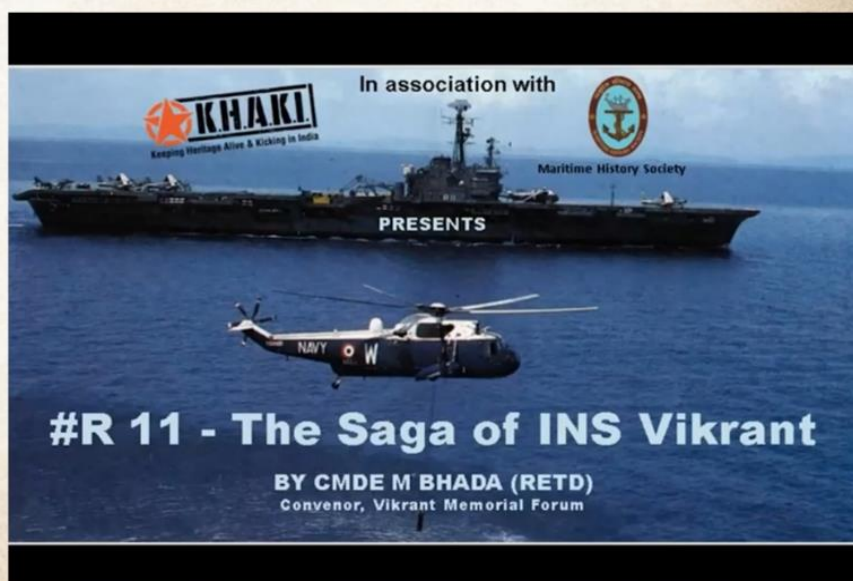
important – one coming from Andheri and the other coming from Dombivali. Alu Nakhava probably got converted to Islam because he wanted to become king. At the time Mumbai was under the rule of Tughlaqs, who had a policy to appoint Islamic rulers as feudal lords. Under Firozeshah Tughlaq, Alu Nakhava, became a local king, but he was a local fisherman, as his surname suggests. Nakhava belongs to the fishermen community. So, it is not just that the local community was guarding the coast. They had powers and privileges to enjoy. At one point they came to power and ruled over the region. It was primarily the Mumbai Metropolitan Region which Alu Nakhava and Hambirarao were struggling to gain control over. It is not just local rulers, but Firozeshah Tughlaq, the king of Delhi, himself had to intervene in the matters of these local disputes. Hambirarao's inscriptions talks about how he is associated with Firozeshah Tughlaq and how he is a feudal lord of Firozeshah Tughlaq, who is ruling from Delhi. Even a king of Delhi had to have his eye on the Mumbai region and primarily that is because of the revenue which we have been generating for the last 2,300 years. We remember these dead, who narrate the story of their kings, for whom they have lost their lives. The kings were ambitious to control the Mumbai region because they wanted to have stability for their empire. Stability can be primarily achieved by economic prosperity, for which kings like Someshwara probably sacrificed his life and the Yadavas remembered the fall of the Silaharas through these Eksar Stele. I think Eksar Stele were not just a set of Hero Stones. They

narrate to us the entire story of 11th-12th century Mumbai. They talk about people living here. How were their lives, what did they eat and how

did they fight with each other. That's why we need to preserve this war memory as one of the heritage antiquities of the city.



Snapshot from MHS Research Initiative



SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION

REDISCOVERING LOST TUNES OF YORE

Cmde Srikant B Kesnur (Retd)

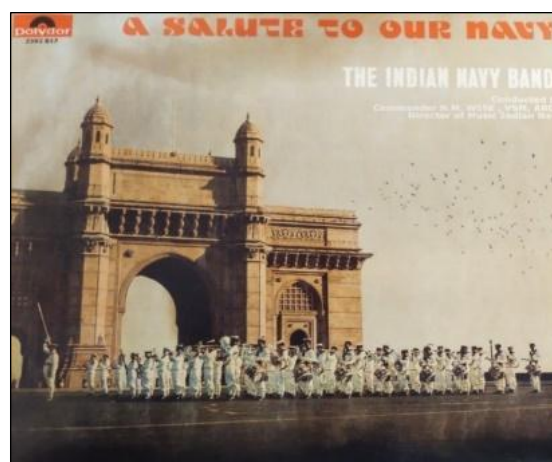
"He who has once begun to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments.... Remembrance advances from small to smallest details, from the smallest to the infinitesimal, while that which it encounters in these microcosms grows ever mightier."

~ Walter Benjamin (1932)

It was in 1974 that the popular German-British Record Label M/s Polydor Records Ltd. decided to release a record with the Indian Navy (IN) Band to mark the historic occasion of the Silver Jubilee of India's Republic Day i.e., on January 26, 1974. It was also just after the 1971 war for liberation of Bangladesh in which the IN's exploits had captured the people's imagination. It was an uncharacteristic decision by this international private company generally guided by business interests, but then, the IN Band was famed world over for having enthralled thousands of listeners at parades, beating retreat ceremonies, public performances, radio and television programmes. The record that was released by Polydor was titled "**A Salute to Our Navy**" featuring fourteen songs/ tunes performed by this accomplished Navy band under the conductorship of the immensely talented Commander Noel Malcolm Wise, VSM, ARCM, the first Indian and the longest serving Director of Music of the IN.

