

## CHAPTER II

### RISE OF NAWABIS: BHARUCH, CAMBAY AND SURAT

Against the backdrop of the collapse of Imperial authority and the steady progression of the Marathas in the province of Gujarat, a significant development begins to gain momentum. This is the initiative on the part of ambitious Mughal administrative officials to assume a posture of defiance and recast themselves as either an autonomous or an independent entity, which ever was viable. It may be pertinent to note that the Marathas too were a rebellious polity which resorted to intrusion or encroachment in different areas following the assumption of their autonomy. From the 1720's their incursions in the provinces of Khandesh, Gujarat, Malwa, Berar, Agra and most of Orissa are seriously pervasive. Gradually, these areas came to be held by victorious Maratha *sardars* or commanders as their personal domains under the loose control of the Peshwa, the chief minister of the powerless Maratha royal dynasty. Incidentally, these domains became better defined after the third battle of Panipat.

On the whole the tendency towards assuming independence by *suba* officials was an emerging phenomenon operative in different parts of the Empire in the wake of the weakening of Imperial control. Significantly, this was marked by varying fortunes, succeeding in some cases and proving abortive in others, probably depending on numerous internal and extraneous circumstances specific to different regions.<sup>144</sup>

It was Nizam-ul-mulk, Asaf Jah, who set the trend in motion for *suba nazims* to carve out personal niches in provinces assigned to them by

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<sup>144</sup> P. J. Marshall, *The Eighteenth Century*, op. cit, pp. 4-5

assuming autonomy and detaching the provinces from the Empire in effective terms. He asserted his claim over the eastern Deccan as his personal sphere of jurisdiction. A survey of the Nizam's career indicates that he had always perceived the Deccan as his future personal domain. Subsequently, the precarious conditions in Delhi became the deciding factor in the establishment of the independent state at Hyderabad. Likewise, during the course of the first half of eighteenth century, Murshid Quli Khan too assumed increasing autonomy by combining the separate offices of the *nazim* and the *diwan* before establishing his independent dynasty which wielded authority over Bengal and Bihar. By the mid-eighteenth century, Awadh also emerged as an independent state under Safdar Jang, the son-in-law of Sadaat Khan, the *suba nazim* who embarked on the path of assumption of autonomy realizing the futility of politicking at the Imperial court.<sup>145</sup>

A crucial dimension in relation to all these three successor states was the strong element of localism involving both, firm authority in politico-economic terms over the region, and patronage and crucial linkages at different levels within the region which together provided the requisite equilibrium to wield effective political authority. Though the Imperial Mughals remained relevant they were too distant in effective terms to really matter as far as these polities were concerned. However, it is noteworthy that legitimacy to wield autonomous political authority emanated from the Mughal Emperor through a *sanad*, as the fledgling regimes in their incipency stood on a somewhat shaky ground.

The leadership in this emerging order came to be styled as the *Nawabs*. In the edited version of Yasin's Glossary of Revenue Terms, the

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5

term *Nawab* connotes a noble or an amir.<sup>146</sup> Satish Chandra describes the term *Nawab* as a title of rank; viceroy or governor.<sup>147</sup> Possibly this nomenclature was derived from the term *naib* meaning deputy.<sup>148</sup> However, the context during this period was somewhat differently larger and definite. While the position of *naib* or deputy at different levels was commonplace during the Mughal period evidenced in the office of the *naib nazim* and *naib faujdar* etc., the term *Nawab* in the eighteenth century, probably signified a *naib* or deputy of the Imperial authority. In effect the *Nawabs* exercised autonomy, political and fiscal, over the area in his charge which was sanctioned through an Imperial *sanad*. The *sanad* legitimizing his authority was obtained from the Emperor through contacts at the court and by presenting huge amount of *peshkash*. This stature was frequently sought through parleys and expensive gifts made to influential power brokers at the Imperial court after the assumption of a de-facto demeanor and usurpation of effective control over the area assigned in administration. In such a situation, the Emperor had little choice but to reconcile to the changing political scenario and hold on to whatever remained of the disintegrating Empire. The ascendancy of the *Nawabs* represented a paradox, reflecting the dwindling Mughal Imperial fortunes on the one hand and of the resilience of the Mughal state on the other.

Detailed reference has been made earlier to similar tendencies of autonomy in the province of Gujarat in chapter one. It is noteworthy that

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<sup>146</sup> Yasin's *Dastur-i-Malguzari*, tr and ed. as *An Eighteenth Century Agrarian Manual*, Hasan Mahmud Delhi, 2000, p 284

<sup>147</sup> Satish Chandra, *Medieval India*, part II, Delhi, 1999, p. 533. C. A. Bayly too describes this term as viceroy of a Mughal province. C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion*, Delhi, 2000, p. 506

<sup>148</sup> This term is described by Steingass as "A guard of soldiers; -nuab (pl. of *naib*), Vicegerents, deputies, lieutenants, governors; (in P. also sing.) a vicegerent, &c.; a nabob, Altesse, Highness (as title, m. c. ), F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, Munshi Ram Manohar Lal, Delhi, 1973 (Reprint), p 1458

despite the progressive Maratha intrusion in the province, appointment to the office of *nazim* of Gujarat continued to be the most sought after, amongst the nobles at this point of time. During the first half of the eighteenth century, four successive *suba nazims*, either directly or through their *naibs* or deputies, made a bid to establish their independent authority: Haider Quli Khan, Hamid Khan, the *naib* and uncle of Nizam ul Mulk, Sarbuland Khan and Abhay Singh. Significantly, the English sources frequently class these de facto *nazims* as *Nawabs*, probably in vague acknowledgement to the shift in their newly assumed autonomous or de facto stature. Similarly, in the text of the instrument offered to the *nagarsheth* Khushalchand by the Ahmedabad *mahajans* too, the rebel *nazim* Hamid Khan is styled as *Nawab* Hamid Khan.<sup>149</sup>

However, these initiatives towards assumption of autonomy proved to be abortive. When reports of the defiant activities of these *nazims* reached the Imperial court, orders were issued for their dismissal and recall.<sup>150</sup> The changeover to the new appointee was interestingly a military affair between the outgoing *nazim* and the *nazim* designate, probably a final bid in holding on to the province.<sup>151</sup> However, resistance in each of the four instances eventually failed to yield positive results and culminated in the exit of the defaulters from the province. A pertinent question in this connection is: why did these initiatives fail?

Haider Quli Khan, the first among such *nazims* in the region besides being a powerful noble at Delhi, had also served earlier in the province. In 1715 he had been appointed as the *suba diwan* and simultaneously held the position of *mutassadi* of Surat port for one year.<sup>152</sup> Further, as *naib*

<sup>149</sup>Instrument in Favour of Khushal Chnad, the *Nagarsheth* by the *Mahajans* of Ahmedabad, 1725, is reproduced in M.S. Commissariat, II, p. 423

<sup>150</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 410, 416, 470

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>152</sup> *Mirat*, pp 367-70, *Maathir ul uamra*, vol., I, pp. 600 - 601

*nazim* of Khan Dauran he managed the *suba* affairs for two years, 1717-19. It is noteworthy that during both these tenures he proved himself to be an able administrator. Revenue realization both at Surat and in the *Khalsa* lands had increased considerably.<sup>153</sup> Probably this experience in the province familiarized him to the attractive prospects of the region.

During the phase of turmoil preceding Muhammad Shah's accession, Haider Quli Khan rendered laudable services in the debacle of the Saiyyids which were amply rewarded. Besides titles, his *mansab* was raised to 7000/ 7000 and he was exalted to the office of *Mir Atish* or commander of the artillery. Further, in addition to this office which he delegated to Khan Zaman Mewati, he was assigned the *nizamat* of Gujarat along with the office of *mutassadi* of Surat.<sup>154</sup> It may be recalled that this appointment was despite his being dismissed from Surat earlier due to the unjust confiscation of the enormous inheritance of the shipping magnate Mulla Abdul Ghafur on his death in 1716.<sup>155</sup> Haidar Quli was probably entertaining hopes for the *vizarat* which however was assigned to Nizam-ul-mulk and this became a cause of immense dissatisfaction. On account of frequent clashes between both at Delhi, he was ordered to assume charge of Gujarat in person. Possibly, realizing that his fortunes at the centre were sealed, he focussed his energies in Gujarat. His moves towards the assumption of autonomy, described at length in chapter one,<sup>156</sup> were probably guided by an urge to carve out an independent niche for himself in line with the evolving trend of seeking spaces within the disintegrating Empire to survive the impending Imperial collapse. However, as is noted in the discussion in chapter one, his presumptuous actions were too frivolous and became the cause of his melodramatic exit

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid* pp 601

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Mirat*, pp. 370

<sup>156</sup> Refer to page No. 57-59 in chapter 1 for details on Haidar Quli Khan.

from the province. It is interesting to mention that though Haidar Quli sought support from the local officials for organizing resistance against his dismissal; none came forth despite tempting offers of generous gifts and honors. Significantly, the rationale put forward was that “it was not a private quarrel, but in opposition to the sovereign that he wanted their assistance. He had been dismissed from office and they were no longer under his orders” to obey.<sup>157</sup> Quite possibly, the locals did not want trouble with the central authority which might involve chastisement or displacement, though meddling in ‘private quarrels’ was not ruled out. Haidar Quli khan despite his enormous stature thus failed in actualizing his ambitions to establish independent authority for primarily three reasons.

Firstly, his arch rival Nizam-ul-mulk, the *wazir* was too powerful for him. While the position of the Emperor had weakened miserably, the Imperial court despite factionalism was still the principal power centre wielding substantial political authority to allow such developments to go unnoticed. Secondly, Gujarat was too strategic a region to be easily lost as yet. Moreover, Nizam-ul-mulk had his own definite plans of extending his concerns beyond the Deccan in Malwa and Gujarat. Haidar Quli’s presumptions of independence thus had little scope to go unheeded as far as the centre was concerned. While the sources do not specify the exact nature of local elements whose assistance was sought by the ousted *nazim*, it could be speculated that as far as the local officials were concerned, intervention in such feuds was deemed unwise. Unlike the *zamindars* who enjoyed a landed base and at least some clan support in the region and even beyond in some cases, the local nobles were solely dependent on the Imperial authority for their position and survival.

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<sup>157</sup> William Irvine, vol., II p. 129, Mirat, p. 410

Though some of these elements did assume a somewhat more meddlesome posture during the subsequent decades, at this point of time it was more of a wait and watch situation at their end. In view of this, the local nobility felt it appropriate to refrain from intervening in high level power play at Delhi.

The more important factor in this entire episode was the absence of the crucial element of localism. During his tenure both as the *naib nazim* and *nazim*, Haidar Quli Khan does not appear to have paid much attention towards forging the crucial linkages during the tenure of his office both at the level of the polity and economy within the province which could have served as his line of support at this juncture. Moreover, his confiscation of the properties of Mullah Abdul Ghafur was not taken kindly by the local commercial elites. Though he adopted a patronizing attitude towards the Babis<sup>158</sup> who figure as important components of the local nobility, on the whole his presence in the province was somewhat alien. It lacked adequate support at the level of the local polity and the commercial elite, both within and outside the province, which could have facilitated him to realize his ambitions of assuming autonomy.

