Chapter 1 -
INTRODUCTION

By and large, the complex cultural process, 'Trade' is usually perceived as the exchange of goods and commodities, which is very superficial. It is understood that there is much more in it than is suggested by the tangible evidence. Within the archaeological contexts trade is always presented through similarities and differences in the material culture, for instance, presence of artefacts of separate typology, technology, and provenance, with little emphasis on the intangibles. Trade facilitates an exchange of not only material objects but also of vital cultural attributes, ideas, and innovations in addition to the economic benefits that it brings in. The first attempt to understand the international trade dynamics related to the early historic period of India was made by R.E.M. Wheeler at Arikamedu (1946). This resulted in extensive investigations on 'Indo-Roman' trade, whereby, a great majority of the trade between places within the sub-continent and the Roman world which comes within the route of Rome and India was undermined. But identification of 'Roman Amphorae' from various archaeological sites of Western India typologically as the Torpedo Jars of West Asia (Tomber 2007) and the excavations at Sanjan (Gupta *et al.* 2004a); one realises that potentially the West Asian trade in India has contributed immensely to its various cultural spheres beginning from the Sasanian period and moving on to the Early Islamic caliphates. Ceramics from West Asia are the clearest markers of this contact between West Asia and Western India and many types of glazed and un-glazed wares have been reported from the Indian sub-continent.

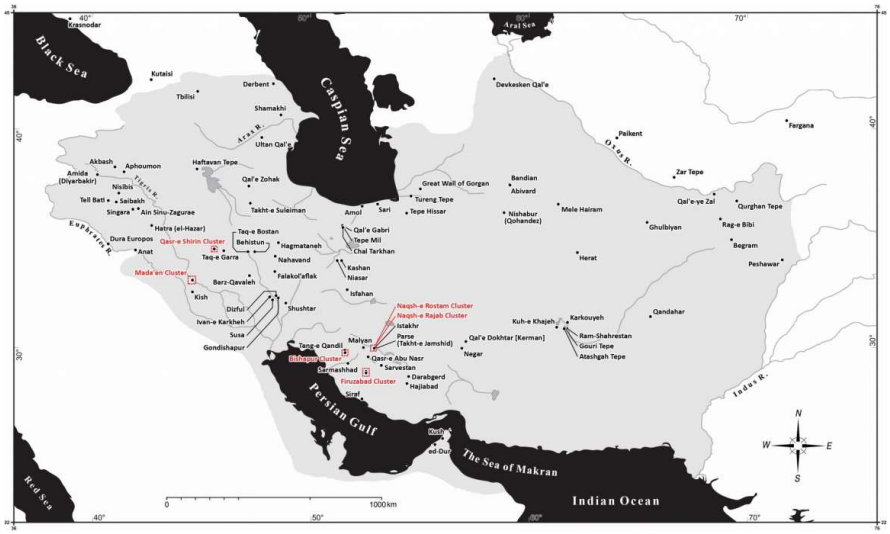
Meanwhile, majority of the archaeological investigations and work in Iran and Iraq was concentrated on the Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultural phases, lesser emphasis was put on the succeeding periods, particularly on the Sasanian period. The Sasanians were well-known Zoroastrian elites ruling from Persia (capitals centred around Iran and Mesopotamia) and their monuments, buildings, rock reliefs, inscriptions, and collections of coins and manuscripts have shaped the present image of Sasanian archaeology, the pioneering works were mostly restricted to art history and regional study of ceramics (Mousavi and Daryaee 2012: 1076-1077). Most of the Sasanian cities were named after the kings who built/rebuilt them, for example, Veh-Ardashir (named after *Ardashir* or Jundeshapur with *Shapur*) and it led to a marked diaspora to the cities, of skilled individuals, which housed textile, glass, metalworking, and other industries had immense

economic and political significance. Their bas-reliefs were generally away from Sasanian cities and were personal and locations were symbolically chosen and mostly restricted to the early Sasanians (Mousavi and Daryaee 2012: 1079-1090). Geographically, the Sasanian empire can be divided into different regions such as the highlands of Fars (including cities of Firuzabad, Bishapur, and Darabgird) and the lowland settlements around southwestern Iran and southern Mesopotamia (Shushtar, Jundishapur, Iwan-e-Karkeh, Susa) (Map 1.1).