Almost all of the songs contained in this unique LP record holds invaluable historical significance for the Nation

and the Navy. To name a few - the song *INS Nilgiri* was composed for India's first indigenously built major warship; the song *INS Delhi* for the IN's very first Flagship; *Vijay* commemorating the decisive 1971 victory over Pakistan;



Cover of the original LP – 'A Salute to Our Navy'

Deshon Ka Sartaja soul-stirring martial song, in a folksy tune, sung by many old sailors of times gone by; *Hymn to the Republic of India* composed as a grand finale to the colourful Beating Retreat ceremony during the Navy week celebrations of 1972 and such like. Interestingly, the back cover of this unique record also featured a blurb written and signed by Admiral SN Kohli, the then Navy Chief, saying, "*I am very glad that this Album is being released on January 26, 1974, our 25th*

Republic Day. I am confident that the excellent quality of music within its covers will not only enhance the fine reputation that the Navy band holds at

home and abroad but will also be a continued source of inspiration to officers and men of the Indian Navy."



V Adm Cursetji, FOCINC(W) being presented the LP record by Virendra Luther of Polydor in 1974

Fast forward to the present day. Information on the existence of this LP had been almost lost in obscurity but was discovered - by chance - by a team of serving IN officers and history enthusiasts. Then came the herculean challenge to locate this vintage LP/record in a world that has migrated almost any and all media on to the online medium. While some navy veterans and musically inclined people in the 'civvy' street had heard about the LP, getting hold of a copy almost five decades later seemed impossible. The laborious search for the missing record spanning various cities, antique shops, collectors, online queries and even with the music giant M/s Universal Music Group of which the original Polydor Records Ltd. is today a part took months. Finally, the team was able to successfully locate and purchase a mint (and perhaps the last surviving) copy of the record from a vintage record shop situated in the recesses of Old Delhi after a period of many months.

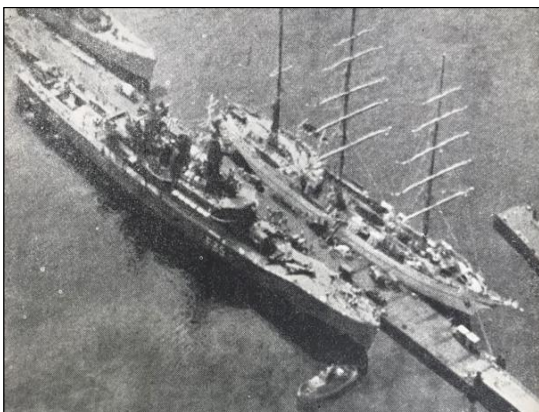
After the purchase had been made, the challenge for the team was to ensure that the highest fidelity authentic sound from this vintage LP was retrieved and digitised for future generations. Initial efforts with local music studios in and around Delhi yielded sub-optimal quality of sound, primarily because of the obsolescence of the record, and due to lack of good quality recording equipment. The team needed some luck and got it in the form of M/s Prasad Corporation, Chennai, one of India's most reputed and oldest production studios, who agreed to get the record restored and digitised. On learning about the search for this LP and seeing the enthusiasm of their interlocutors, the management of this iconic studio volunteered to do the digitisation work *gratis* for the IN. (Incidentally, this studio had also previously assisted the team in digitising the audio of Admiral RL Pereira's inspirational speech from a dilapidated yester-year tape; this speech, now available on YouTube, has been viewed by tens of thousands of viewers and is also being utilised extensively in IN's leadership/ training establishments).

Another set of people were enthused to learn about our quest and came to our assistance after learning that we were wary about using commercial courier companies, unsure about damage or loss to the LP disk during transit. The assistance of carefully and quickly ferrying the vintage LP record back-and-forth from New Delhi to Chennai for the required digitisation work at Prasad Corporation's studios was graciously extended by M/s High Energy Battery Ltd., a firm that specialises in manufacturing batteries at Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu. After the high-quality digitised audio of the LP record was finally retrieved by M/s Prasad Corporation, a video was also

made, in-house, towards better historical appreciation of the IN and the IN Band, to serve as a means of preserving the digitised record online and also, for sharing those memorable fourteen *tunes of yore* with the larger naval community.

At this stage, couple of trips down memory lane are warranted especially in the light of the launch of the new avatar of the warship *Udaygiri* and the backdrop of the glorious exploits of the Navy band and some of its great icons. V Adm SCS Bangara, a navy veteran with great zest for history, recalls the 'famous cruise' of the newly built indigenous warship INS *Udaygiri* in 1977 with the 23-man IN band embarked along with their Conductor Cdr NM Wise. For about 3½ months, the ship flew the Indian Flag high in foreign waters. The Cruise covered 13 Ports of 11 countries, including attending the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the throne.

While this Cruise was largely aimed to showcase to the world, India's capability in building major warships, it also had Commander NM Wise and the *IN* Band as the prize attraction.