The second attempt at assumption of autonomy was made by Hamid Khan, the *naib nazim* of Nizam ul mulk, who succeeded Haidar Quli Khan to the *nizamat* of Gujarat.<sup>159</sup> In all probability his actions were guided either by his desire to establish his independent sphere of influence in Gujarat or possibly he was instigated in assuming a

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<sup>158</sup> Ali Muhammad Khan gives details of rivalry between the two prominent Gujarati nobles Safdar Khan Babi and the *naib nazim* Shujat Khan, wherein Shujat Khan made an attempt to undermine Safdar Khan and his two sons, Salabat Muhammad Khan and Jawan Mard Khan by proposing to Haidar Quli Khan to transfer their offices and *jagirs* to himself and his relatives. He led an army to Kheda which was under the charge of Muhammad Babi, the son of Salabat Muhammad Khan, who proceeded to Delhi to represent his case to the *nazim*, who was in Delhi at that time, and the Emperor. It is significant that Haidar Quli Khan was well received and pacified by the Gujarat *nazim*. He further confirmed Salabat Muhammad Khan and his father and brothers in their *jagirs*, besides an addition to his mansab and the title of Sher Khan. *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 403-404.

<sup>159</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 410

rebellious stand by his nephew, Nizam-ul-mulk Asaf Jah. It may be noted that the Nizam had been working towards maintaining his personal hold in the Deccan and as Gujarat and Malwa were contiguous to the Deccan he was exploring possibilities of extending his influence or authority in these regions.<sup>160</sup> In all probability, his appointment to the *nazimship* of Gujarat was part of this larger scheme of establishing his independent authority over all these provinces. It was a matter of coincidence that these very areas had a strong Maratha presence, who constituted his principal rivals in the Deccan. The Nizam's fortunes were thus closely linked to that of the Maratha polity, components of which, interestingly figure both as his allies and opponents. Hamid Khan's negotiations and the conclusion of an alliance with the ambitious Maratha *sardars* was definitely an act of defiance, and what followed thereafter was a clear illustration of his attempt to establish his independent authority. Accordingly an agreement was made with Kanthaji Kadam Bande, the commander of the Maratha *senapati* Khanderao Dabhade, according to which the latter was promised the *chauth* or one fourth of the revenues of Gujarat in return for assistance to restore Hamid Khan.<sup>161</sup>

The subsequent course of events is a saga of devastating depredations led by the Marathas and the forces of the rebellious *naib nazim* Hamid Khan in the *suba* capital Ahmedabad and its vicinity. It is significant that Ahmedabad was held to ransom by the rebels and peace was bought for the city by its *nagarseth* Khushalchand. Eventually, Hamid Khan left the province in view of the arrival of new *suba nazim* Sarbuland Khan, who had been sent by the Emperor to assume charge of the province in person and chastise the rebellious elements.<sup>162</sup> Despite the patronage of the

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<sup>160</sup> Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the mughal Court*, p. 213

<sup>161</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 419

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p. 416



powerful Nizam-ul-mulk and the Maratha *sardars*, Hamid Khan failed to actualise his ambitions. An important dimension in this instance too was the absence of linkages with the local *zamindars*, bureaucrats and the commercial elites. This was particularly important in view of the sheer size and multiplicity of concerns in the region.

A close examination of Hamid Khan's brief administrative tenure in the *suba* is indicative of a demeanor of blatant opportunism and tyrannical oppression.<sup>163</sup> It is noteworthy that he enlisted support from elements, who despite being formidable, were intruding, belligerent fortune seekers, much dreaded and abhorred by the local populace and who had no qualms about resorting to duplicity.<sup>164</sup> Sheer military power, oppressive extortion, the alliance with the Marathas lacked the essential inputs for assuming independent authority. Even prior to his assuming autonomy, Hamid Khan's brief tenure failed to provide any element of the much needed stable governance in the province which was fast disintegrating. It would not be incorrect to state that his ambitions were like his predecessor, too frivolous and lacked crucial supporting linkages located within the province.

This was in striking contrast to the Nizam's treatment of the Deccan provinces wherein effective linkages were initiated at different levels within the region with a definite objective of carving out a specific sphere of influence. This significantly became viable in the Deccan despite the Marathas. It is quite likely that Gujarat and Malwa were perceived as probable accretions by the Nizam on account of their proximity to the Deccan. While Malwa remained under his control for sometime, his

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<sup>163</sup> Refer to page No. 74-78 in chapter one.

<sup>164</sup> In the instrument drawn in favour of Khushalchand the nagarsheth, by the Mahajans of Ahmedabad, the Marathas are classed as *ganimani* or marauders. This document has been translated in English and reproduced in original in Commissariat II, pp. 420-23. It is also noteworthy that Shamal Bhatt in his classical epic on these events, 'the Pavada of Rustom Ali', refers to the Marathas as *Dakshini gamin*, quoted from Commissariat, II, p. 422

ambitions in Gujarat remained unfulfilled. Though, certain areas in Gujarat continued to remain under his charge for quite some time, being assigned to him in *jagir*.<sup>165</sup> Through these he continued to maintain his influence as is noticeable in relation to the patronage extended by him to the *Nawab* of Bharuch.

Sarbuland Khan's effort at gaining autonomy is somewhat bolder than that of his predecessors and significantly more sustained. His *nizamat* lasted for roughly about five years, yet he too failed. During this five year tenure, Sarbuland Khan does not appear to have initiated any noticeable efforts to forge the crucial linkages with the local elements within the province or earn goodwill by improving governance which made him unpopular.<sup>166</sup>

In fact, forcible extortion, illegal imposts, fines, ransom money and over taxation (often levied as an advance for the next season) besides Biwarah had become routine features during his tenure which became cause of severe distress to the local populace.<sup>167</sup> It is noteworthy that, Sheth Khushalchand who had rendered laudable services to the residents of Ahmedabad in the face of the Maratha onslaught was subjected to immense harassment and extortion by the *nazim* who was provoked to this effect by his rivals aspiring for this position.

It is intriguing that despite his early victories in the military operations against the combined forces of the rebel, Hamid Khan and the Marathas, he chose to refrain from capitalizing on his achievements and surprisingly discontinued hostilities. Maratha depredations were responded with virtually no resistance from the *suba* authorities forcing the resident populace of invaded areas to pay *khandani*, a lump some

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<sup>165</sup> The Nizam's *jagir* in Gujarat included the *parganas* of Dholka, Bharuch, Jambusar and Maqbulabad or Amod, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p.485

<sup>166</sup> Refer to page number 59-64 for details on his Nizamat.

<sup>167</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p.470

tribute or fee to safer havens.<sup>168</sup> Often some of the predatory *kolis* operated in concert with the rebels, either as mercenaries or freebooters, with promise of covert sanction to plunder and loot.<sup>169</sup> Further, the Maratha mode of warfare had numerously proved to be unmatched for the slow moving Mughal forces.<sup>170</sup> In view of these factors, Sarbuland Khan probably deemed it wiser to reconcile to the glaring reality that the Marathas were there to stay. Instead of waging a futile war against them, he considered it was more appropriate to end hostilities and collaborate with them and thereby enjoy some breathing space in the changing scenario.

The only saving grace which provided some respite was the rivalry and infighting amongst the different Maratha components in Gujarat: the Peshwa, the Senapati and his rivaling *sardars*. In 1726, an agreement was concluded whereby the *chauth* of all the *parganas* north of the river Mahi with the exception of the capital and the *pargana haveli* was granted to Kanthaji, the commander of the Senapati.<sup>171</sup> With this alliance central and South Gujarat were virtually lost to the Marathas. When reports of these developments reached the Imperial court, the monthly subsidy of three lacs granted for ousting the Marathas from the province was discontinued. It is intriguing that despite this act of defiance he was recalled in 1730 from his charge of the province after roughly a span of four years.

It is further significant to note that though the sub regions of Saurashtra and Kutch were still under Mughal authority, tribute could be

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<sup>168</sup> An illustration of this attitude is noticeable during the attacks led by the Peshwa's officers on the prosperous town of Vadnagar. Despite appeals for help from the capital none was provided and the residents were compelled to pay rupees four lacs. The entire episode has been described at length in the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp.445-46.

<sup>169</sup> Instances in this connection have been cited in Chapter four at length.

<sup>170</sup> An illustration to this is found in Ali Muhammad Khan's description of the Maratha offensive led by Dhana Jadav. *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 318-325

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, p.447

exacted only through display of military force. A perusal of the campaigns undertaken by Sarbuland Khan 1727-29 shows that while chieftaincies in Saurashtra made sometimes feeble and sometimes firm attempts to resist payments, the ruler of Kutch put up stiff resistance, taking maximum advantage of the difficult terrain in the barren Rann which caused considerable losses to the *nazim*'s contingent. Interestingly, during the course of his campaigns, though we find Sarbuland Khan getting married to the daughter of Raja Pratapsingh of Halvad, the political implication of this marriage does not appear to be of particular relevance.<sup>172</sup>

Following the Kutch campaign in 1730, it is surprisingly fascinating to note that Sarbuland Khan's exactions provoked agitation from the prosperous Sunni Bohra community. The *nazim* was in need of funds to pay the soldiers who were becoming restless with their salaries falling in arrears, which is somewhat surprising, as substantial amounts were exacted as *peshkash* and fines during these campaigns. Further, as had become the routine practice, he imposed an amount which was to be exacted by 'means of *biwarah* from ryots and common folk' in the capital. 'This unpleasant innovation and illaudable tax was levied from the past on members of big Jamaat of wealthy Sunni Bohras in proportion of one-third of what was levied on Hindus'.<sup>173</sup> News from Delhi that Sarbuland Khan had been superceded in the region emboldened the Bohras to resist. Pleading their inability to pay, the Bohras resorted to organizing an agitation in resistance to this levy. The leadership of this agitation was assumed by Shaikh Abdullah, an obscure recluse whose

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, p. 452

<sup>173</sup> The entire episode is narrated by Ali Muhammad Khan. *Ibid*, pp. 465-66. Also see William Irvine Vol., II pp. 201-2

provocative speeches in the Jama Masjid effectively mobilized the community.

Initially the *nazim* strategically adopted a conciliatory stand, conveying to the assembly 'I have exempted the Bohras from *biwarah* out of respect for the Shaikh' and the crowd should thus disperse peacefully. At this stage Shaikh Abdullah feeling highly enamored by the impact of his leadership, assumed a more extreme position, demanding that 'the *biwarah* should not be imposed on the others' too and the *nazim* should leave the city. By 'others' he obviously meant the Hindus. Probably he saw this as an opportunity to gain the goodwill of the Hindus and emerge as the leader of a larger local community. Sarbuland Khan next ordered his general Ilahyar to use force and occupy the masjid where the riotous crowd was assembled. In the scuffle that took place some of the Bohras were killed and Shaikh Abdullah along with a few others were arrested. As a penalty, the impost to be levied from the community was doubled. It is significant that in this entire incident Sarbuland Khan emerged as the villain. He could have perhaps handled the situation more tactfully, thereby forging linkages with the prosperous Bohra community in the capital. On the other hand interestingly this episode is indicative of the intimacy between different sections of the local populace in situations of crises.