Boucharlat and Haerinck (1991) were the first to publish a comprehensive study of Sasanian ceramics, which clearly showed its regional character though there is a lack of well-defined typologies of ceramics from Sasanian core areas. The mentioned regions are southwestern Persia (important site being Iwan-e-Karkeh), sites with similar ceramics in Mesopotamia, western and northwestern Persia (representative sites - Haftavan Tepe in Azerbaijan and Kangāvar or in the Sasanian areas of Qal'eh-i Yazdigird in Kurdistan), Northern Persia (graves of Noruz-mahaleh in Gilan), North-eastern Persia (excavated sites Tepe Hissar, Yarim Tepe, and Tureng Tepe), Eastern Persia (only excavated site; Kuh-i Khwaja), South-eastern Persia and coastal area (excavated site of Siraf and Whitehouse and Williamson's explorations), and Southern Persia (representative sites - Qasr-i Abu Nasr and Firuzabad) (Boucharlat and Haerinck 1991) (see Map 1.1).

The Arabs defeated the Sasanians and conquered the Sasanian capital city of Ctesiphon in 639 A.D. which eventually shifted the investments around the newly established Arab capital of Baghdad. The Caliphates (Rashidun, Umayyad, and Abbasids) also regularly shifted their capital cities from Damascus in Syria to Baghdad and Samarra in Iraq and back to Baghdad (see Map 1.2). The investments of the various caliphs into the capital cities also brought out many religious, social, economic, and political changes to West Asia. Major changes are seen in architecture (religious and secular), coins, textiles, glass, ceramics (especially glazed ceramics) and most evidently in religion as Islam became the major state religion. Trade continued from the Sasanian period into the Early Islamic period in the Indian Ocean sphere. The finest example of it is the Samarran Wares which were imitations of Chinese ceramics. The contact thus had

a profound effect on the innovative potters of West Asia especially based in Basra. It also shows the degree of exchange that existed between the East and the West.



Map 1.1: Archaeological Map of the Sasanian Empire (courtesy: sasanika.org)

Indian sub-continent formed a part of the greater network of long-distance overseas trade which stretched all the way from South-East Asia to Europe. The region of Western India needs to be looked at in greater detail as there seems to be lot of economic and political contact with West Asia in this region as suggested by the material remains viz. ceramics, coins, and inscriptional evidence. The region was also prone to overseas trade due to the lengthy coastline and easily navigable ports and its tradition of overseas and inland trade from early part of Chalcolithic cultures (for instance, the Indus Valley Civilisation). The inland region did not trade directly but through entrepôts such as Bharucha, Hathab and such other sites in Gujarat which gave an entry into central India for further contact with other regions.

It is important to understand the spread of the material from the production zones in West Asia to western India by looking at the general spread of the material in Indian Ocean Trade sphere and its organisational aspects. One of the characteristic tangible remnants of West Asian trade in India is a variety of Glazed wares and non-Glazed wares of West Asian origin.

Map 1.2: Map of the Caliphate expansion and regional areas within Iran – Iraq and major Early Islamic sites in the 9th century A.D. (Map courtesy: Cattette 2021[1])

1.1. Previous Research

The political contact between the Indian sub-continent and West Asia is evidenced through historical sources which mention the cordial and close relationship maintained by the Sasanian king Naoshirwan and Pulakesin II (Karmerkar and Dhunjisha 2002: 13, Wink 2002: 105). Example of Sasanian effect seen from the art historical perspective is illustrated in Ghosh's (1991: figure 4) publication on the steatite casket found at Rangmahal (Rydh 1959). The casket lid depicts a typical hunting scene styled on the Sasanian king hunting with bow and arrow, seated on a horse turning back to shoot a lion. Ghosh (1991: 235) also mentions the decorative tiles from Harwan (Kashmir) circa 300 A.D., and a fragmentary stone stela which distinctly bears Sasanian influence, and also the Gadhiya coins and the debased Indo-Sasanian coins which show the obvious numismatic influences. Abbasid coins have also been found from Banbhore (Mughal 2012: 335-336) in Pakistan. West Asian ceramics such as the Turquoise Glazed Ware, Lustre Wares, and Sgraffiato pottery have also been found from the site of Banbhore (Mughal 1990: 59-60 Pl. I and Pl. II; Mughal 2012: 336-340) in Pakistan where it has

[1] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Abbasid_Caliphate_850AD.png as part of license agreement

been found in deposits ranging from 8th to 12th c. A.D. - labelled as Late Abbasid (Khan 1976).