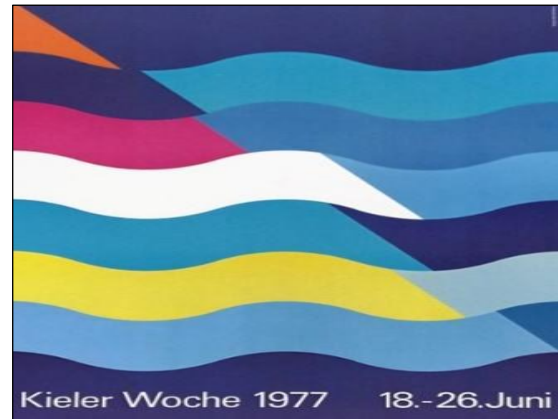


INS Udaygiri in Kiel Harbour in 1977

During the cruise, INS *Udaygiri* commanded by Capt (*later* Cmde) Kersi N. Dubhash got the opportunity to attend the 95th **Kiel Week** annual

sailing event from June 18-26, 1977 at the port of Kiel in Germany.

This is the largest sailing extravaganza in Europe which attracts millions of visitors every year, from Germany as well as neighbouring countries.



1977 Kiel Week Poster

One of the tremendous benefits of a foreign cruise is the friendship created amongst foreign nationals. In that respect, sailors are true ambassadors of good will and contact is established at all social levels. To illustrate, the Captain exchanges views with military and government officials at the highest levels. In this instant case Dubhash brushed shoulders with royalty (and history) in the company of the Queen of England, Lord Mountbatten of Burma and Admiral Otto Kreshmer, an ace submariner of World War 2 (he sank 43 ships).



Lord Mountbatten, Admiral of the Fleet on the bridge of INS Udaygiri with its CO, Capt KN Dubhash

But contact is made at lower levels too, with the common man. The friendship is spontaneous and the invitations to visit the ship from sailors or locals to visit their homes are freely accepted. For a sailor, the ship is his home and for visitors especially in advanced countries in Europe, it is an honour to be invited onboard an Indian warship. In each port, many thousands of enthusiastic visitors came to the ship and left with a lasting impression not only of the excellent ship but of Indian hospitality and warmth. And of course, the sailors made hundreds of girlfriends. A popular 'musical festival' is the Kiel Week event which showcases various bands (including those of the military). That year (1977), towards the end of the music festival, the combined band of all militaries took centre stage for delivering the **Concert of Nations**, held at Kiel's Baltic Hall and performed before a capacity audience. After much deliberation by the event organisers, and undoubtedly impressed by the immense Indian talent displayed score after score, **Cdr NM Wise was selected over other prominent Conductors from other European militaries to be the Chief Conductor** for the Concert of Nations - to lead over 300 musicians in the combined bands' performance.

This great honour bestowed to Cdr NM Wise was entirely on account of his genius and great style of 'conductorship' that was on display that day, which made the combined band performance a roaring success. Interestingly, the performance of the Indian Navy band helped this 15th *Concert of Nations* to once again bring in substantial net proceeds destined for charitable purposes. To all eyewitnesses present, Cdr NM Wise was a central figure in showcasing the INS Udaygiri and India. Even in later years, the accomplishments of this

Cruise were much talked about in many circles and still remain an indelible memory among those veterans who were involved.



Cdr NM Wise conducts Indian band in Kiel's naval port in 1977. Behind them, the INS Udaygiri. To the right are the masts of the Portuguese naval cadet training ship SAGRES

Many veterans fondly recall Cdr Wise being a fine, God-fearing, and affectionate officer. Sadly, he suffered a tragedy as a young officer when his two-year old son died touching a live wire in a naval mess. Despite this heart-breaking personal loss, he remained a doting father to his daughters, and took keen interest in guiding generations of navy's young musicians to become proficient.

Cdr Wise would employ the technique of teaching the young sailors the basics by rote and keeping a close paternal eye over their progress. Many of these sailors, having joined without any musical talent or early education in music, became able to read and play their musical instruments masterfully under Cdr Wise's watch and care.

The Naval band comprising these bandsmen personally trained by Cdr Wise were soon seen playing and winning competitions in Bombay's popular music venues, such as Homi Bhabha auditorium at TIFR, parades, beating retreat ceremonies, Radio &

television programmes and such like. They were also embarked on Indian warships on good-will missions to faraway places such as Rabat, Tokyo, Sydney, Odessa, Istanbul & London. When the INS Trishul was earmarked to call at Osaka for attending Expo '70 - Japan's very first international exposition, the Navy's Central band led by Cdr Wise also embarked on this historic cruise. Incidentally, during this deployment when INS Trishul entered Port Blair one of the bandsmen who had landed ashore broke his ankle. That left Cdr Wise very worried because he was the only player of the euphonium in his band. As Vice Adm IC Rao (Retd) recalls *"It was there that the ship's crew was educated by Cdr Wise, as to how a band cannot perform without the euphonium - the instrument looking like a cross between a complicated trumpet and a saxophone. Motivated by Cdr Wise's passion and call for duty, the bandsman miraculously ended up marching with his plaster on, on the opening of the 'India Day' event at the exposition. The Naval band, unsurprisingly, drew huge applause from the crowd for their splendid performance at the opening"*. In a similar incident during the cruise of INS Trishul to Manila the Navy band performed at the famous Rizal National Park and caused a stampede. One young officer who was present at the venue, reminisces that, *"Cdr Wise was mobbed by the frenzy crowd, the girls wanted locks of his hair!!!!"*

Interestingly, when a couple of officers later on convinced Cdr Wise to accompany them to a strip-tease show, Cdr Wise was left scandalised when one of the scantily dressed performers after gyrating on the table tried to find a way onto his lap leaving Cdr Wise muttering "Holy Jesus! Lord Forgive me".



