

CHAPTER - IV

THE RELATIONS WITH THE PORTUGUESE,

THE FIRST PHASE

The relations of Portuguese with Gujarat commenced in 1508, with the "Battle of Chaul". It was for the first time that the commerce of India was largely affected by the arrival of Portuguese in the Indian waters.

Before their arrival, Egypt, due to its geographical situation, enjoyed the monopoly of the Indian trade. A large number of Moorish merchants were permanently staying in the ports of India, viz. Calicut and Cambay, Varthe^{ra} and Barbosa had clearly mention that Calicut on Coremandal coast and Cambay in Gujarat, were the important entrepot centres of Indian Trade.

Therefore, the Moors were the first people who realised the Portuguese threat to their control their supremacy of Indo-European trade. Egypt, which extended its power over Syria, controlled Red sea, and sacred places of Islam, in Arabia, was faced with loss of large revenues, which she collected from this Trade.

The Battle of Chaul :-

The Policy of the Portuguese in the sea, largely affected the Sultan of Gujarat both financially and reli-

giously. The trade with the European countries yielded a large amount of revenue to Sultān Mahmūd Shāh. The Portuguese by and large harassed the Muslims at sea. Therefore, their conduct antagonised Sultān Mahmūd Shāh. At this time Sultān Qansawāh-al-Ghāwri of Egypt sent an embassy with the letter of Khalifah of the time Yaqub-bin-Abdul Aziz, to the court of Sultan of Gujarat. ¹

The Khalifah in the said letter to the Sultān of Gujarat requested him "to drive out the Portuguese menace" from Indian waters, who were harassing the travellers to Jedda and other holy places of Islam".² The Ambassador, on behalf of his master sought the co-operation of Sultān of Gujarat for driving out the Portuguese from India.

Zamorin, the Raja of Calicut, asked the aid of the Sultān of Egypt, Qansawāh-al-Ghāwri, against the Portuguese, who were gradually isolating him from the Hindu rulers of Malabar coast, but Zamorin failed to get this help.

Sultān Qansawāh-al-Ghāwri, thereafter, sent a fleet, under Amīr Husāin Governor of Jedda and a Kurd by birth and an officer of experience and ability. The fleet carried about 1,500 men and was equipped with the latest artillery. The Gujarat fleet was organised by Malik Ayāz

1. MMS. Fol. 84-85

2. Ibid

Sultānī the Governor of Div and Junagadh.

The Egyptian admiral voyaged leisurely, and arrived in Div, probably because he wanted to make Div as base and to operate from there against the Portuguese. At the orders of Sultān Mahmūd, Malik Ayāz, joined, Amīr Husāin, with his fleet. The combined flotilla went towards Chaul in South against thirty Portuguese ships which were lying in that direction.

Francesco de Alm^eçida, at this time was in charge of the Portuguese forces and he was assisted by his son Lorenzo. The news reached Lorenzo, that an Egyptian fleet had reached Div and had been joined by Malik Ayāz. He sailed north to meet the Egyptian vessels, half disbelieving on their existences and even when the ships were sighted he mistook them as the ships of Affonso Albuquerque, who was due on India from Hormuz.³ The combined flotilla arrived near Chaul, where took place the first serious engagement in January 1508.

The Course of the fight :-

The Egyptian ships which were big in size were placed in the first row, while the smaller Gujarat "Fustas" were in the second row. It seems that Egyptian fleet was

3. K.M. Pannikar, Malabar and the Portuguese, p. 69.

equipped with artillery, where as the Gujarat "Fustas" had to depend more on spears, bow and arrows.⁴ The fighting lasted for three days. Lorenzo's ship was surrounded by a number of the light "Fustas" of Gujarat. In a severe fight, the Portuguese admiral, Lorenzo, lost his legs, and was killed "Before surrendering the ship, Lorenzo's body was let down into the swift current, through a hole in the vessel, with all his arms and belongings, so that nothing of his should fall into the hands of the enemy."⁵

The Portuguese suffered a serious reverse in this engagement and withdrew the remnant of their shattered fleet to Cochin. Mahmūd Begada is said to have been greatly pleased at the news of this victory over the "Firan-gees". He set out from Champaner, towards Mahim and went as far as Daman and Bassein. In his encampment at Bassein, he received the victorious generals who had cast anchor on their return journey and favoured them with gifts. Amīr Husāin was offered the ^cCommand of Mahim, if he would prefer to stay in India and enter the Sultān's service.