In 1726 the Peshwa's agents made an entry in the province from the north indulging in massive plunder and destruction.<sup>174</sup> The basic objective of the Peshwa, Baji Rao I was to undermine his arch rival the Senapati Trimbakrao Dabhade and his commanders by securing for himself the lucrative rights of *chauth* in Gujarat. Sarbuland Khan's strategy now was to align with the more prominent faction in the Maratha camp. The

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<sup>174</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 455

peshwa was definitely more powerful than the Senapati's *sardars*, Pilaji and Kanthaji. Following serious depredations and sustained negotiations from 1726-27 he was successful in concluding an alliance with the de facto *nazim* in 1730.<sup>175</sup> By this treaty Sarbuland Khan agreed to cede to the Peshwa the Sardeshmukhi, or ten percent of the entire revenue, both from the land and customs, with the exception of revenues accruing from the port of Surat and the districts attached to it, along with the *chauth* from these areas and five percent of the revenues of the city of Ahmedabad. In lieu of these revenue rights the Peshwa was to maintain a stipulated contingent of 2500 horse to maintain peace and promised to make no additional demands from the ryots. Further, on behalf of Shahu Raja, the Peshwa ironically expressed his commitment to uphold Imperial authority and prevent the Maratha *sardars* from supporting disgruntled *desais* and *zamindars*.<sup>176</sup> An important issue is, if the disgruntled *desais* and *zamindars* in the province could be patronized to become allies by the Marathas commanders like Pilaji, what prevented the 'Nawab' from attempting the same. Probably his exalted stature in comparison to the Marathas, the mystical aura of being a representative of the Imperial authority made him less approachable to the lesser elements. On the other hand, he possibly failed to gauge correctly the importance of this category which enjoyed a strong local base and could have become the much needed line of support.

It would not be inappropriate to state that while the ambitions of Sarbuland Khan were quite high, his strategy of merely forging links with the Marathas proved ineffective. It is ironical that while his alliance with

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<sup>175</sup> Details of these negotiations are discussed in Grant Duff I 1921 pp. 347; V.G.Dighe, *Peshwa Baji Rao I and Maratha Expansion*, 1944, pp. 32-33 and *Bombay Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Part I, p. 392.

<sup>176</sup> Allusion is being made to Pilaji the Maratha *Sardar* who by this time was well established in South Gujarat and seemed patronizing to the disaffected *Desais* and *Bhil* and *Koli Zamindars* located herein and in some of the *parganas* of central Gujarat.

the Marathas strengthened them, it eroded his own basis of wielding authority in the *suba* both as the *nazim* and as the '*Nawab*'. On the whole, his scheme of working towards the realization of his ambitions was again like his predecessors', too frivolous and lacked seriousness, foresight and practicality.

Abhay Singh the next *nazim* (1730-37) too assumed a similar demeanor of defiance by concluding an alliance with the Peshwa, thereby agreeing to the division of the revenues of Gujarat.<sup>177</sup> It may be recalled that his regime failed to offer any succor to the local populace who were somewhat caught in a devil and the deep sea situation. On the one hand was the oppressive regime of his *naib* Ratan Singh Bhandari and on the other side were the Marathas who by this time had penetrated much further in the province. Moreover, internal rivalries between the Marathas worsened matters, for the victims in such situations were the local populace. Within about two years Abhay Singh was convinced that the Marathas would eventually gain control over the province. The total hopelessness of the situation made him leave the province assigning the charge of whatever remained of *suba* Gujarat to his *naib*, Ratan Singh Bhandari whose oppressions were unprecedented.

Sheer military might was no longer the only essential attribute to wield and sustain a regime in the fast changing socio-economic scenario. While all these four attempts at gaining autonomy by the *suba nazims* failed, a significant development which gained momentum was the growth of a similar tendency but at lesser levels within the province, which significantly proved to be more worthwhile. By the 1740's the three important port towns: Surat, Bharuch and Cambay emerged as niches controlled by chiefs classed as *Nawabs*. Likewise in north Gujarat and

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<sup>177</sup>*Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 484, Gense and Banaji, I, p. 10

Saurashtra, besides the mainland, scions of the Babi dynasty assumed independent authority at Radhanpur, Junagadh and Balasinor and came to be classed as *Nawabs*. It is noteworthy that the fortunes of these *Nawabs* were marked by patterns of varying fortunes. Some survived as native states under the British colonial rule while others ceased to exist succumbing to the expanding concerns of the English East India Company. A brief survey of the rise of these *Nawabs* has been attempted hereon.

#### BHARUCH:

The rise of the *Nawabs* of Bharuch was closely linked to larger developments and concerns both within and outside the *suba*. Before proceeding further a brief mention of the economic importance of this area may be worthwhile.

Bharuch was an important port town marked by impressive commercial traditions that can be traced way back to the first millennium B.C. The port however lost its primacy as an entrepot for overseas trade to Cambay during the Sultanate period. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, though the importance of Bharuch was a relatively less prominent port, it remained an important centre for coastal trade. This was particularly so in view of land routes becoming unsafe due to the increasing predatory activities from multiple quarters in wake of law and order breakdown, thereby rendering substantial portion of coastal trade sea-borne, in small vessels. Significantly this enhanced shift to sea borne coastal trade gave an element of sustainable buoyancy to smaller port towns like Bharuch and Cambay.

Another significant aspect relating to Bharuch was its proximity to the richest cotton producing zone in western India. Also, a variety of textile classed as *baftas* which were in high demand were excellently bleached



here. Tavernier who visited Bharuch has noted in his travelogue that the river of Narbada was renowned for centuries for possessing a special property for perfect bleaching white calicoes ( Indian cotton textiles were so classed in Europe). <sup>178</sup> This peculiarity also finds a mention in a letter written by the president of the Surat Factory to the Company in 1639. <sup>179</sup>

Circumstances leading to the establishment of the *Nawabi* regime at Bharuch could be traced to the 1720's when Hamid Khan the *naib* of Nizam-ul-mulk chose to rebel against his dismissal and the appointment of Sarbuland Khan as the *suba nazim* in his place. The latter appointed the Gujarati noble Shujat Khan as his *naib*. Hamid Khan, however, refused to handover charge to the new appointee which became the cause of a serious civil strife. While hostilities were eventually neutralized through the intervention of Safdar Khan Babi and his two sons, Salabat Muhammad Khan and Jawan Mard Khan, and Hamid Khan left the *suba* capital Ahmedabad for Dabhoi, he was in no mood to actually yield. <sup>180</sup>

This defiance of Imperial orders assumed serious proportions when Hamid Khan, instigated by his nephew Nizam-ul-Mulk, sought assistance from Maratha *sardars* to reinstate himself in Gujarat. Nizam-ul-Mulk arrived at an understanding with Kanthaji Kadam Bande, whereby the latter was promised the *chauth* of Gujarat in return for collaboration against the Imperial forces. <sup>181</sup> Consequently, a serious internecine war commenced and continued for a year (1725-25). In this war, Shujat Khan and his brother Ibrahim Quli Khan were killed and Hamid Khan became

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<sup>178</sup> Taverniers 'Travels in India', I, p. 66, II, p.6.

<sup>179</sup> Commissariat Vol. II, p. 300.

<sup>180</sup> Mirar-i-Ahmadi, p. 416

<sup>181</sup> In view of the late wazir Nizam-ul-Mulk's being out of favour at the Imperial court, Shujat Khan had offered to attack him in the Deccan and the Emperor had granted three lac rupees to raise a contingent for this purpose. The *nizam's* response to this was enlisting support from the Maratha *sardar* in Gujarat. William Irvine, pp. 170-71. also see *Mirat-i -Ahmadi*, 419-423

successful in re-establishing his authority at Ahmedabad, which however proved to be a fleeting affair.<sup>182</sup>

On reports of these developments, Rustom Ali, the *mutassadi* of Surat and brother of Shujat Khan began to make preparations to reassert Imperial authority in Ahmedabad and avenge the death of his brothers. It is interesting to note that he too made an alliance with Pilaji Gaekwad, the Maratha commander against whom around this time he was engaged in military operations. Pilaji agreed to assist Rustom Ali in defeating Hamid Khan in return for payment of rupees one lac, besides other valuable presents.<sup>183</sup>

Around this time, Hamid Khan also initiated secret negotiations with Pilaji to collaborate against the Imperial forces, to which the latter agreed.<sup>184</sup> It is interesting to note that in such turbulent times opportunism and duplicity had become commonplace. Anyways, the Maratha presence in the province was predominantly guided by sheer mercenary considerations which made duplicity somewhat habitual. Moreover, unlike the Peshwa, the representative of Shahu or even his rival, the Senapati, the Maratha *sardars*, owed their position to their individual military achievements, besides the establishment of strong linkages with disgruntled local elements, the *zamindars* and *desais*. It gave them relatively greater discretion to manoeuvre situations to their advantage *vis a vis* their opponents and rivals. This dimension was totally lacking at the level of the four ambitious *suba nazims* who aspired for autonomy in Gujarat.

During the course of the campaign that ensued between the forces of Hamid Khan and Rustom Ali, it is noteworthy that both the Maratha

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<sup>182</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 419

<sup>183</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 428. According to William Irvine who also refers to Khafi Khan and Kamwar Khan, Pilaji was offered rupees two lacs by the rebels. p.176

<sup>184</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 427-433

*sardars* refrained from military action. Though Hamid Khan was initially defeated and forced to flee which made him furious, he had little choice but to maintain his alliance with the Marathas. When news of these developments in Gujarat reached the Deccan, the Peshwa's troops too arrived and joined in the depredations. Subsequently, Rustom Ali was soon outnumbered and brutally killed when the rebel allies initiated concerted action. The Marathas next spread themselves in virtually all the *parganas* of the *Suba* 'as ants and locusts', engaging in plunder and pillage exacting safety money Khandani.<sup>185</sup>

As per the agreement committed by Hamid Khan, the *chauth* for the lands on the Ahmedabad side of the Mahi River was given to Kanthaji, while those on the side of Baroda, Surat and further beyond in south Gujarat to Pilaji.<sup>186</sup> Accordingly, Bharuch came within Pilaji's sphere of operations. He briefly occupied Bharuch, appointed his deputy with Kasbati<sup>187</sup> troops and then departed to his headquarters at Songadh.<sup>188</sup>

For a short time, Bharuch was thus held by the Gaekwads. Meanwhile Sarbuland Khan, the new *suba nazim*, ordered Jafar Muhammad Khan to proceed to Bharuch to assume the office of *faujdar*. However, the implementation of this order appears to be uncertain. Around this time the deputy of Pilaji, left Bharuch for Songadh on false news of his chief's death. Interestingly when he returned, his Kasbati troops prevented him

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<sup>185</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 434

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>187</sup> The *Kasbatis* (literally meaning town residents) during this period were a numerous and warlike body of Muslim resident stationed in the towns. According to A. K. Forbes they were divided into three categories: the *menas*, *Rahens* and *Parmars*. The ancestors of the first two had perhaps migrated from Delhi as soldiers of fortune. The *Parmar Kasbatis* were the descendants of Rajputs who were settled in Botad as converts to Islam in the reign of Sultan Mahmud Begda. The *Kasbatis* of Dholka were favored by the Marathas as a counterpoise to the power of the Rajputs. Till the advent of the British power, they continued as a bold and turbulent class of mercenary soldiers whose leaders hired out military service. A. K. Forbes, *Ras Mala*, Vol. II, pp. 63, 66 ; Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. IV, pp. 147, 179-80.