In India, the earliest work by Carswell (1978) mentions 25 ancient port sites explored by him along the Eastern coast of India where he found Turquoise Glazed ware along with Tin White Ware at many locations (J. Carswell Personal Communication, in Glover 2002: 169). Glover (2002) identified Turquoise Glazed Ware from the excavated ceramic assemblages of Manikapatna, Pallur and among surface finds from Gourangapatna in Odisha suggesting that West Asian pottery has also been traded to the Eastern coast of India. Turquoise Glazed ware was again reported from the site of Gourangapatana (Basa and Behera 2000). At the ancient and medieval port of Manikapatna, among Chinese, Sri Lankan, Burmese, Siamese, Indonesian and 'Roman' material they reported an 'egg white Arabian moulded ware' and 'thick chocolate glazed ware' (Pradhan *et al.* 2000). Similar evidence was found from Khalkattapatna (Sinha 1992: 428).

In western India, the excavation of Sanjan (Gupta *et al.* 2004a) a site in southern Gujarat, was essential for truly understanding the variety of West Asian ceramics found in India and was in a way, a pioneering study with its well stratified finds. The site has shown a wide variety of ceramic assemblage including West Asian ceramics; Glazed and Non-Glazed (Nanji 2011). Shinde et al., (2007) reported BI-Glazed ware (the earliest West Asian find of the period) dated to the early Christian centuries from the early historic trading emporium of Junnar, Maharashtra. Tomber's (2007) studies have revealed that most of the ceramics termed 'Roman Amphorae' in the past literature are actually Torpedo Jars. Tomber (2007: 977) identified Torpedo Jars from the various assemblages in Western India and Southern India and also gave an overall idea of their spatial- distribution in the Indian sub-continent. More recently, a team from Deccan College, Pune found Hatched Sgraffiato Ware from their exploration at Chandigaon, a site in Northern Konkan in Maharashtra (IAR 2006-2007: 53). Balvally (2013) did further analysis of Torpedo Jars and identified the presence of Sasanian Glazed ware particularly in Gujarat and Kerala. Petrographic studies were also done on the Torpedo Jars from select sites in Gujarat to understand the texture and composition of the raw-materials used.

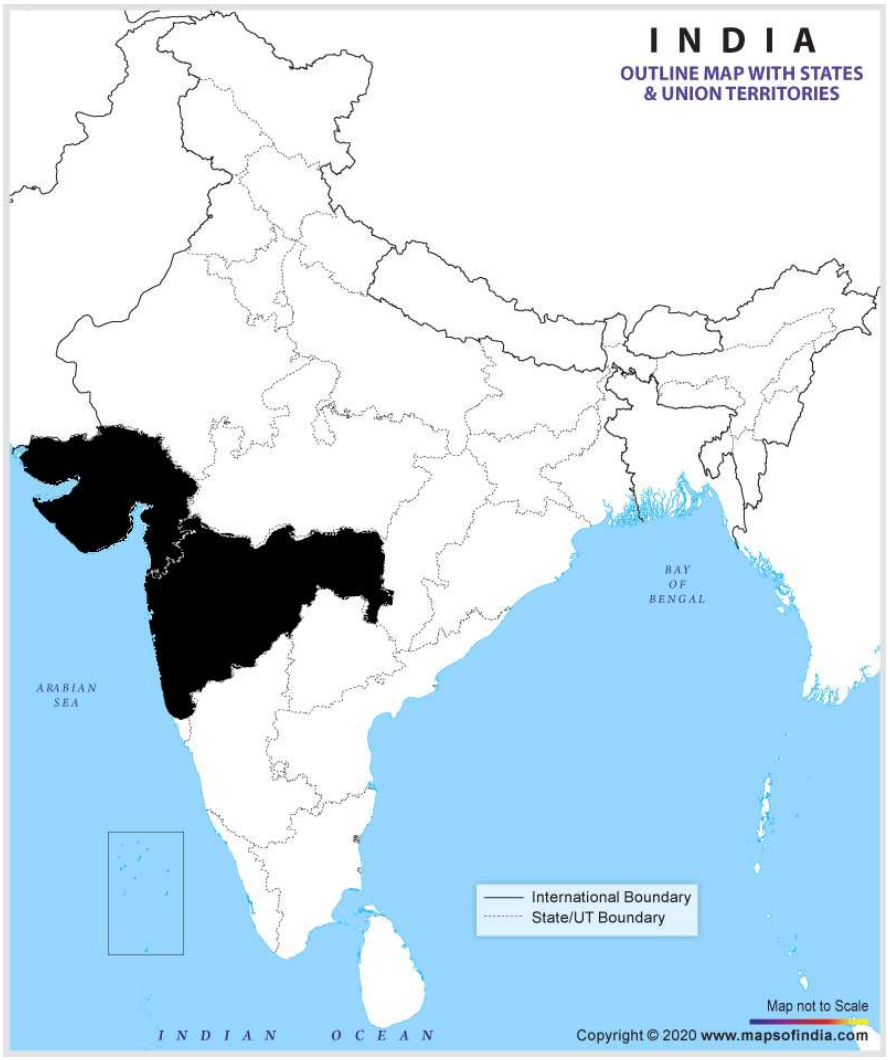
In peninsular India, excavated sites such as Pattanam (Shajan *et al.* 2004), Kottapuram (Hemchandran Pers. Comm.) and Vizhinjam (Ajit Kumar *et al.* 2013*)* have also shown evidence of West Asian contact primarily through the ceramic assemblages. West Asian ceramics have also been found from the sites in Sri Lanka such as Mantai (Carswell and Prickett 1984), Anuradhapura (Seely *et al.* 2006) and Tissamaharama (Schenk 2001). The results of the geo-chemical analysis carried out on the bitumen lining of the Torpedo Jars from Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka suggest that the bitumen is most likely to have originated from the Luristan region of Iran (Stern *et al.* 2008: 413 – 423).