4. The author of MMS states that the Gujarat naval unit depended more on spears, bow and arrows fol.116-117.

5. M.L. Dames "The Portuguese and Turks in the Indian ocean in the sixteenth century" JRAS, Jan. 1921 pp. 7-8.

Lesson of Chaul :-

The Portuguese were successful in establishing their superiority over Zamorin only because of their better gunnery and efficient equipment. When they had to fight the face to face with the Egyptian fleet, which was its equal in every way, the advantage did not lie with them. They underestimated the enemy's strength because of their easy victories over the ships of Zamorin. When Amir Husain with accuracy and skill directed fire from his artillery the Portuguese were surprised. This incident was clearly a lesson for Indian rulers, that without equipment of equal calibre and efficient gunnery, it was impossible to defeat the Portuguese on the Sea.⁶

Battle of Div : Feb. 3, 1509 :-

Francesco de Almeida, on hearing the death of his son took a vow to avenge it. He realised that the immediate necessity was to recover the command of the seas which the Portuguese had lost after their defeat at Chaul. He started, with an armada of eighteen ships and about twelve hundred men, towards the west coast of India. He found the Egyptian fleet and the ships of Gujarat, assembled in the straits between the main land and the Island of Div.

6. K.M. Pannikar, Op. cit. pp. 69-70.

In the sea-fight which followed, Nuno, who was in command of one squadron, attacked the vessels of Malik Ayaz. While Almeida, concentrated his energy on the Egyptian fleet. He obtained a decisive victory over the Egyptians, the entire ship of Amīr Husāin being broken up.

We have to rely on the Portuguese and Turkish sources for an account of this battle. The histories of Gujarat are silent about this defeat, though they describe the victory at Chaul with great satisfaction. ⁷

The causes of defeat at Div :-

The defeat of the joint flotilla at Div was partly due to the fact that Malik Ayāz was not serious about the fight. He remained aloof during the course of war. Pannikar believes that Malik Ayāz was bought off by the Portuguese & governor Almeida. He further states that this was responsible for weakening the Indo-Egyptian force. Amīr Husāin had to depend upon his ten ships as against the eighteen ship of the Portuguese Governor. Besides also, he depended on Zamorin's hundred sailing ships for his supplies. ⁸

7. R.S. Whiteway - The Rise of Portuguese power in India pp. 115-118.

8. K.M. Pannikar - Opp. Cit. P.71.

Pannikar has relied on contemporary Portuguese histories, Gasper Gorrea and Barros, besides the local traditions of Malabar. Even though there is no mention about this in Persian histories, the charge on Malik Ayāz does not seem justified, because Malik Ayāz was not punished by the Sultān for so called treachry; on the contrary he remained with undiminished power and influence till his death in 1521.

Second, if the Portuguese could bought off Malik Ayāz, then how is it that they feared him as their enemy. We may add here that Malik Ayāz was the greatest opponent of the Portuguese in the Court of Gujarat and also he did not favour any concession to be given to them. Hence judging from the attitude of Malik Ayāz towards the Portuguese in general, the charge on Malik Ayaz does not seem justifiable.

Results of the Battle of Div :-

The battle of Div was not a decisive battle, but after this engagement the relations of the Sultān of Gujarat with the Portuguese took a different shape. By defeating the navy of Gujarat at Diu (1509) and capturing ¶ Goa in 1510, the Portuguese strengthened their position in India. Hence with the other Indian Princes, the Sultan of Gujarat had to change his attitude towards the Portuguese.

It seems that the battle of Div was fought to establish Portuguese superiority over the sea, but inspite of all their efforts during the last ten years, they had not succeeded in this. The battle of Chaul and Div showed that the Portuguese in sea, could be challenged, given proper leadership and an efficient gunnery. The Portuguese power was saved from these odds "by the unaided genius, extra ordinary resourcefulness and unflinching courage of Affonso Albuquerque", ⁹ and also by the lack of any perception on the part of Indian powers.

The Retreat of the Egyptian fleet :-

Amir Husain, after the defeat at Div, escaped first to Cambay and ultimately sailed towards Yemen. The banners of the Egyptian Sultan Qansuh^{ah}-al-Ghawri, captured during the battle, were taken to Portugal. Among the spoils of victory were books on a great variety of languages which showed, the mixed composition of the Mamluk Sultan's forces. Amir Husain continued as governor of Jeda, upto 1517. ¹⁰

9. K.M. Pannikar, Dpp. Cit. p. 71.

10. E. Dennison Ross - "The Portuguese in India and Arabia" JRAS, Oct. 1921. pp. 548-553.

An envoy Gujarat sent to Affonso De Albuquerque :-

The engagements of the joint navy of the Gujarat and Egypt at Chaul and Div, and the ultimate consequences at Div, opened new chapter in the history of the Portuguese relations with Gujarat. Before the battle of Div, it seems that, the Sultān underestimated the strength of the Portuguese in sea. The defeat of the navy of Gujarat, at Div, compelled the Sultān to change his policy regarding them. He subsequently followed defensive policy in dealing with them.

In 1510, as a preliminary step in this direction he sent an envoy to the court of Affonso De Albuquerque, to convey his master's desire for alliance. Following were some of the reasons for this new turn in the policy of the Sultan.