<sup>188</sup> S.C. Misra, Introduction, *Qissa-i-Ghamgin*, Baroda, 1975, p. 2

from entering the town. The reason for this appears to be resentment due to non payment of dues.

Meanwhile the *nazim* appointed Mirza Abdullah Beg as the *faujdar* of Bharuch. It is surprising that he managed to secure the submission of the *kasbatis* which gave him some footing in the town. According to the English records the year of his appointment was 1728.<sup>189</sup>

In 1730, when Abhay Singh was appointed as the *suba nazim*, the combined charge of Baroda, Petlad and Bharuch was assigned to Saiyyad Azmatullah Khan Barha.<sup>190</sup> In the face of this development, Abdullah Beg felt compelled to look for an alternative line of patronage which significantly came forth from the powerful Nizam-ul-Mulk.

It is noteworthy that at this juncture, the Nizam too was in need of new supporters in the region for numerous reasons. Firstly, Bharuch constituted a portion of the Nizam's *jagirs* which were granted to him when he had been appointed as the *nazim* of Gujarat and continued to stand on his name.<sup>191</sup> Secondly, the *suba nazim*, Abhay Singh's alliance with the Peshwa, the arch rival of the Nizam in the Deccan compelled him to seek ways of undermining the Maratha leader whose influence were rapidly expanding in Gujarat. Further, the death of his ally, the Maratha Senapati Trimakrao Dabhade, to espouse whose cause he had marched to Gujarat in 1732 necessitated the forging of alternative lines of support. Abdullah Beg amply fitted in the Nizam's scheme of sustaining influence in the region. In view of these considerations we thus find Abdullah Beg receiving a *sanad*, a *mansab*, the title of Nek Alam Khan

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<sup>189</sup> Gense and Banaji Vol. II, p. 76

<sup>190</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p.470

<sup>191</sup> The Nizam's *Jagir* included the *parganas* of Dholka, Bharuch, Jambusar and Maqbulabad (or Amod) *Ibid*, p. 485.

and he hereafter began to exercise authority over Bharuch as the *naib* of the Nizam.<sup>192</sup>

This kind of disassociation from the *suba nazim*'s authority was an emerging pattern in other areas too, wherein *faujdar*s embarked on the path of assuming autonomy and establishing their de facto dynastic authority in the areas assigned to them. While this sort of defiance was obviously not permissible to a *faujdar*, the *suba nazim* by this time was left with little power and concern to check such tendencies. Eventually, this facilitated the actualization of dynastic ambitions and paved the way for the final disintegration. Significantly, the umbrella of the Nizam's patronage was the crucial factor in extending stability to the new lineage at Bharuch. This dimension was particularly important in the light of the formidable Maratha presence in this part of Gujarat.

Clashes between the Gaekwads and Nek Alam were naturally inevitable right from the beginning.<sup>193</sup> The mediation of the Nizam however neutralized antagonism between both the parties. Pilaji Gaekwad was an officer serving the Maratha Senapati Trimbakrao Dabhade and after his death, his son Yashwantrao Dahade who incidentally were the Nizam's allies in the Deccan and remained so even in Gujarat. Initially, probably at the instance of the Nizam, his *naib* the Mughal *faujdar* and the Gaekwad agreed to equally share the revenues of Bharuch.<sup>194</sup> Subsequently however the Maratha share classed as Swarajya however came to be enhanced which is reflective of the increasing Maratha power in these parts.

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<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, p. 485

<sup>193</sup> For a couple of years till his death in 1739 Abdullah Beg was successful in maintaining his authority over Bharuch despite the Marathas who around this time were preoccupied with expanding their concerns in North Gujarat and Saurashtra. This provided him with an opportunity to consolidate himself. *Mirat* p. 730

<sup>194</sup> Gense and Banaji I p. 41

Abdullah Beg was succeeded by his son Mirza Beg, who like his father continued to enjoy patronage from Nizam-ul-Mulk. He received the title of Nek Alam II and a *sanad* for the *parganas* held by him from his patron, the Nizam.<sup>195</sup> Meanwhile, the Marathas were persistent in their ambitions. In 1740 Damaji II, the son of Pilaji, besieged Bharuch. Nek Alam II turned to his patron the Nizam for help, whose intervention ended the hostilities. Eventually it was agreed that the Marathas 'should receive 6/10 and the moguls 4/10'.<sup>196</sup> Interestingly from the 40% classed as Mughlai, a substantial portion was to be remitted by the *faujdar* to the Nizam, his overlord. Technically, this portion was the balance which remained after deducting the expenses incurred for revenue collection. Ali Muhammad Khan in his narrative states that the Nizam's protégé put forward the excuse of maintaining *Sibandis*<sup>197</sup> and paying the Marathas in such a manner that he did not have to pay a dam to anybody.<sup>198</sup> This arrangement remained in operation till the death of his patron the Nizam in 1748.

Nizam-ul-Mulk was succeeded by his son Nasir Jang in the Deccan who however was fraudulently assassinated in 1751. In view of these developments, the over lordship of the Deccan *Nawab* ceased to exist. Nek Alam II found the moment appropriate to assume greater autonomy. Ali Muhammad Khan states that "He obtained through the Muqarrab-ul-Hazrat *Nawab* Bahadur, a mansab of 2000 zat and 500 sawar, a title of Nek Alam Khan Bahadur and a *sanad* for *parganas* from the office of the

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<sup>195</sup> *Mirat* pp 730

<sup>196</sup> Gense and Banaji Vol I, pp.41

<sup>197</sup> According to Yasin's Glossary, the *Sibandis* were soldiers both the sawars and piyadas recruited by the *faujdar*s and *Hakims* at the time of maturity of crop and dismissed at the onset of the rainy season. They were re-employed again at the time of harvest to facilitate the process of revenue collection. Yasin's *Dastur-i-Malguzari*, op. cit., p.216. However, the *sibandis* were also recruited as irregulars in the army.

<sup>198</sup> *Mirat*, p.730

royal crown lands”.<sup>199</sup> By this move, in effect he legitimized his autonomous stature as the *Nawab* besides extending a sound fiscal base to his fledgling lineage.

It is fascinatingly ironical that while legitimacy to wield political power emanated from the Imperial authority, its effective position by this time had weakened considerably, barring the privilege of making nominal appointments and issuing *sanads*. This survival and continuation of Mughal institutions and traditions is however very important. The *sanad* issued in the name of the Imperial authority was very crucial and its procurement or arrangement involved considerable payments as bribes, the amounts of which are obviously not clearly spelt out. Nonetheless, the emerging political order found it convenient to cloak their authority by professing to exercise the same on behalf of the Emperor. Significantly, the price of this was usually a lump sum payable only while the *sanads* had to be ‘arranged’ from the Imperial court. Legitimacy emanating from the much diminished Mughals is a marker to the sound foundations and resilience of this regime which despite its dwindling fortunes continued to remain the reference point of political legitimacy.

Following the death of Nek Alam II in 1754, a precarious dynastic strife surfaced at Bharuch.<sup>200</sup> The charge of Bharuch was assumed by Khair Talab Khan, the younger brother of Nek Alam II, while his son Hamid Khan felt compelled to seek refuge at Surat. Khair Talab Khan, prone to profligacy and addicted to wine and women, survived for barely three months. Administrative affairs during this brief period were managed through a *naib*. Following his death, Bibi Bholan, a wife or mistress of Nek Alam I assumed authority as regent for the deceased ruler’s son Hasan Ali Beg who was a minor. Administrative and financial

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<sup>199</sup> *Mirat*, p.730

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 771-776. Also refer to commissariat Vol.II, pp. 520-22

matters were looked after by Muhammad Hashim. This was naturally resented by Hamid Khan, who stationed at Surat, viewed himself as the rightful heir. The role played by a woman in such turbulent times is quite amazing and reflective of the nature of gender relations.

Both the contending parties rallied all the available resources and significantly the military operations that ensued were seaborne. The first attempt by Hamid Khan to take Bhrauch by military action proved to be a failure. He next smuggled himself in disguise with the help of an opportunistic Maratha mediator Bhagwan who however resorted to duplicity by exposing him.<sup>201</sup>

Eventually Hamid Khan sought the assistance of the Idrussi Saiyid chief, Saiyid Abdullah who looked after the monastery of Saiyid Idrus at Surat and was highly revered and popular both in Surat and Bharuch. This Saiyid commanded a large following among the local commandants of troops. Incidentally, these troops had not been paid their salaries for quite sometime which made them restless and they sided with Hamid Khan who promised to pay the long overdue arrears if they supported him. Armed conflict ensued between both the parties and interestingly truce was made through the intervention of moderates who argued and tried to convince Bibi Bholan to reconcile to the regency to Hamid Khan in view of the precarious times. The Marathas were rapidly consolidating their presence in the region. Possibly feeling hard pressed, she yielded but only temporarily.<sup>202</sup>

Hamid Khan next worked towards consolidating his position by dismissing his opponents and summoning his relatives, important among who were Qadir Baksh, Inayat Bakshi and others.<sup>203</sup> It is interesting to

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<sup>201</sup> Commissariat II, p, 521, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 774

<sup>202</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 773-74

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, p. 776



note that he chose to reside at Miyagaam, located about 12 kurohs from Bharuch with his brothers and dependents which incidentally was under the control of his close associate Ranmal, the *koli* zamindar.<sup>204</sup>

Meanwhile Bibi Bholan, still active in her efforts to regain her lost position, sought the help of one Makhu Beg, a relative of Abdullah Beg who was tempted with the promise of the post of *naib*. She also sought the help of the *naib*, Muhammad Hashim, who was at Miyagaam, asking him to also enlist *kolis* for military operations. In the conflict that took place, Hamid Khan emerged victorious. He next secured through his agents at the Imperial court grant of a mansab, the title of Nek Alam Khan Bahadur and a *sanad* for the *faujdari* of Bharuch and assumed the title of *Nawab*, a marker of his semi independent dynastic status. Probably a similar sanction was also secured from Hyderabad.<sup>205</sup> Both the power centres, at Delhi and Hyderabad, had little choice but to accept the harsh reality of the changing circumstances and hold on to whatever remained within their specific spheres of influence.

The developments marking the rise of this *Nawabi* are significant as they illustrate the structure of power relations and provide insights to the relationship between different components of power, particularly during this phase of transition of political authority.

At the apex stood the Marathas represented by the Gaekwads and Hamid Khan, the grandson of Abdullah Beg, the Mughal *faujdari* who about thirty years back had virtually no connection with the local elite. S.C. Misra, in his introduction to the *Qissa-i-Ghamgin*, describes Abdullah Beg as a 'graft on Bharuch' who derived legitimacy to wield

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<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p.776; Gense and Banaji II, pp. 76-78: *Qissa-i-ghamgin*, Introduction p. 5. Commissariat, II, p. 520.

political authority from external agencies: the Emperor, and the Mughal noble, the Nizam.