Glass in the form of beads was also extensively traded in the Indian Ocean sphere and India was also one of the major centres of production (Kanungo 2002, James Lankton Pers. Comm.). Recent studies confirm that glass beads produced in India were traded as far as Xin- jiang in China. The beads and bracelets were studied using high-resolution portable x-ray fluorescence (pXRF) spectrometer to understand their composition (Liu *et al*. 2012: 2129). From 2nd c. B.C. to 4th c. A.D., glass types included both Central Asian and Kushana variants of plant ash soda lime glass, with a distribution for the latter centred on the southern limb of the oasis Silk Routes in China. But as time progressed from the 4th c. A.D. to 10th c. A.D, the glass which is similar in composition to the ones produced at Sasanian sites in West Asia replaced the earlier glass varieties in that region (Liu *et al*. 2012: 2140). But the famous Sasanian cut glassware (Goldstein 2005) was conspicuous by its absence in the Indian sub-continent. Although many finds are reported from China (Gyselen 2007: 17) and in Japanese tombs of high-status nobility related to the Emperor (Whitehouse 2005).

1.2. Geographical Background of Western India

The area of western India (within this thesis) has been delimited to the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra which was previously called the Bombay State but separated into two different states based on their respective regional languages in 1960. Both the states have

a continuously connected lengthy coastline (which is met by the Arabian Sea) and perennial rivers (Map 1.3).



Map 1.3: Map of Western India with Gujarat and Maharashtra highlighted in black. (Map courtesy: mapsofindia.com)

1.2.1. Gujarat

Gujarat lies between the latitudes 20° 6' N to 24° 42' N (north latitude) and 68° 10’ E to 74° 28'E (east longitude) and is bordered by Pakistan towards the northwest, Rajasthan to the north-east, Madhya Pradesh to the east, and Maharashtra to the south. Gujarat can be divided into different zones, namely, Kachchh, Saurashtra Peninsula (Kathiawar), and Mainland Gujarat (Lata), which includes North Gujarat (Anarta), Central Gujarat, and

South Gujarat (Merh 1995:1; Map 1.4). Kachchh is the largest district in India having the vast marshes of the Greater Rann and Little Rann which flood up annually (Biswas 1993: 18). The Gulf of Kachchh separates Saurashtra and Kachchh, and it is also surrounded partially by the Gulf of Khambhat near Khambhat. Saurashtra is a vast flat fertile area and has mount Girnar as its highest point. The rivers which originate in the central Saurashtra in the Chotila range flow to the north into the Rann of Kachchh. Only the Aji, the Machhu and the Brahmani are northward flowing rivers. The rivers originating in the Girnar and the Gir namely the Ojhat, the Kamb, the Surekh, the Somal, the Sangwada, the Hirani, the Kapila and the Saraswati flow into the Arabian Sea. Mainland Gujarat region has larger river systems compared to Kachchh and Saurashtra. The Banas, Saraswati, Sabarmati have basins in North Gujarat, Mahi in Central Gujarat, and Narmada, Tapi, Damanganga, Kim in southern Gujarat (Merh 1995). The coastline of Gujarat is one of the largest within India with more than 1600 kms, a large chunk of which lies in Saurashtra which includes many ports such as Okha (Bet Dwarka), Pipavav, Jaffrabad, Navlakhi, Bedi, Porbandar, Sikka, Bhavnagar, and Veraval (GIDB 2006: 19-22). On the mainland, ancient ports on the Narmada such as Bharuch (ancient *Barygaza* in Greek) were extremely important as evidenced from their repeated mentions in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (Schoff 1912) in the early historic period and later ports such as Sanjan in south Gujarat which gain prominence in the early medieval phase.