First, the Portuguese officer Francisco Pantoja, who was on his way to Socotra, in 1510, captured the Sultān's own vessel Meri (Fatḥ Meri) near Hormuz. The envoy on behalf of his sovereign requested Albuquerque, the return of the same. The Sultān in its return, offered to hand over the Portuguese prisoners in Gujarat to the Portuguese commander. For any further negotiations for this, the Sultan showed a desire to meet Albuquerque on any of the Gujarat Ports.¹¹

11. Commentaries - II, pp. 122, 208-209.

The superiority of the Portuguese in sea, after the battle of Div, was also responsible, for the change in the policy of the Sultan of Gujarat towards intruders. This was viewed seriously by the countries engaged in sea-borne commerce. It is also possible that Sultān Mahmūd might have considered a big fall in revenue, in case of prolonged enmity with the Portuguese.

The two letters sent to Albuquerque :-

The envoy had two letters with him, one from the Portuguese captives at the capital of Gujarat and another from Malik Gopi, who is described as the Chief Minister of the king of Cambay. ¹²

The letter from the Portuguese prisoners, contained the reasons for their detention in Gujarat. It was stated that they had sailed from Socotra in the ship "Santa Cruz" under the ^command of D' Affonso de Noronha. While passing from the Western coast of India, they captured a richly laden ship of Gujarat. Subsequently they were overtaken by a fierce storm and their ship wrecked on the Gujarat coast.¹³ The captain and other sailors on were drowned, while fifty or sixty people escaped. The Sultān at the complaint of some of the Muslims on board, the Gujarat ship captured

12. Commentaries - II, pp. 122, 208-209.

13. Ibid pp. 210-211.

by them, imprisoned them. Further that Malik Gopi, the minister of the Sultān on receiving the news of their imprisonment, had urged the Sultān to treat them fairly, with the result that they were now in chamber. They begged the Governor, to procure their release in any way.⁷⁴

The contents of Gopi's letter :-

Malik Gopi is described as a special friend of the Portuguese at the court of the Sultān of Gujarat both by Persian and Portuguese historians. It seems that at this time Malik Gopi was in the capital and from there he entrusted his letter to the messenger sent by Sultan Mahmūd to Albuquerque. In the letter, Gopi mentioned the trouble that he had to undergo to save the lives of Portuguese from people, when their ship wrecked. He had persuaded the Sultān to order the port officer to send them to the court. Accordingly, they were presented covered in chains, before the king their chains were removed by the Sultān's orders and commanded the officer in charge to provide them with the necessities for their maintenance. In the letter, he assured Albuquerque of his services as an intermediary between him and the Sultān; in respect of alliance and friendship between them. He suggested to Albuquerque that he should send a trust worthy envoy to the Sultan of Gujarat, with suitable presents, by way of Surat

74. Ibid pp.211-212.

port, and an assurance that the Portuguese ships would not in future disturb the maritime trade of Gujarat. Lastly, in concluding the letter; Gopi assured Albuquerque to get the prisoners set at liberty and secure freedom for anchoring the Portuguese ships on Gujarat ports.¹⁵

It may be noted here that Malik Gopi in his letter reveals himself as a friend of the Portuguese. By this letter also, it also appears that at this time, Malik Gopi, had gained the favour of Sultān Mahmūd and he was attempting to improve the relations of the Sultan with the Portuguese.

Albuquerque's reply :-

The envoy had to wait for some time for the reply of Albuquerque. In due course, the Portuguese guards took him to their Governor. In reply to the letter of the Sultān, Albuquerque asked the envoy to inform his master that he was preparing for an attack on Goa, and after its conquest he proposed to visit the Sultān and settle the terms of alliance. Further he requested the Sultān for the release of the Portuguese prisoners detained at his court.

In his letter to Malik Gopi, he assured the Malik that due consideration would be given to the Muslims who

15. Commentaries - II, pp. 212-213.

were taken in the Gujarat ship that had been captured, and asked for the King's wishes regarding the disposal of the ship and its crew. Albuquerque concludes with the hope of alliance between the King of Cambay and his master by virtue of which the former would find his harbours safe and his ships free to navigate the seas. The letter is dated September 16, 1510 at Cannanore.¹⁶

League between Gujarat and Egypt broken up :-

The fall of Goa, in November 1510, made a radical change in the attitude of the Indian princes towards the Portuguese. Till now they had faced the Portuguese only at sea but now it was found that on land also they had shown equal strength. Albuquerque's fortifying the captured town, was a signal to the Indian rulers that the Portuguese intended to carve out an empire for themselves on Indian territory.

It seems that Sultān ^a ^ū Mōhamed Shāh, realised this danger and so he did not show any more interest in continuing the alliance between Egypt and Gujarat. Amīr Husāin according to the "Commentaries" was still in Gujarat awaiting relief and reinforcements from Cairo. On hearing the loss of Goa, he obtained permission of the Sultān

16. Commentaries - II, pp. 215-217

Mahmūd to return. The Egyptian Sultan also gave orders to halt the construction of the fleet in progress at Suez. Thus the naval confederacy of the Muslim powers against the Portugal in the Indian sea was for a time effectually broken. ¹⁷ As a further step Sultān Mahmūd ordered the liberation of prisoners who had been captured.

17. Commentaries - III, pp. 19-20.