Cdr Wise in a party with sailors on eve of his retirement in June 1980

Interestingly, around the same time as INS Udaygiri's historic cruise viz. the mid/late 1970s, J Rodrigues, MCPO I (Retd.) recalls Cdr Wise hearing a rendition of the *Jai Bharati* (Composed by Mr. Michael Diaz) at Bombay and immediately was able to appreciate the greater suitability of using the song for the Navy. Cdr Wise instructed J Rodrigues, MCPO I to arrange the song for the military band and, shortly thereafter, was able to convince the top leadership of the Navy on the need for a dedicated tune/song for the navy. The rest, as they say, is history. While Cdr Wise retired in Jun 1980, the song caught on and was extensively played by the IN Bands **to become the anthem for the Navy**. Through the last four and half decades, this song has stood the test of time and is still able to evoke a deep sense of patriotism and love for the white service from naval personnel. It is also loved by the civilian populace whenever it is played. As the signature tune of the Navy played either at the beginning or end of a musical event, the *Jai Bharati* song elicits huge applause, generates a foot tapping atmosphere and lifts the spirits of all those present. It is an adrenaline booster invoking the glory of India in all its hues and engendering pride in our profession. Incidentally, for the masterly arrangement of this popular naval song/ tune for the navy band, J

Rodrigues, MCPO I was commended by the CNS in 1978.

Even more interestingly, Commander Wise's talent did not end only with music. In the early 1970s, he got involved in gardening as a serious hobby after the Sailor's Home was constructed. The builders had left behind a wilderness of rubble and concrete. The task was a herculean one, but this did not daunt the "crazy Commander" who loved a challenge. He set to toil immediately and with dedicated efforts of over a year, the garden at Sailor's Home came to boast of most lovely foliage with more than 2,000 varieties of plants and trees. The garden was a product of dedicated and sustained efforts of Cdr Wise and his team of musicians. The garden had already started to win a number of prizes before being finally adjudged as the '**Best Garden**' in Bombay's Open Garden competition two years in a row i.e., in 1974 and 1975.



View of the Sailors Home Garden in 1975 created by Cdr Wise and his musicians

The well-known fortnightly *Sainik Samachar* in its July 1975 edition ran a news item on this sterling accomplishment titled "Wise - A Melodious and Green Fingerted Commander" accompanied with

photographs of Cdr Wise looking on happily and proudly at the exquisite garden he helped create.



A collection of annuals which won the 1st prize being given final touches by Cdr Wise & Musician SS Latif

To come back once again to the present and this episode's conclusion. On May 12, 2022, a '**Historical Musical Artefact**' was presented to Admiral R. Hari Kumar, the Chief of the Naval Staff by this team of IN History enthusiasts containing both the vintage LP disk of 1974 and a pen drive with the restored and digitised audio and video. The artefact presented will serve as a reminder of the rich musical legacy inherited from forebears like Cdr NM Wise, and preserve the same for posterity.



*Late Commander NM Wise
1927-2018*

Interestingly, one of the martial songs contained in the LP disk is titled '**Deshon Ka Sartaj**' (which incidentally was the Navy's anthem before 'Jai Bharti' came into prominence in the late 1970s) and is expected to be

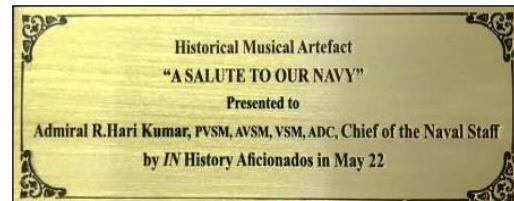
released shortly in an entirely new avatar.

This article while recording our exhilarating journey in search of a rare artefact is also a humble tribute to

Indian Navy Musicians (past, present and future) for their excellent contribution to both the Service and the Country.



Framed copy of LP disk



Plaque at the base of the framed LP disk



Back Cover of LP disk



Presenting the framed LP to Adm R. Hari Kumar, Chief of the Naval Staff

JEWEL FROM THE PAST

THE MONSOONS' DEPARTING SIGH

Cmde Srikant B Kesnur (Retd)

On Saturday, 01 Oct, the day weather forecasters had announced the exit of monsoons, the skies in Mumbai (and elsewhere) opened up to a huge downpour and rains continued to beat relentlessly for hours as though to mock the predictions of their departure as premature. Or, possibly, it was a parting reminder with the 'till we meet again' signal. Two weeks later, with the skies still overcast and media proclamations of continuing wet days, one wonders if monsoons have really left, or if the joke is upon us.