Vegetation

The areas of Gujarat get differing rainfall and soil, which creates three vegetation zones; well wooded area south of the river Narmada consisting of moist and dry deciduous forests with teak as the main economic species. Secondly, the regions between the river Narmada to the extreme north covering inferior dry deciduous forests with or without teak, and finally the area of Saurashtra and Kachchh with poor teak forests in Junagadh and Gir and in other areas scrub lands, mangrove forests and desert areas (Gujarat State Gazetteer I 1989: 48).

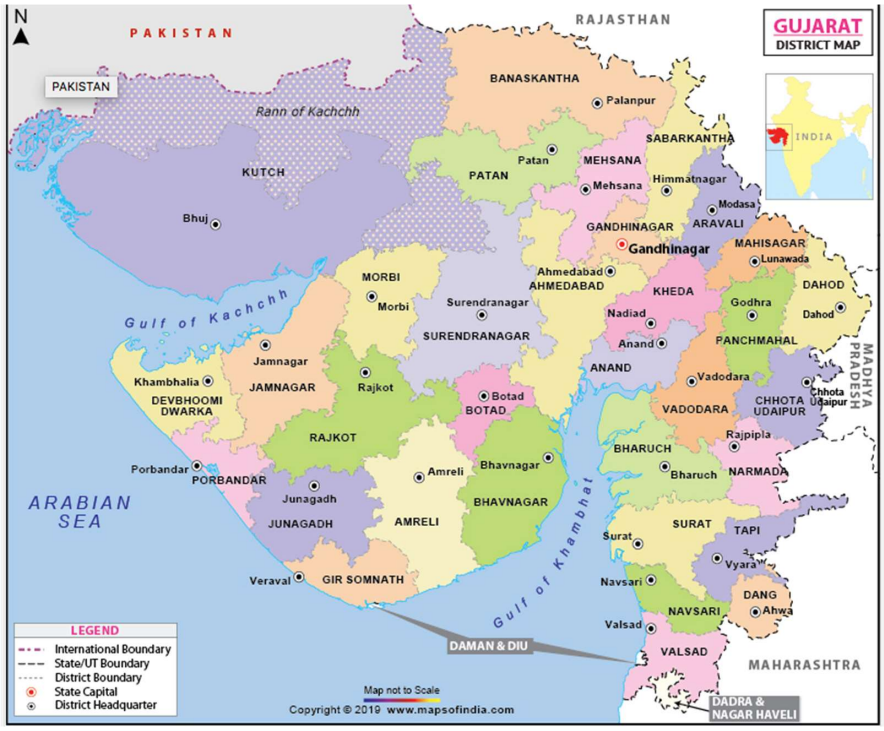
Precipitation

Gujarat has a diverse rainfall range with most of its rainfall coming from the southwest monsoon winds around June to September. The state can be divided into four different

zones with highest annual rainfall seen in south Gujarat and least in areas of Kachchh and parts of North Gujarat (Table 1.1). Merh (1995: 10-11);

Table 1.1: Showcasing the range of precipitation in the state of Gujarat

Rainfall	Districts/Regions
>1000 mm	Valsad, Dangs, Surat, and eastern parts of Bharuch
1000 mm to 800 mm	Vadodara, Panchmahals, Kheda, and southern part of Ahmedabad
800 mm to 400 mm	Saurashtra, and northern part of Ahmedabad District
< 400 mm	Kachchh, Banaskantha, and western part of Sabarkantha District



Map 1.4: The Districts of Indian Political State of Gujarat (Map courtesy: mapsofindia.com