The principal factor which enabled Abdullah Beg to consolidate his coup attempt was his ability to maintain influence and authority over the leaders of the mercenary militia, the *kasbatis* and the *sibandis*.

Ideology was indeed an important dimension of power relations and occupied a relevant space in a state system. Three decades hence, as these elements were ideologically affiliated to their religious patrons who in this case were the Idrussi Saiyyids, we find Hamid Khan strategically enlisting their support. As for the Marathas, their interest appears to be purely monetary which they maintained firmly. This concern of theirs is clearly reflected in their enhancement of their share to sixty percent from the earlier fifty percent.

Besides the soldiery and the Idrussi Sayyids, another important component within the locally dominant elite was the economically prominent Hindu families who were traditionally associated with the complicated task of revenue collection. They were also in pursuit of different commercial activities like credit finance, banking, cotton trade and various other retail businesses. The perennial need of funds and the complexities involved in land revenue administration made them indispensable, besides remaining the close confidants of the *Nawabs*.<sup>206</sup> This nexus is particularly noticeable in the position and role of Lallubhai, the chief advisor and minister of Muazziz Khan, the last *Nawab* of Bharuch (1769-72).

Lallubhai was the nephew and adopted heir of his maternal uncle Bhaidas. Kishoredas Munshi, the author of *Majmua-i-Danish*, testifies to the abilities of the two Mehtas, Bhaidas and Bhukahndas, majumdars

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<sup>206</sup> Commissariat, pp. 521-22

under Hamid Khan as “[those] who discharged their duties so efficiently that they were considered equal to Todar Mal and Birbal.”<sup>207</sup> The ancestors of Bhaidas’ had been involved with revenue collection since Shah Jahan’s reign and had been assigned a *jagir*, besides the right of Palki (to ride in a palanquin) for the maintenance of which a separate grant was also sanctioned.<sup>208</sup> In a letter written in 1772 by John Morley, the English resident at the court of Muazziz Khan, it is indicated that Bhaidas was instrumental in Hamid Khan’s accession and he remained influential throughout his regime. According to Morley’s information, it appears that Bhaidas and Bhikharidas,<sup>209</sup> the two influential *bania* residents at Bharuch were rivals, and besides their traditional involvement in revenue administration they, by this time, also appear to play a meddlesome role in the ensuing dynastic strife.

Hamid Khan’s removal from Bharuch and retirement to Surat, shortly after Khair Talab Khan’s accession, was at the behest of Bhikharidas who provoked his master against the intentions of Hamid Khan. Morley further states that Bibi Bholan was supported by Bhikharidas. In response, his rival Bhaidas prevailed upon the commanders of the militia to conspire and side with Hamid Khan, promising suitable rewards in the event of success. Interestingly, on Hamid Khan’s accession, Bhaidas was successful in getting his rival treacherously assassinated.<sup>210</sup>

It may be noted that despite the basic incongruence of the two apex authorities at Bharuch, the *Nawab* and the Gaekwads, both Damaji and

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<sup>207</sup> Quoted in Munshi Abbas Ali’s *Qissa-i-Ghamgin*, ed. S. C. Misra, Introduction p.7

<sup>208</sup> This reference is based on Ganeshram Himmatram Desai’s *Bharuch Shehr no Itihas*, quoted in the Introduction to the *Qissa-i-Ghamgin* ed, S.C.Misra, p.7 The discussion indicates that Bhaidas and Bhukahndas were father and son.

<sup>209</sup> According to G.H.Deasi, the family of Bhikharidas was well known and had been appointed as chaudharis during the reign of Akbar. By 1667 during the reign of Aurangzeb, the number of chaudharis had increased considerably so they elected Gordhandas Jagjiwandas and one other (perhaps the family of Bhaidas) to their headship as Desai. Since then these Desais determined the amount which was to be taken from the villages as revenue. *Bharuch Shehr no Itihas*, p.131

<sup>210</sup> Gense and Banaji II pp 76-77

the *Nawab* entrusted all the administrative and the revenue matters to these experts who were well versed with their functions and enjoyed strong influence over the primary agrarian classes. Kishoredas states that “it goes to their credit that on account of their enterprising spirit and excellent administration, for a period of twelve years neither the Gaekwad had any occasion for misunderstanding with the *Nawab* nor the *Nawab* had any doubts about their faithfulness in spite of their service in dual capacity....”<sup>211</sup> This arrangement amazingly continued over to the next generation. Lalludas managed the administrative, financial and diplomatic affairs for both his patrons, the *Nawab* and the Gaekwad. He also figures as the principal mediator between the *Nawab* and the English. At a later point we see him advising Damaji’s son Fatehsinghrao and the English too.<sup>212</sup>

An intriguing issue is: what prevented these elements from assuming higher political authority or remaining effectively apolitical despite their administrative, financial and diplomatic role? Their actual masters were merely military chieftains. Though they had in no manner assumed a military character, they wielded considerable influence at least enough to manoeuvre military commanders. A possible explanation might be the caste and occupational inhibitions against realization of such aspirations which were deeply internalized in their sensibilities. Another factor might be sheer practical consideration. Masters may be two or more and might even change, but these elements continued to look after revenue collection. Quite possibly the strong commercial spirit inherent in this region, and particularly among the *bania* caste, urged these elements to refrain or at least maintain distance from the more risky business of assuming direct political authority, especially in these turbulent times. A

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<sup>211</sup> *Majmua-i-Danish*, op. cit., p. 8

<sup>212</sup> *Qissa-i-Ghamgin*, Introduction, p. 9

more valid factor which probably acted as a deterrent and was lacking in them was the crucial element of legitimacy to wield political authority, which at this point of time continued to emanate from the Mughal Imperial authority. The situation however began to change with the increasing ascendancy of the English in the region which necessitated intermediaries and Lallubhai seemed to fit in their framework quite suitably as is visible in the subsequent course of events which mark the end of the *Nawabi* at Bharuch. In Munshi Abbas Ali's *Qissa-i-Ghamgin*, Lallubhai figures as the anti-hero, who despite being fully trusted by his patron *Nawab* Imtiyaz ud din Diler Jang, Muazziz Khan,<sup>213</sup> operates in conjunction with the expanding English concerns in the region.<sup>214</sup>

Despite firm local linkages, the fortunes of the new *Nawabi* at Bharuch proved to be short-lived, as this town soon passed under English control. The entire course of events forms the theme of the Urdu *masnavi*, the *Qissa-i-Ghamgin* which narrates the tragedy of Bharuch. The fall of Bharuch to the English was the outcome of the growth of major forces in the region - the Marathas (Gaekwads), the Peshwa and the English. A brief discussion of these developments is essential to understand the dynamics underlying the emerging political patterns in the region.

In 1758 Ahmedabad passed under Maratha control and this date marked the commencement of the dual regime of the Peshwa and the Gaekwads which was overall quite complicated due to succession disputes both in Poona and Baroda and the attempt of the Peshwa at Poona to maintain a commanding position as the principal authority of the Maratha confederacy. Meanwhile in 1759, the English assumed de facto authority over Surat while the Mughal representative was reduced to

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<sup>213</sup> Nek Nam Khan was succeeded by his son Muazziz Khan in 1769. Commissariat, II, p.520

<sup>214</sup> References from this work are based on the unpublished transcribed version of this text in *devnagari* script in the possession of the Department of History, M.S.University Baroda.

a mere figure-head. An insight to this is found in the following observation of the admiral stravoinus who was at Surat in 1774, "The English give laws to all, neither Europeans nor Indians can do anything without their special approbation. The governor of the city does not in this respect differ from the lowest inhabitant. He must obey their commands, although they show him externally some honour, and will not in public allow that he is subservient to them".<sup>215</sup> The establishment of the political authority of the English East India Company at Surat became the precursor to the Bharuch crisis as it gave them a chance to meddle in its affairs.

The pretext was the claim of the Surat *Nawab* over the *furza* or customs revenue accruing from the Bharuch port. The basis of this claim is highlighted in a letter written by the *Nawab* of Surat in 1771 to the British Governor and President at Bombay, William Hornby, wherein he states that the *furza* of Bharuch had been assigned to the Surat governors by the Mughal Emperors. It appears that this arrangement was operative for about 150 years. However since the last 40 years it had ceased, following the establishment of the *Nawabi* at Bharuch. The *Nawab* of Surat being in no position to enforce his demand sought the intervention of his English protectors for the reclamation of this amount which had by this time fallen in huge arrears totaling to Rs. 28, 00,000 computed at the rate of Rs. 70,000 per year.<sup>216</sup> Such an attempt to revive an obsolete Mughal legacy was quite unwarranted and awkward on the part of the *Nawab* of Surat, particularly in view of his own weak position and the reduction of the Emperor to a mere figurehead as a pensioner of the English East India Company. As far as the English were concerned, any such appeal for intervention was always an attractive proposition.

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<sup>215</sup> Quoted from Commissariat, III, p. 682

<sup>216</sup> Gense and Banaji II pp.2-4

It may be worthwhile to mention that opportunism was a rampant phenomenon during this phase of transition. Besides the English and the *Nawab* of Surat, covetous eyes were cast on this area by other ambitious powers too: Momin Khan, the *Nawab* of Cambay (who offered to buy Bharuch from the English), and Damaji's son Fatehsingh Gaekwad of Baroda. In view of the dynastic rivalry and controlling influence of the Peshwa at Poona, for Fatehsingh Gaekwad, alliance with the English was the most natural and viable proposition. In April 1772, he approached their chief Mr. Price at Surat offering 'an alliance offensive and defensive with the Hon'ble Company',<sup>217</sup> He also promised the Peshwa's share to the English. Foregoing his claim over Bharuch to the English in the process of undermining the influence of the Peshwa was also a strong possibility in future negotiations.

Simultaneous to this earlier mentioned reclamation of *furza* revenues, the English had their own demands from the *Nawab* of Bharuch. According to an agreement made with the *Nawab*, it was decided that only 1.5% duty would be collected on all the goods belonging to the merchants trading under the Company's protection. This duty was raised to 2.5% in the last six years. The difference was estimated at Rs. 25,000 per year and for six years the figure computed to Rs.1, 50,000. The President and Council at Bombay communicated to England thus, 'the just demand the government has on that of Broach is about thirty lakhs'.<sup>218</sup> An understanding was arrived at between the *Nawab* of Surat and the English according to which it was agreed that one third of the amount recovered would be the share of the *Nawab* and likewise a third portion of the expenses incurred for effecting this claim would be borne by him.

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<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.* II PP.63-64

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid* II PP.2-4

The first expedition against Bharuch in may 1771 proved to be unsuccessful though the reason for this was not a strong line of defense at the *Nawab*'s end. Rather, it was due to the lack of effective coordination from the English side.