Under such circumstances, it would be rather bold of me to suggest that the monsoons have indeed gone, possibly just about, but they have made their exit after lingering long. I am no weatherman, and I may have got it horribly wrong. We live in the age of extreme climate events when weather calendars can go haywire and, in any case, low pressure areas, unrelated to monsoons, can suck in moisture and bring more showers. Yet, I see unmistakable signs of post monsoon life. Walking along the seafront promenade at the United Services (US) Club one notices clear visibility for miles. Ships at anchorage or underway are seen from afar. The fishing boats with their colourful buntings are out in large numbers too. Above all, the sea is calm. Not quite the flat calm of a glass lake but far more benign than in monsoons. And the weather is just that shade pleasant

before the stuffy 'October heat' starts to envelop the place any time now.

These musings on monsoons are occasioned not by any desire to say something new about the phenomenon itself. Their standard pattern of wind circulation made connectivity possible in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) long before other parts of the world witnessed similar activity. Monsoons have been the catalyst of Indian Ocean history providing the medium for transporting commerce, cuisine, culture, ideas, civilisation and much else. And this, in turn, has led to a huge body of work in several disciplines. For example, literature and other creative domains – song, dance, art, sculpture, cinema, are full of rich expressions about monsoons exploring their every facet. So, I will not even attempt to go on that path or try to add value or say something original.

For me, it's about the fact that monsoons are, arguably, the most magnificent spectacle to behold. And having experienced it in different ways over the last 37 years of my naval career, I got a ringside seat to witness it unfold, like a slow raga in its full range of emotions, at Navy Nagar, in south Mumbai, over the last few years. And suddenly, it struck me - having retired in June this year - that this was the last time I would be experiencing them at this beautiful place, from this

vantage point. Here, in the southernmost tip of south Mumbai, where land meets the sea, one gets to see the myriad moods and emotions of monsoons. And even took the damn thing for granted. Now, I will no longer have a ticket to that show. Of course, I may see, feel and experience the whole 'M' in a different place, in a different manner. But there will be nothing quite like this. And that leaves me with a jolt, a kind of quiet pain with a dash of melancholy.

I am, of course, aware of my privilege when writing this. I have not been among those haplessly adrift on a small boat in stormy monsoons awaiting rescue. My house or belongings have not been washed away by torrential rains or rivers in spate. I have not had to wade through miles of slush and water, navigating manholes and fallen electrical fittings on roads, when trains were marooned, or cars got stuck. Hell, I have not even been caught in a traffic jam caused by rains.

Of course, on the other hand, being in the Navy, having served on ships and staying on the coast, I have experienced the fury and intensity of monsoons and other weather events. There have been rough seas galore, long bouts of bad weather sailing and all that they entailed. And then the impact on ground when living close to the sea – fallen trees, smashed window panes, odd accidents. Writing this piece on 12 Oct, I can't ever forget the terrifying memories of this day in 2014, experiencing the full blast of super cyclone 'Hudhud' which hit Vizag and paralysed it for several days. But, relatively speaking, mine is a position of privilege compared to many who may dread the monsoons or its aftereffects. And I recognise that

while writing this essay. In fact, even while watching the terrifying or awesome aspects of monsoon, I do so like a spectator from the pavilion watching a fearsome pack of fast bowlers dishing out chin music to pitch hopping batsman, on a green top, under cloudy weather. It is savagely beautiful seeing it from afar.

These days, Indian Navy ships sail far and wide, throughout the year, round the clock. It is a natural outcome of having bigger, more blue water platforms. More than 30 years ago or (arguably) even before, monsoons were a time of conserving and maintenance especially for small ships which formed a considerable part of our Fleet. This did not mean ships did not sail out during monsoons – that would be a wrong inference, but that the activity levels went a notch lower. Big ships like the Aircraft Carrier and Fleet units took part in 'Monex' (Monsoon Exercises, what else, which later became Summerex) off the East Coast where the (south-west) monsoon effects were less pronounced. For Flotilla or LND ships, Monsoons meant ship's husbandry, preparing for the campaign season post monsoon and involvement in academic endeavours such as 'Monsoon Series Lectures'.

Here, to briefly digress, I am reminded of a riveting paragraph in a book that I am reading on the great Maratha Admiral Kanhoji Angre. 'The Sea Hawk' by Manohar Malgonkar (Harper Collins, latest edition May 22) is brilliant and precise in its description of people, places and events. This is what it says about monsoons in the 17th century. *"Battles could erupt anytime and anywhere in the region save during the four months of the*

monsoon. Then guns fell silent, sails were furled and ships huddled on beaches under cover. While the rain raged, the rulers and the ruled, the invaders and the invaded cowered behind high walls and shivered and made propitiatory gifts to the rain gods to lift his siege". Simply put, the monsoons have been intimidating and awesome since times immemorial.

Going back in time, the long years in the Navy meant a certain drill for monsoon and a huge catalogue of varied experiences. As young officers, we did not have the luxury of fancy sedans and transitioned - like many before us did – from bicycles to scooters to second hand or small cars, in the initial years of service. Thus, monsoons were about getting the vehicle ready to face the battering. It meant greasing, protection paint, having tyres checked for treads, ensuring lights and brakes were in working condition.