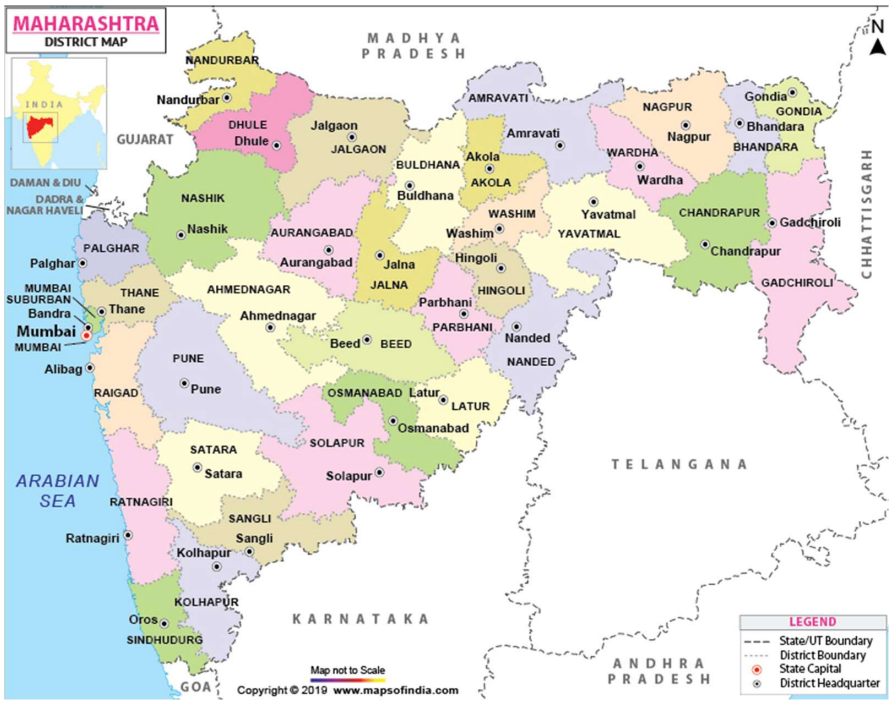
1.2.2. Maharashtra

The State of Maharashtra (15.6° North and 22.1° North and longitudes 72.6° East and 80.9° East) is divided into two areas by the Western Ghats (which run north-south) with

the Konkan coast to the west and the Deccan Plateau towards the east. The coastal areas (Konkan) are thus much more humid due to higher rainfall (south-west monsoon winds) and also the closeness to the Arabian Sea. Maharashtra is surrounded by the Arabian sea in the west, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh on the north, Madhya Pradesh in the east, and the southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh on the south (Map 1.5). (Maharashtra State Gazetteer 2009: 1) Maharashtra occupies a major part of the Deccan Trap.

The Arabian sea coast marks the Western boundary of Maharashtra between the Damanganga river to the North and the Terekhol creek to the South, the Satpura Range is the Northern boundary, and the river Narmada which originates from the Amarkantak hills and flows towards the Arabian sea has separated Maharashtra from North India and has provided its North-Western boundary (see Map 1.6). The Southern boundary of Maharashtra is not characterised by natural barriers like rivers or mountains but rather by its linguistic and cultural identity. It has a conical border and connects Gadchiroli in the centre of India with Goa in the South-West towards the coast. Bastar forest to the East touches the boundary of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. (Maharashtra State Gazetteer 2009: 2)

The two main natural zones within Maharashtra are due to the Sahyadri mountains, spread from North to South, have divided Maharashtra into Konkan and the Desh. The Sahyadri which is situated at a varying distance of forty-five to ninety kilometres from the sea, has created a strip of land in between known as the Konkan. The south-west monsoon winds are arrested due to the mountains as they are parallel to the western coast of India. The enormous plateau land which amounts to almost nine-tenth portion to the east of the Sahyadri is known as the Deccan plateau (Desh). The plateau is higher (600 <m above the sea level) in its western portion is six hundred metres, and in its eastern border area it is approximately 300m above the sea level. Mawal, a land full of ravines has been formed by the major rivers and their tributaries originating from the plateau and flowing Eastward. In the Doab region due to less soil erosion and horizontal rock formation, this plateau has been formed and the Sahyadri and its ranges which extend eastward at a right angle, provide protection to the Deccan plateau (Desh). The hills and rivers have divided the Deccan plateau into the following five natural sub-regions: Konkan, Tapi-Purna valley, Wardha-Wainganga valley, Godavari valley, and Krishna valley. (Maharashtra State Gazetteer 2009: 3) (see Map 1.6)