Judging the seriousness of the whole matter we see the *Nawab* initiating diplomatic negotiations which fructified in the conclusion of a treaty of 'peace and friendship' in November 1771. This treaty significantly gave the English a more definite status at Bharuch. Accordingly, it was agreed that persons trading under the Company's passes were exempted from the payment of custom duty in any area falling within the jurisdiction of the *Nawab*; a factory was to be set up at Bharuch; the *Nawab* was to assist the Company in its wars and in return he too would be supported in all wars that he should engage in with the consent of the company authorities or in an eventuality of being suddenly attacked in his territories by his enemies. Lastly, the *Nawab* was bound to pay Rs. 4,00,000 in full discharge of all the claims made against him.<sup>219</sup> This amount was to be disbursed in installments. In April 1772, James Morley was sent as resident at Bharuch to effectively execute the treaty.

Despite this treaty, however, very soon differences began to grow between both sides. In the face of Maratha attacks on the *Nawab*'s forces and in spite of his representation to the English for aid, none came forth which compelled him to initiate hostilities against the Marathas.<sup>220</sup> The damages suffered during the Maratha encounter made Muazziz Khan

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<sup>219</sup> As per the information provided in the English documents the total amount due from the *Nawab* by this time had increased to nearly thirty three lacs: twenty eight lacs being the customs arrears; one and half lacs for the customs recovery ,and three lacs for the expenses incurred during the first expedition against Bharuch. *Ibid*, II, pp.51-55

<sup>220</sup> In this connection it appears that there was a partial default at the *Nawab*'s end too as he had failed to pay heed to the advice of the governor at Bombay to organise the movement of troops within a stipulated time-frame in view of the arrangement of relevant passes from Poona to ensure the safety of the *Nawab*'s contingent. *Ibid* II pp.65-70



interpret the treaty of friendship as null and void and its terms non-operational. In response, the English appear to have assumed a bolder demeanor by initiating moves towards effecting control over this principality.

Efforts began to be made by James Morley to collect all possible information pertaining to the state of the revenues of Bharuch and its dependencies, the diplomatic stature of the *Nawab*, his military strength and most importantly, the worth of his treasury.

On the basis of reports from the locals, principal among whom was a Parsi agent Nawroji, it was estimated that the *Nawab* maintained about 2000 troops of which 200 were horsemen. Rupees 5000 was the annual custom duty, while revenues from the city amounted to approximately Rs. 20000/- per annum. Besides the town of Bharuch, revenues from about 175 villages which fell within the jurisdiction of the *Nawab* amounted to approximately Rs.7,00,000/- per annum. This entire collection was divided between the Gaekwad and the *Nawab* in the ratio of 60:40 as per the ongoing arrangement. Further on, the *Nawab*'s administrative expenses amounted to about Rs. 100,000/- while another Rs. 50,000/- took care of his household. More fascinating were reports that the *Nawab* had at least about forty lacs worth of Rupees in specie in his treasury which perhaps induced the English to hasten the conquest of Bharuch.<sup>221</sup> This last portion of information in all probability was a grossly wild estimate as is evidenced in the *Nawab*'s desperate plea of inability to fulfill the payment of the first installment of Rs.200,000/- agreed as per the treaty of 1771 due to poor rains. He initially was able to tender bills worth Rs. 30,000/- only along with jewels, gold, pearls etc. which valued to barely Rs. 50,000/- . Further evidence of the *Nawab*'s financial

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<sup>221</sup> Gense and Banaji, II, pp. 69-70

inadequacy is noticeable in Morley's own report that the *Nawab*'s troops were disaffected as their salaries had fallen in arrears for several months. The Company authorities refused to accept payment in this form and somehow obstinately insisted on remaining unconvinced about the *Nawab*'s financial inadequacies.<sup>222</sup>

Opinions against the *Nawab* were manifold on the English side. Resultantly, the British resident was recalled from Bharuch and following considerable deliberation and consultation, the Council Board decided in favor of organizing an expedition for the capture the town. Shortly after, the commencement of military operations, the hard-pressed *Nawab* fled the town. About four months later, he died as a fugitive at Dehwan, at the age of just forty two. For over a decade, 1772-1783 Bharuch and its dependencies remained under English control till they were handed over to Mahadji Sindhia after the treaty of Salbai.

It is worthwhile to mention that following his flight from Bharuch, Muazziz Khan went to Amod which was held by a *girasia* chieftain who however refused to provide refuge. Munshi Abbas Ali states that it was Lallubhai (called *badzaat* or base born) who pressurised the chieftain not to give refuge to the *Nawab*.<sup>223</sup> Lallubhai's tentacles were definitely well spread out. *Nawab* Muazziz Khan then proceeded to Dehwan on the north bank of the river Mahi, where he was given shelter in a chivalrous manner by its *koli* chief Jalim Jalia.<sup>224</sup>

## CAMBAY

Cambay located about 52 miles from Ahmedabad was an important port town. During the phase of Imperial disintegration, like Bharuch, this port

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<sup>222</sup> *Qissa-i-Ghamgin*, pp 87-97, 105

<sup>223</sup> *Qissa Unpublished Manuscript* p, 138, S.C.Misra, ed. *Qissa*, Introduction, p. 12

<sup>224</sup> *Qissa Unpublished MS.* p. 140

town too saw the rise of a *Nawabi*. Before proceeding further, a brief overview of Cambay's history is essential to appreciate its economic significance and context in relation to the emerging polity.

The origin of this port is traced way back to the illustrious Solanki era (942-1242). In view of both geomorphological and political developments Cambay emerged as a substitute to Bharuch and Somnath Patan, as the principal entrepot for overseas trade since antiquity. The latter was subject to continuous Mongol and Turkish raids which rendered the Somnath Anhilwad route dangerous.<sup>225</sup> During the reign of Siddharaj Solanki (1094-1143) Cambay developed into a well established commercial centre. Al Biruni 970-1039 in his memoirs provides details on its strong commercial linkages with Persia, Arabia, East African ports, China and the Far East besides flourishing coastal trade with the ports of Malabar and Coromandel in the south and overland connectivity to Multan.<sup>226</sup>

Under the Muzaffarids, the importance and prosperity of Cambay increased manifold. It is worthwhile to mention that Duarte Barbosa, the Portuguese official who visited Gujarat in the early sixteenth century addresses the Gujarat Sultans as 'King of Gujarat's Kingdom of Cambay' thereby highlighting the economic standpoint of the Gujarat Sultanate.<sup>227</sup> Similar classification also appears in other Portuguese sources. Besides providing essential incentives to promote trade and commerce, the Muzaffarids particularly Mahmud Shah I Begada, 1458-1511 paid special attention towards the promotion of varied forms of craft production. In fact under state patronage, Ahmedabad and Cambay developed as principal centres of varied crafts and industry. Among the

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<sup>225</sup> V.A. Janaki, *The Commerce of Cambay from the Earliest Period to the Nineteenth Century*, Dept. of Geography, M.S. University, Baroda, 1980, p.14

<sup>226</sup> E.C. Sauhau, *Al Biruni's India*, Reprint, 1964, pp. 208-209

<sup>227</sup> The Book of Duarte Barbosa, ed. M. Longworth Dames, Vol., I Hakluyt Society London, 1918, p.117

different industries like leather work, shoe making, lacquer work, the classical agate industry, ivory work, gold ornaments, arms industry, etc. that flourished at Cambay, the most prominent was the cotton textile industry. Commenting on this industry Barbosa states that Cambay 'is situated in a pleasant district rich in supplies and in the city dwell substantial merchants and men of great fortune both Moors and Heathen. It has many craftsmen of skill. Here are woven white and cotton fabrics, and others printed in patterns, also much silk cloth and coloured velvets, velvety satins and tafetas'<sup>228</sup> It is fascinating to note that as many as twenty different varieties of cotton fabrics were exported from Cambay.

By the turn of the century, however, Cambay suffered a major setback, being gradually substituted by Surat as the principal entrepot, a situation akin to its own rise during the early medieval times. An explanation forwarded in this regard was the silting of the navigation channels in the gulf which prevented big ships from entering. A. Ray however views this argument as a myth recalling R.N. Mehta's thesis that due to geo-morphological reasons the sea had been receding from the Gujarat coast due to the silting of the coast line. In his opinion the decline had little to do with silting as the situation of mud-flats (area of fine silts exposed at low tide and covered at high tide) existed since its origins. This feature was applicable even to Surat which however was prospering.<sup>229</sup> Besides disturbances along routes leading to Cambay in wake of Mughal conquest and expansion in Gujarat, a more serious dimension added at this juncture was the arrival of the Europeans starting with the Portuguese, subsequently followed by the entire course of coercive trade practices, besides ruthless rivalry among the different

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<sup>228</sup> Book of Duarte Barbosa, op. cit., vol., I, pp. 140-41

<sup>229</sup> Aniruddha Ray, op. cit., p.34. Also see R.N. Mehta, 'Khambhat: Topographical, Archeological and Toponymical Perspective' in *Journal of the M.S. University of Baroda*, Vol., XXIV, 1975, No. 1, p.28.

European concerns in the region, which though significantly counterpoised the impact of the Portuguese presence.

Nonetheless, Cambay did not totally become dysfunctional as a sea-port. Some overseas trade, besides coastal and overland, continued to flourish at Cambay. The initial phase of Portuguese belligerence at Cambay was pacified after the Mughal conquest of Gujarat. An important dimension of consolidation was the conclusion of a treaty with the Portuguese in 1573 recognizing their claim over the Gujarat trade with a free *cartaz* for the Imperial ships.<sup>230</sup> It is significant that both the English and the Dutch set up their factories at Cambay in 1616 and 1617 respectively. While fortifications ensured security, Jahangir's reduction of the port duties to 1/40<sup>th</sup> from 1/10<sup>th</sup> and 1/8<sup>th</sup> was indeed an important attraction for foreign merchants.<sup>231</sup>

During the course of the seventeenth century, the Portuguese were steadily displaced by the English in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, the lucrative trade in spices in the Far-East came to be dominated by the Dutch. It is important to mention that these spices could be procured predominantly in exchange for Indian textiles. Thus, the textile industry became the focal point of competing European commercial concerns. To undermine the Dutch monopoly in spices it became imperative for the English to establish their control over the Indian textile trade. Resultantly the next step was the more direct participation and penetration of the English in the textile production. Success in trade was directly linked to control over production. Thus Ahmedabad, Broach, Cambay, Surat and its supporting textile hinterland, the villages and smaller towns involved in the manufacture of cloth came to be integrated within the purview of English Commercial enterprise.

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<sup>230</sup> M.N. Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, California, 1976, p. 83

<sup>231</sup> *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, tr, A Rodgers, Vol. I, London, 1909, pp. 415-24

Cambay and its surrounding areas, famous for both silk and cotton textiles, constituted an important dimension of English strategic concerns. Further innovations like the *jajmani* and *dadni* system facilitated the smooth procurement of commodities despite situations of wars or famines.