Navy persons privilege the raincoats over umbrellas and every monsoon meant new rain apparel with the twin jacket and trouser combo being favoured by those who 'biked' their way to work. Similarly, it meant a range of preparations and precautions on ships, whether at sea or in harbour. From electrical hygiene to securing furniture and crockery for sea, to battening down the hatches, an elaborate list of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) encapsulated the rites and rituals associated with monsoons. Of course, none of this spared us from the intensity of experiencing monsoons at sea on ships. Whether it was the acute pitching of the Petyas accompanied by a screeching sound, or the peculiar corkscrew motion of the minesweepers or the constant rolling

of the flat hulled landing craft, the sea and the elements humbled you. Fine hulls of SNFs gave a roller coaster ride, the more buxom G class rolled in slow motion. As your ship got battered, as you constantly heard stuff being smashed about, you could only smile wanly wondering about the next wave. The acrid smell of fuel, the stench of people puking their guts out and the whine of turbines made one conclude that Hell was a more agreeable place. And, in the middle of that, life had to go on. Exercises had to be carried out, gunnery shoots conducted, fuelling and flying undertaken. You learnt to overcome, to forget and to ignore that queasy feeling in the pit of the stomach. You switched your mind to thinking of rasam, pickle and khichdi for lunch (if you were upto it) or an aloo poori treat on return to harbour.

Fortunately, I have not been 'seasick' in the 'normal' sense. Yes, the sea never fails to remind us of who the master is and there have been episodes of intense queasiness and throwing up in very rough seas, but they have been few and far apart. There is no skill in this or any credit of mine; just a matter of luck, I guess. Thus, my last two sea tenures in command of ships saw operations in monsoon where everything from underway replenishment to entering/leaving harbour were done in marginal weather conditions. At such times I had my heart in my mouth and silently prayed to all the gods I knew but I suppose every seaman or mariner would do that. In fact, it was these command tenures when I had the luxury of often perching on the Captain's seat that I tried the trick of 'looking beyond and thinking away'. It

simply meant ignoring the churning in the body and taking in the awe-inspiring drama. To take note of the seas, skies, hear the winds and not be terrified of them but wonder at God's (or nature's) creation and her ways.

Obviously, I was less than totally successful at that technique, but it is something I took with me in my post seafaring life. I have said this before in some of my writings that mine is not the love for the sea that a seafarer (think Dilip Donde or Abhilash Tomy) has. I lived that life, but I don't have natural nautical inclinations. I would not necessarily want to go back to a life at sea, though my sea tenures were the most thrilling and satisfying - as it would be for most navy personnel - due to several other reasons. I have more the romantic's approach of admiring the oceans and exhilarating in their multiple dimensions without having to experience them in their raw form and intensity.

Thus, to me, watching the monsoons with the sea as the backdrop at Navy Nagar was the ultimate spectacle where many of nature's elements came together in a grand orchestra. Whether it was the US Club promenade or our fifth floor flat or any other precincts nearby, the tango between sea, sky, clouds, wind, trees, birds, buildings and humans provided a fascinating kaleidoscope. The stage was set as the hot summer months receded and we approached June. Traditionally, the monsoons are supposed to operate from around 10 June to 10 September (with reference to Mumbai). In fact, they are supposed to weaken by 'Narali Purnima' (the full moon in the month of Shravan) when fisherfolk venture into the sea again. Until about 20 years ago, one could witness and experience this first hand.

However, with erratic climate patterns monsoons have not played by the script in recent years. In fact, a couple of years ago they lasted until the end of Oct (or so it seemed). This year too, Sharad (Kojagiri) Purnima has come and gone but the rains are still on.

While there is no certainty about when the monsoons recede, they have more or less stuck to the script with regard to their arrival, give or take a week here and there. Come early June, the canvas changes. The wind speed picks up, the seas start churning with greater force and the colour of water changes to dark grey. Clouds, thick and dark form and rumble and show streaks of lightning to announce their arrival. Visibility drops and there is brief suspense before the first downpour, which follows with some quick bursts before taking a slight pause. That's like the Monsoons saying 'this is the trailer, picture abhi baaki hai'. The initial burst is enough for the parched earth to open its arms welcomingly, for plants to sway in the breeze and drink greedily, for birds to sing and frogs to croak, for urban infrastructure to start creaking, for people to welcome the respite from summer heat, and for policy makers and farmers to pray for another 'normal' monsoon. But who knows the monsoons will be normal? Possibly, weather forecasters but even they will tell you it could be a mug's game. As for the rest, they just gird their loins and prepare.

Unless you are a retired pensioner like me with plenty of time in hand and balcony tickets to watch the 'great monsoon show'. In which case, you are enveloped in a cosy cocoon witnessing the ebb and flow of the phenomenon. And there, there are no

disappointments as one is held hostage to a whole range of expressions over the next three or four months. While the collage I am etching is a montage of all our years in Mumbai at different times, they largely relate to the last six years here. Monsoon rains could be in furious torrents with breaks in between or they could be a steady continuous drizzle for days. Or they could be a combination of both. The pattern that I have seen (and I may be wrong, for mine is not the precise scientific method of noticing but the romantic's instinctive way of noting) is many wet days followed by a brief dry spell in alternating phases.