Map 1.5: District Map of the Indian Political State of Maharashtra (Map courtesy: mapsofindia.com)

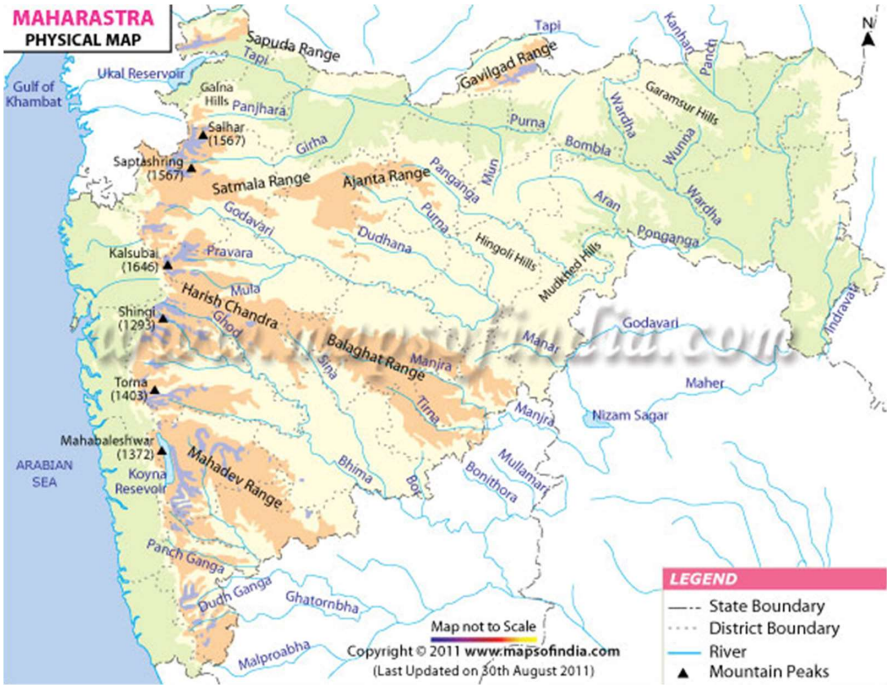
Konkan is a strip of sloping land with a coastal line stretching from Daman in the north and Terekhol creek in the south, sandwiched between the Arabian sea and the Sahyadri mountain, measuring variously from 45 to 90 kms. in width and 720 kms. in length, is known from ancient times as Aparanta or Konkan. In the course of time, the land to the north of river Savitri, i.e. the northern part of Ratnagiri district and the southern portion of Surat district, began to be known as North Konkan and the portion between river Savitri and the southern part of Karwar district, as South Konkan (see Maps 1.5 and 1.6). In this region, the average rainfall is 2600 mm. per year. The historic name Aparanta, which means 'the western end ', is given to North Konkan. The Sopara inscription clearly shows that this territory was a part of Ashokan empire. The name Konkan began to appear in ancient texts since the fourth century B.C. Ptolemy, the Roman pilgrim-cum-historian (A.D.150), refers to Gujarat and North Konkan as Latika, and South Konkan as Aarika. According to an opinion, the name Konkan was given after Kunkana, the legendary mother of Parashuram. In the past, trade with Babylon, Rome and other places was carried out through the ports of Chaul, Mahad, Kalyan and Sopara.

Various luxury goods, wine and glass were imported into India from the Roman empire through these ports. (Maharashtra State Gazetteer 2009: 3- 4) Tapi-Purna Valley, a sub-region of Maharashtra is formed by the rivers Tapi and Purna. The land covered by the Tapi valley is known as Khandesh, while the portion covered by the Purna valley is known as Varhad. The region having black soil, is well-known for cultivating cotton, also known as black cotton soil (see Map 1.6). The route from the North to South passes through Burhanpur (see 1.5). The ancient Savalda culture flourished in this region. The beginning of the present way of life in Maharashtra is connected with these cultures. Traces of the Indus valley culture are also found in this region. (Maharashtra State Gazetteer 2009: 4)