However, the port town of Cambay, which came to house another *Nawabi*, was a region relatively much diminished in economic terms *vis a vis* its illustrious past. From the early eighteenth century the concerns of Cambay were predominantly linked more closely with Ahmedabad than Surat on account of increasing Maratha prominence in south Gujarat. The city remained important as it served as a clearing house between Ahmedabad and Surat. One of the major trade routes from Ahmedabad to Surat was through Cambay. However, absence of an effective political authority gave an opportunity to fringe categories: *kolis*, *kathis* and *Grasias* besides Rajputs to indulge in predatory activities in the region causing frequent disruptions. When Alexander Hamilton visited Cambay in the early eighteenth century he made a note of both desertion and insecurity stating “Rasspoutes and coolies .....plunder even the gates of the city, sometimes even the city itself”.<sup>232</sup> Despite this, evidences of the region’s economic resilience are noticeable, such as the weavers maintaining the supply of yarn from the surrounding areas.<sup>233</sup>

From 1725, conditions at Cambay were marked by predatory attacks, oppressive extortions and virtually ineffective governance. An important dimension of the *suba naib nazim* Hamid Khan’s revolt was his alliance with the Maratha *Sardars* Kanthaji and Pilaji. When he returned victorious to Ahmedabad after the battle of Adas 1725 along with his

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<sup>232</sup> Alexander Hamilton, A new Account of the East Indies, (An observation and Remarks of Captain Hamilton who spent his time there from 1688-1723), ed. W. Foster, London, 1930, vol, I, pp. 389-90.

<sup>233</sup> Aniruddha Ray, op. cit., p.36

Maratha allies, they began ravaging the surrounding areas demanding *chauth* as per the agreement with the rebel Hamid Khan.<sup>234</sup>

On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1725, Daniel Innes, the English agent at Cambay reported that Pilaji and Kanthaji had encamped separately outside the city walls and demanded five lacs of rupees as ransom. On the next day, he reports that “this town has been burnt by Pilaji’s forces, but we (the English Factory) are likely to be safe”.<sup>235</sup> Significantly a rift between Pilaji and Kanthaji gave some breathing space to the Cambay residents. Rendered totally helpless, the Cambay residents initiated negotiations with Pilaji. Eventually, the original Maratha demand of rupees five lacs was reduced to one lakh ten thousand which was to be paid within a reasonable time. Likewise, ransom was demanded even from the English which again was reduced following negotiations from rupees five thousand to three thousand. Commenting on the hopeless conditions at Cambay Innes wrote “..... the city is now entirely at their (ganimis) mercy ..... our lives and fortunes at dependent on the caprice of armed villains.....”<sup>236</sup>.

To worsen matters, a month later Hamid Khan whose oppression at the capital was creating havoc sent a contingent to Cambay to collect rupees one lac fifty thousand for the payment of his troops. In a letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> May 1725, Innes writes that a cess of Rs 12/- was levied on every house at Cambay, and orders were given for seizure of about 50 of the head shroffs and merchants in the city to demand from them the above sum as an advance. Hard pressed, many of these elements left the city or went into hiding.<sup>237</sup> Subsequently, despite dispatch of more troops when the amount was not forthcoming, the demand was reduced to Rs 5/-

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<sup>234</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 419

<sup>235</sup> Gense and Banaji, *The Gaekwads of Baroda*, Vol., I, p.5

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, Cambay to Surat, April 11, 1725, Vol., I pp. 5-6.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7

per house in response to which it is recorded that, “.... some of the merchants crept out of their holes”.<sup>238</sup> Shortly after the merchants were compelled to promise the payment of rupees 35,000 and the English were also asked to contribute.<sup>239</sup>

Oppressive extortions continued to persist till the final exit of the rebel Hamid Khan from the province in 1725. The significant aspect in this rebellion is the crucial role played by the commercial classes- the shroffs and merchants besides the English who, together constituted the fundamental economic base. They were rendered hopelessly defenseless and were compelled to negotiate on their own with the enemy; a situation akin to Surat in the face of Shivaji's plundering raids in the late seventeenth century. It is noteworthy that for the Marathas at this juncture, cities like Cambay were merely sources of wealth to be targeted, rather than likely domains to be administered which explains their frivolousness. It was such pressing circumstances which paved the way for new linkages noticeable in the growing conjunction between the English and some of the local residents.

In 1727 we find Mirza Agassar Beg, the governor at Cambay raising objections against the English as they were taking the goods of the 'Nawab's' subjects under their flag thereby effecting a dent on the revenues of the port town.<sup>240</sup> It is quite likely that this convenient arrangement was an innovation emanating from Farrukh Siyar's *farman* of 1716 granting tax exemptions against a lump sum payment to the English.<sup>241</sup> In fact this arrangement was becoming an increasingly regular feature in other areas also, indicating the new nexus that were emerging.

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<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 7-8

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>240</sup> Cambay to Surat, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1727 in A. Malet, *Historical Narrative of the District of Cambay*, Calcutta, 1865, p. 28. (Abbreviated hereafter as HN)

<sup>241</sup> A translation of this *farman* has been given in Gense and Banaji, Vol., I p.22.



The beginnings of the new polity at Cambay can be traced to Mirza Abdul Husain Momin Khan Dehlami, the *diwan* of Gujarat during 1723-28. He was a Persian noble who arrived in Gujarat from Delhi in 1714 and was assigned the office of the *mutassadi* at Surat besides the additional charge of *faujdar* of Baroda, Petlad, Nadiad and Dholka. In 1715 we find him dismissed and replaced by Haider Quli Khan, to be appointed again in 1718 as the *mutassadi* of both Surat and Cambay.<sup>242</sup> In 1724 he was further elevated with the charge of the *suba diwan* which he continued to hold till his death in April 1727.<sup>243</sup> Following his death, he was succeeded by his brother Abdul Ghani Khan as the *suba diwan*.<sup>244</sup> According to Briggs, Momin Khan's daughter, Aulia Begum, was married to a migrant noble Mirza Muhammad Amin of Persia who belonged to the princely line of Amir Nejam Sani and held the charge of Petlad and Cambay was given in dowry to Mirza Muhammad.<sup>245</sup> However, Z. Malik on the basis of the *mirat*, differing slightly, states that the original name was Mirza Muhammad Nejam Sani, son-in-law of Abdul Ghani, the *diwan* of Gujarat.<sup>246</sup> Though some ambiguity remains on the exact nature of familial ties, one aspect is quite certain that the political concerns of this lineage were prominent in view of the high offices of *faujdar*, *diwan* and subedar held by its members.

Incidentally, at the time of Momin Khan Dehlami's death in 1727, Mirza Muhammad remained in charge of Petlad. However, on account of differences with new *suba nazim*, Sarbuland Khan, we find him leaving the province for Delhi and returning back in 1730 as a part of Abhay

<sup>242</sup> Alexander Hamilton, op. cit, p.390.

<sup>243</sup> M.S.Commissariat, II, pp. 389-90. Also see Annirudh Ray, op. cit., pp.38-39 fn. 82.

<sup>244</sup> *Mirat*, p. 471.

<sup>245</sup> Briggs, op. cit., pp.175-77

<sup>246</sup> Z. Malik, op. cit., p.220, fn.1. Also see M. S. Commissariat, Vol. 2 p. 466 and Markand Nand Shankar Mehta & Manu Nand Shankar Mehta compiled The Annals of Hind Rajasthan, Bhadarwa, 1896, reprint, Bombay, 1985, Vol., 1B, p.630.

Singh the next *nazim*'s contingent.<sup>247</sup> Around this time he inherited his father-in-law's title Momin Khan and held the charge of Cambay as governor from 1730 to 1737.

During the intervening period (1725-30), we find a rapid change of officials at Cambay which, however, failed to provide stability in the wake of predatory activities, oppressive extortion and ineffective governance. An important implication of this was the frequent disruption in flow of goods from the countryside around Cambay.<sup>248</sup> In 1733 Mirza Muhammad was assigned the charge of Surat in place of Tegh Beg Khan, the *mutasaddi* at Surat who was ordered to assume charge of Cambay. Significantly, neither acted on these orders as both were working towards establishing their independent authority as *Nawab*'s in their respective areas.<sup>249</sup> Subsequently, we find him holding the office of the *suba nazim* till his death in 1743 with the title of Najm-ud-Daulah and Dilawar Jang and a *mansab* of 6000 *zat* and 6000 *sawar*.<sup>250</sup>

While ambitions were rampant in the wake of the fast growing political vacuum in the region, it is significant to note that Momin Khan was quite definite in his concerns at Cambay from the beginning. He appears to have treated this region as his personal domain. With the objective of instilling confidence and winning over the distressed commercial classes we find him writing an encouraging letter to them from the Mughal camp.<sup>251</sup> His next move was the appointment of new officials. These measures appear to have had the desirable results as trade was resumed.

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<sup>247</sup> *Mirat*, p. 471.

<sup>248</sup> Daniel Innes from Cambay to Surat, Feb.23, 1725 in HN, p. 25

<sup>249</sup> *Mirat*, p. 503.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*, p. 611

<sup>251</sup> Cambay to Surat, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1730 in HN, p.39

Meanwhile, the English hold was assuming firmer footing in the region and the inevitable clashes between the *Nawab* and the English began to gain momentum. Innes, during his visit to the *Nawab*, has observed that he was “highly concerned at the oppression” of the English government. Significantly, on this occasion he states that the local trading community would side with the English, thereby indicating that the merchant class had been looking for an alternative power that would safeguard their interests in these turbulent times.<sup>252</sup>

Disputes between the English and the *Nawab* had already started growing over various issues: important among which was the tax of 9% imposed by the *Nawab* on the transport of paddy from Cambay to Surat.<sup>253</sup> Around this time conditions again began to worsen at Cambay due to poor rains, oppressive extortion from Ahmedabad and infighting and rivalry among the Marathas. Abhay Singh’s exit from the province in 1732 further aggravated problems.

At the end of October 1735, the Marathas sent a message to Cambay demanding a 50% share of share of customs both at land and sea. This time the *Nawab* appears to have been better prepared. He had arranged for the requisite gunpowder and arms from the English. Resultantly, the Marathas left the city after a compromise was affected. At this juncture it is important to note that the attitude of Momin Khan I in tackling the English was firmly stern. In April 1736 we find him ordering the seizure of two ships of Byram the Company’s broker.<sup>254</sup> While the English were hard pressed due to trouble with the brokers and the stalling of supplies at Cambay, besides the scarcity of funds, the *Nawab* was unyielding. The ships were not released. Eventually though the English managed to get a

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<sup>252</sup> Quoted in Aniruddha Ray, op. cit., p.39

<sup>253</sup> Surat to Cambay, 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1730 in A. Malet, *Precis Relating to the History and Affairs of Cambay*, Bombay, 1864, pp. 7-9

<sup>254</sup> Bombay Dairy, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1736, in HN, Op. cit., p. 39.

release order from Ahmedabad, Momin Khan refused to yield.<sup>255</sup> The emerging concerns at Cambay were definitely different from those at Ahmedabad where the reigning authorities were pursuing their own vested interests.

Meanwhile in May 1737, Momin Khan was entrusted the charge of the *suba nazim*. As had become a routine feature by now, the *nazim* designate had to battle his way to assume office. Momin Khan too made the preparations to expel the dismissed *naib nazim* of Abhay Singh, Ratan Singh Bhandari. It is interesting that like his predecessors he too found it exigent to make an alliance with the Marathas. Under the agreement, Momin Khan I promised to grant to the Gaekwad, Damaji fifty percent of the revenues of the entire *suba* with the exception of the city of Ahmedabad, its *pargana haveli*, and most significantly, the town and port of Cambay which he viewed as his own very personal domain.<sup>256</sup> This agreement was definitely a major breakthrough for the Maratha *sardars* and marked the extension of the activities of the Gaekwad, from south Gujarat to the mainland, and beyond in Saurashtra.