Often, as the saying goes, 'when it rains it pours'. Then the rains reflect the 'wild and savage energy of the seas' to paraphrase another quote in the Malgonkar book. Watching from our house or at the promenade there is a sense of foreboding. Thunder and lightning in full flow, the angry seas and the waves lashing with all their fury on the promenade wall and shrouds of mist over the surroundings. The Prongs Reef lighthouse (which juts out into the sea like a promontory of sorts) is barely visible and it is dark during daylight. One cannot glimpse many ships over the horizon; some that we see are bobbing up and down helplessly in the churning waters. On many occasions, the promenade, itself at fairly good height, is washed over and the Club lawns are flooded. The walking track and the golf course take the bulk of punishment. The pavement is frequently broken, making walking difficult if not dangerous and yet there is a thrill to doing it. To try and edge as close to the sea as possible, to watch the action. From our balcony, it

is sad to see birds getting wet and desperately seeking shelter. The whole area is magnificently green during monsoons attaining a rich dark hue; yet, one must be cautious of trees that fall or coconuts that obey Newton's law of gravitation at twice the speed in accordance with Einstein's formula.

Frequently, I have also been subject to Murphy's law when I got caught in a downpour at the far end of promenade with no shelter in sight. Being drenched to the bone was not as much fun as it was in childhood, but offered different experiences. On one occasion, on my return to the near end and safety of a roof, I was treated to cups of hot sweet chai that the workers and staff at the Club drink. That was one time when the sugary concoction seemed preferable to the pot tea that 'Sahibs' sip. On another occasion, I was rewarded with a most interesting chat with the (late) Surg Cmde Sharma, then a US Club regular. It was raining cats and dogs, we both were stranded, so to speak, and had nowhere to go and nothing to do but strike a conversation. And what a wonderful illuminating exchange that was, when I learnt much of the history of Navy Nagar, INHS Asvini and the US Club from a man who had 'been there, seen that'.

Strangely, but also understandably, the Club is largely deserted on such days with most preferring to work out indoors. That makes the experience special for those who indeed take the chance and step out outdoors – rain cape or umbrella in hand. Lesser people imply lesser social talk, more conversation with likeminded souls and more communion with nature. One can sit for hours at the Club or

similar such spaces watching the rains and taking in the full spectrum of sight and sound. Be it the interplay of light and shade or roar of the seas or the sirens of ships leaving harbour or the flash of lighthouse, there is plenty to hold one in thrall. On occasion, when the sun breaks out and on the rare occasion when you see a spectacular sunset, you also get a reminder of the post monsoon canvas that's waiting like the next course of meal. And if the rains and howling winds get far too disconcerting by the seaside, you retreat to your home and be lulled into sleep by the 'pitter patter'. Or watch it from the windows, as you sip on the ginger tea or your favourite poison.

The nights are magical too. Sitting cosily at the club or a friend's place or snuggling in the warmth of home and watching the rains continuously, listening to them as they lash down, taking in the rumble of thunder and the menace of lightning, enjoying the comfort of soothing music in the background is hypnotic. To use a cliché, the vistas are endless. Thus, even as the monsoons seem to

extend interminably and people debate on its protracted presence, I have no complaints. Yes, I am aware of the weariness this has caused and associated anxiety about them affecting the festival season or the winter crop. I too am looking forward to the break from monsoons. But I believe that the extended monsoon season this year was a special gift that enabled us to savour its every component and take in its every crest and trough. The slow motion fading away made it possible to linger and appreciate every phase. I believe that analogous to the Northern Lights in Scandinavia or the Wildebeest migration in East Africa, the Monsoons are one of nature's most astounding occurrences. One has to be truly lucky to live through it, year after year, from perfect viewing galleries. As we prepare to leave this vantage perch, we are grateful for the sublime experiences that we had and say in invocation 'Monsoon Bappa, pudchya varshi parat ya' (Oh God of Monsoon, please manifest yourselves again next year).

Snapshot from MHS Archive Initiative



BOOK REVIEW

THE NIGGER OF THE NARCISSUS BY JOSEPH CONRAD

Gargie Kode, Research Intern, MHS

Nautical Fiction is a genre that has intrigued the masses with its larger-than-life representation of sea voyages, the life of the seamen and bringing forth various aspects of nautical culture. This is a genre that is filled with the finest details of the voyages and expeditions, elucidation of the roaring deep blue sea, narratives of the struggles of the sailors together laced with lores of the maritime expanse. As the genre evolved, it became synonymous with Joseph Conrad- one of the most famous exponents of this genre. Popular among readers for his works like the "Heart of Darkness", "Lord Jim", "Typhoon" and one of his distinguished works which was disputable for its contentious title: "The Nigger of the Narcissus".

Conrad's career as a sailor and his life on sea gained him sufficient experience to beget the process of writing. It was his attempt to recount his time on the sea through his narratives and thus eventually letting the readers peek into his life- one that was fraught with adventure and challenges. Conrad's work contemplates the depths of his personal experiences which reflects in his narratives.