Wardha-Vainganga Valley in many respects within this region differs from the rest of Maharashtra. The excavation at Paunar shows that human settlement began in this region sometime between 1,000 to 800 B.C. This region lies to the east of the river Wardha and is known as Nagpur region, a part of Mahakoshal. Wardha to the west, Satpura hills and jungle to the north and the east, and forest region of Andhra to the south constitute the natural boundaries of Nagpur region. The volcanic Deccan trap rock ends in this region. Besides granite, and gneiss rock formations are found here. The major portion of the valley, from Tumsar to Vainganga-Godavari confluence is very fertile (see Map 1.5 and Map 1.6). The region is characterised by artificial lakes, and green paddy fields. It is gifted with huge deposits of minerals and has a considerable tribal population. The average rainfall in this region, which is 1,016— 1,270 mm. is considerably higher than that in the Deccan. (Maharashtra State Gazetteer 2009: 4)

Godavari Valley is the fourth natural sub-region of Maharashtra. The river Godavari is also famously known as the Ganga of Maharashtra. The urban civilisation in Maharashtra took root in this region in ancient times. The river originates in Nasik district and after crossing Maharashtra border in Nanded district, flows through Andhra Pradesh (see Map 1.6). Paithan (ancient Pratisthan) situated on the bank of the Godavari, is a place of pilgrimage. Geographically, this region is divided into two sub-regions, namely, the hilly portion and plains comprising Nasik district, and high and dry plateau to the east including the areas of Aurangabad, Jalna, Parbhani, Nanded, and Ahmadnagar districts (see Map 1.5). (Maharashtra State Gazetteer 2009: 4-5).

The Krishna Valley is a fertile belt created by river Krishna, which flows through Satara, Kolhapur, and Sangli districts, is rich in variety of crops. In addition, this region also includes a portion of Pune district containing Nira and Bhima rivers, and some part of Solapur district. A territory known as Kuntal in ancient times forms part of this region. Pandharpur, a place well-known since ancient times as a religious centre, is situated in this region. (Maharashtra State Gazetteer 2009: 5) (see Map 1.5 and 1.6)



Map 1.6: Physical Map of the Indian Political State of Maharashtra with the Western Ghats shown in green hugging the coast and the river systems. (Map courtesy: mapsofindia.com)

1.3. Critical Objectives

In general, theoretical propositions and constructs on trade emerge from site specific studies and further extended to its surroundings or the area between two model settlements. It also looks at the land use pattern and geological resources towards the inland to construct hypothetical models on trade. The previous work mentioned in section 1.1. of this chapter regarding the contact with West Asia and the Indian sub-continent (specifically with western India as a region) is in no way different. Such

propositions were formulated for Sanjan (Nanji 2011). Isolated occurrence of specific artefacts also has boosted trade related studies, for instance, occurrence of Torpedo Jars (Tomber 2007, Balvally 2013). But still there is a lack of understanding of the larger picture of the contact with West Asia. This work has collated the already established data available and finds the lacunae. Trade is a sub-system of a much wider range of tangible and intangible cultural traits. Trade has much wider ramifications and not merely a 'give and take' but has a deeper hidden stratum of cultural influences. Polity, ideology, identity, and socio-economic exchange may or may not be completely displayed by the tangible remnants of this complex exchange. Thus, it is imperative that researchers think beyond the meaning of the word 'trade', as 'trade' within and outside of a cultural system gives rise to complexities within. These complexities are represented through the tangible and intangible parameters of the culture. Within the contexts of the aforesaid assumption, the complex cultural exchange mechanism between West Asia and South Asia while trading and its socio-economic implications needs to be academically appreciated. Thus, under this theoretical framework of understanding, the following has been outlined as the objectives of study.

1. To try and comprehend the nature of cultural contact of West Asia to western India between 3rd to 10th centuries A.D. This would not be viewed only through the narrow prism of trade, but rather by comprehending the effects of the cultural exchange beyond the economic point of view.
2. To understand the socio-cultural impact of the contact of Western India with West Asia. When different cultural systems interact, there are tangible and intangible exchanges.
3. To analyse the spatial distribution of West Asian material in the regions of Western India through the recording of excavated material and exploratory surveys
4. To record the temporal distribution of the West Asian materials in the regions of western India mainly through recording the West Asian material from excavated contexts through their associated material relatively and/or absolute dates.
5. To identify and analyse West Asian ceramics as a marker of exchange by quantifying and recording them and their attributes. This corpus of material would be most useful in determining the Overseas contact with West Asia

6. To undertake thin-section studies on the recorded West Asian ceramics to determine the petro-fabrics which would aid in understanding their manufacturing process and provenance