The novel- The Nigger of the Narcissus- revolves around the protagonist James Wait, a dying black sailor. It describes the journey of a

ship named Narcissus, the life and struggle of the protagonist on board. The gripping plot advances with the ship being ambushed by a strong gale and engulfed in the curtains of credulity which eventually results in the death of Wait.

Conrad stands out particularly from other writers due to his engaging style of writing. For a novice in the world of Conrad, it takes time to get acquainted with the long illustrative narrations and somewhat ambiguous style of writing. Conrad's works are heavily infused with nautical jargons and "even if the exact meaning is not clear to the reader, the use of technical terms serves to signify the restoration of order in the face of the tumult of the sea and the mutinous stirrings of the ship's crew."¹ Conrad makes use of the technical terms in the conversation among the sailors.

The reader finds such instances of nautical jargons in the plot - "The main topsail had to be goose-winged" or "the ship moved ahead slowly under topsails". Conrad's employment of expletives pervades throughout the novel though he tries to use them strategically. "The technical language of the passage not only provides a way of talking about the hardships of the voyage but also emphasizes that simple, routine, good seamanship is important to the success of the venture."²

The novel narrates a detailed and meticulous description of the ship *Narcissus* and its journey. Conrad makes a point of assimilating his own experience as a sailor in the novel. He subtly paints an illustration of the ship's journey from Bombay to England which was in fact the narration of his own experience. During his days as a sailor, Conrad boarded the ship of *Narcissus* which sailed from Bombay to Dunkirk. He, therefore, considers the reference of Bombay and thereby incorporates it in the novel. The voyage begins and *Narcissus* sets sail from Bombay. Conrad brings in the real essence of Bombay by delineating it with the typical Indian mob possessing a deep, heavy Indian accent and an unyielding demeanor.

The theme of "men against the sea" permeates throughout the novel with the extensive description of the sailors' struggle. The novel as a sea fiction illustrates a picture of the crude reality of the life of the sailors and their endeavour to remain afloat on the vicious sea. The realistic description of the sailors' labour harboured with hate and rebellion made the novel quite distinct from the conventions. Vivid descriptions and bold use of imagery describing the struggles of the sailors during and after the storm gives the reader a clear insight into the situation. Drowned in the sea of vulnerability and battling against exhaustion, deprivation of sleep, hunger and thirst, the sailors make a feeble attempt to remain alive on board.

Conrad employs adjectives like "stiff hands", "swollen red fingers", "obstinate and exhausted", bringing in

front of the readers the powerfully evocative imagery which reflects throughout the novel. What particularly stands out in the novel is Conrad's ability to make the audience "see the novel" through his style of narration. Conrad's evident use of oxymoron while illustrating the scenic beauty of the setting sun juxtaposed with the wild, roaring waves brings out the sensual elements of the narrative. The use of synesthesia can be evidently pointed out through these alluring and bewitching exegeses.

What remains evident among the struggles of the sailors is the indubitable presence of slavery and social hierarchy on the ship. Wait's terrified response to Donkin's remark of being "cast overboard", marks the existence and culmination of slavery. "Wait's global, traversal movement-his home in Saint Kitts, his boarding of the *Narcissus* in Bombay, the storm at the Cape of Good Hope, his near approach to England- echoes those forms of collective life that violently refuse and threaten the hierarchal organization on which the sea fiction relies"³ (Jernigan 27).

Amidst the waves of slavery and social hierarchy, what particularly stands out is the representation of the dying "nigger". The racial discrimination along with the advancement of his disease, "he becomes not so much a human being but as an embodiment of death - so that his blackness is in effect a symbol of the ultimate darkness."⁴ The belief that the other sailors hold about Wait is that his death will result in the occurrence of favourable winds. This credence remains etched in the minds

of the sailors despite being impolitic and superstitious.

The majority of the novel seems to be tainted in shades of grey and black hues thus ultimately suggesting the bold existence of the superstitious beliefs of the seamen which they hold against the death of Wait. The dark, grey weather stands as a metaphor for the psyche of the sailors and the beliefs that they cling onto. In the deep sea, where lies endless vast opportunities and if thought upon a deafening silence if not for the violent crashing waves, the sailors at their wit's end hold onto everything possible even if it seems dark!

Though the westerners established maritime fiction as an independent genre, still the same genre marks its presence in Indian literature too. The subcontinent being surrounded by the waters from three sides; slowly creeps into the writings of the Indian authors only to mark its presence quite evidently among the Eastern folk. Samanth Subramanian's "Following Fish: Travels Around the Indian Coast"; narrates the fishing culture of the famous Indian sea coast and thereby recounts the traditions and folklore of the people. Sanjeev Sanyal's "The Ocean of Churn: How the Indian Ocean Shaped Human History" ventures into the unexplored territory of the vast Indian coastline while Amitav Ghosh's "Sea of

Poppies", the epic saga describes the uproarious voyage of the ship Ibis, across the Indian Ocean to the Mauritius Islands. In the roaring sea of Nautical fiction, Indian authors drop in the anchor and set sail on the chronicles of Maritime fiction.

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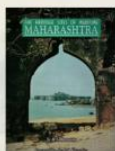
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