From this juncture a definite pattern is discernible at Cambay. Momin Khan I was steadily working towards establishing his autonomous authority at Cambay and subsequently sought to maintain the same despite heavy odds: the rapid Maratha progression, the menace of fringe elements and most pressing were the steadily growing ambitions of the English. It is fascinating to note that his strategy in coping with these challenges was a policy of striking a balance between the pressures of these disruptive forces by vacillating from a compromising to a rigid demeanor, depending on the situational exigencies.

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<sup>255</sup> Bombay Dairy, 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1739 in HN, *Ibid*, p.39.

<sup>256</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 560

While Momin Khan's position was getting stronger, the English presence too was getting more pervasive. Besides their growing intimacy with the local merchants, an interesting intermediary category which evolves is the *vakil*, who served as an intermediary between the Company and its local concerns, and the *Nawabi* regime making representations to resolve disputed matters at the *Nawab's* *darbar*. They were obviously local residents, who probably enjoyed a position of considerable leverage; they could pit one party against another.

Around this time Edulji Cowaji was appointed as the *vakil* by the English agent Munroe, with the approval of the Surat government in 1739.<sup>257</sup> In 1740 differences arose between the *Nawab* and the English as the former claimed duty on re-exported goods. Further *koli* attacks on the Cambay port resulted in the loss of two English ships and two European sepoys in which the ship captain was implicated. In these difficult times Edulji, whose remuneration had been fixed at Rs. 800/- annually along with half percent commission on goods, demanded a raise in *darbar* charges from the English. Meanwhile, reports of an imminent Maratha attack softened the stand of the *Nawab*, who made up with the English with a request for lead and gunpowder. In these circumstances, Edulji raised the issue of his outstanding debts. In 1741 we find him instigating the *Nawab* to disallow the English from exporting Indigo which was interpreted by the company as a breach of provisions guaranteed in Farrukh Siyar's *farman* of 1716 which were considered valid at Cambay too.<sup>258</sup> In response, the English communicated a veiled threat, which though softened the *Nawab*, but failed to end the embargo. Eventually the ban was lifted but only when the English resorted to armed action. Three

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<sup>257</sup> Aniruddha Ray, op. cit., p.43. It is interesting to mention that Surat authorities had asked Munroe at Cambay to put up a tender notice at the factory gate inviting proposals from the merchants and Edulji's price list was the lowest.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid*

boats of the Cambay merchants laden with goods for Mocha and Jeddah were seized and later released when the *Nawab* felt compelled to relent.<sup>259</sup> Subsequently, however, the *Nawab* persisted with the policy of placing an embargo on exports, despite the Imperial *farman*, a clear mark of his independent status *vis a vis* the Empire, howsoever fragile it may have been.

Momin Khan I died in February 1743. For a brief period formal authority at Ahmedabad was jointly exercised by his cousin Fida-ud-Din Khan and his son Muftakhir Khan. Fida-ud-Din's reign proved to be extremely unpopular, primarily on account of oppressive extortions wherein even Cambay was not spared. At the end of May 1743 we find him arriving at Cambay and three days later returning to Ahmedabad "having plundered Cambay of about one lac and a half rupees (1.5 lacs)".<sup>260</sup> In the Factory records we find reference to Nizam Khan, whom Watson classes as Najam Khan. He was the son-in-law of Momin Khan I and on his death in 1743 he assumed the governorship of Cambay. He retained this office till his death in 1748 when he was succeeded by Muftakhir Khan, the son of Momin Khan I, who retained his father's title as Momin Khan II<sup>261</sup>. This definitely marks the firm establishment of the dynastic principle. The Imperial authority at Delhi had little power to assert its authority, and confirming scions of the reigning lineage was deemed, wise particularly in view of both the Maratha and English concerns being still fluid though formidable. Significantly, the title of Momin Khan continued to be retained by successive *Nawabs* till the late nineteenth century as a symbol of legitimacy to wield political power and

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<sup>259</sup> Surat to Bombay, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1742, in HN, p.42

<sup>260</sup> Gense and Banaji Vol., I op. cit., pp.45-46

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, Fn. 2, p.47

a link to their past glory despite their own diminished stature of a native state under the British<sup>262</sup>.

Though the foundations of the new polity were established, the more difficult task was of consolidating and sustaining the same, particularly in view of the fluid political conditions in the *suba*.

The imprisonment of Rangoji,<sup>263</sup> the representative of the Gaekwad at Ahmedabad, naturally brought Damaji at the *suba* capital. In early September 1743, he arrived at Cambay which made Najam Khan turn to the English. The usual compromise was affected with the Marathas, but this time the price of peace rendered the fledgling regime much more vulnerable as the Maratha presence had been formalized at Cambay. Thomas Hodges in his letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> October 1743 to James Hope at Surat refers to this event and states thus "Nizam (Najam Khan), not caring to stand a siege against the Ganims has purchase Rangoji's friendship, by allowing him half the revenues of Cambay, so that now his people as well as the Khan's are placed at the custom House for recording the duty upon all goods. They placed their officers who began to act imperiously, insulting the officers of the *Nawab*".<sup>264</sup>

Further on in early 1744, Rangoji again arrived at Cambay to collect the sum of Rupees one lac from the new *Nawab* (Muftakhir Khan, MomIn Khan II) promised by him in return for assistance in taking Ahmedabad from Fida-ud-Din.<sup>265</sup> The hopelessness of the situation is discernible in the response of the English and the other resident merchants who went out of the town and gave him presents apprehending

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<sup>262</sup> The Hind Rajasthan, Part IB, pp. 640-43.

<sup>263</sup> The context here is the coup attempt staged by Rangoji, the Gaekwads representative at Ahmedabad in collaboraton with Anandrao and Sher Khan Babi to assume control over the suba capital Ahmedabad in 1743 which failed and ended with the imprisonment of Rangoji. Commissariat II, pp. 479-481

<sup>264</sup> Gense and Banaji, I, p.47

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid*, p.48

that the Marathas would otherwise subject the town to plunder and destruction and leading to dislocation and disruption in supplies.

A survey of the numerous instances of Maratha demand of payments from Cambay, despite their claim to fifty percent of revenue share, indicates their increasing power. As regards the *Nawab's* response to these demands, a definite pattern is discernible. While direct resistance was not possible, compromise, and in most cases negotiation for a lesser amount, or bidding of time and initiation of parleys with the English were the usual strategies resorted to, to gain respite. However, this was quite a fleeting affair. Unlike in the case of Bharuch, the fortunes of the new polity at Cambay were closely linked to the developments at Ahmedabad, where by this time the Mughal Imperial authority had completely eroded in effective terms.

Around the end of November 1746, the *Nawab* placed an embargo on all trade between Cambay and Surat once again. The chief reason appears to be the financial crunch being experienced by the *Nawab*. However, on the English ultimatum of stoppage of all country trade, the embargo was lifted.<sup>266</sup>

It is interesting to note that outright confrontation of the new polity with the English was never decisive as the *Nawab* was infrequently compelled to seek help from the English, who, besides organizing the defenses, also supplied ammunition in crucial situations of Marathas offensive. On the whole, the policy of shifting leanings provided the essential spaces facilitating the *Nawabi* to evolve and survive despite heavy odds.

The fragmentation of the Maratha power after the death of Shahu in 1749 and the division of revenue rights in Gujarat between the Gaekwads

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<sup>266</sup> Surat to Cambay, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1746, in HN, p. 44



and the Peshwa placed Cambay within the purview of the Peshwa. In acknowledgement of this arrangement Momin Khan II the new *Nawab* sent his *peshkar* Braj Lal to the Peshwa to assume charge of the Gaekwad's share of revenue at Cambay<sup>267</sup>.

In 1753 Ahmedabad passed under the Maratha authority.<sup>268</sup> While the English initiated parleys with the new regime securing *parwanas* for safe passage of goods in 1754, we find Pandurang Pundit, the Peshwa's agent arriving at Cambay. Momin Khan II put up a very stiff posture in dealing with the Marathas. Meanwhile, in response to complaints from the Cambay residents, the Maratha officer Sripat Rao, the Maratha governor attacked Cambay. After an initial resistance, hostilities ended eventually with the mediation of Ali Muhammad Khan whereby it was agreed that the *Nawab* would pay Rs. 7,000 as *ghasdana* (lit. grass and foodgrain) on the *pargana* of Chorasi over and above Rs 10,000 which he had committed to pay to Raghunath Rao.<sup>269</sup> In the 1750s Cambay still constituted a part of the *pargana* of chorasi, a division in the Ahmedabad *sarkar*.<sup>270</sup> Perhaps in the face of these levies, Momin Khan imposed a general tax in 1754 on the inhabitants of the city.<sup>271</sup> Ali Muhammad Khan however does not make reference to this levy.

Once again, on representations by Cambay residents against the *Nawab*, the Peshwa sent Bhagwant Rao, the collector of tax, to Cambay, Momin Khan sought assistance from the English who remained noncommittal, perhaps not wanting to offend the formidable Marathas. Despite this, the *Nawab*'s determination in safeguarding his concerns at Cambay from the covetous intentions of the Marathas is quite

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<sup>267</sup> *Mirat*, p.729

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 734-47.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 753-556

<sup>270</sup> *Mirat Supplement*, op. cit., p.166

<sup>271</sup> Surat to Bombay, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1754, HN. p.48

remarkable. After showing passivity initially, he ordered the seizure of Bhagwant Rao, Gangadhar *Naib* and his officers and plundered their houses.<sup>272</sup> In retaliation the Marathas besieged Cambay, which ended with the release of the captives. The *Nawab* however continued to tactfully evade the payment. In contrast, the English chose to win the goodwill of the Marathas by giving them presents.<sup>273</sup>

A pertinent dimension to note at this stage is the revenue figures that register a substantial rise, despite the ravages caused by the depredations of the fringe categories, and the Maratha i.e. the Peshwa-Gaekwad combine. The *Ain-i-Akbari* data on Cambay indicate that the revenues of Cambay amounted to 221, 47,986 dams.<sup>274</sup> By the mid eighteenth century this figure seems to have risen to 345, 96,272 dams.<sup>275</sup> The explanation to this perhaps was the boost to the economy due to the European, particularly the English presence. Their focus on the textile industry, which was concentrated in these parts, definitely explains these figures and perhaps provided the essential economic support to the emerging polities. While these enhanced revenue resources facilitated the ascendancy of the new regimes, it is ironical that despite economic growth the Mughal Imperial authority collapsed, which is probably indicative of a system or structural collapse.

Despite these impressive revenue figures we find the *Nawab* experiencing a situation of serious financial crunch. Defenses in the city and the suburbs which constituted the perpetual targets to Maratha and *koli* depredations were in a deplorable state and called for attention. Ali Muhammad Khan has noted that repair of fortifications at Cambay had

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<sup>272</sup> Cambay to Surat, 23rd December, HN, p.49; *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 768-69

<sup>273</sup> Cambay to Surat, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1755, HN, p. 50; *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 777-778.

<sup>274</sup> Abul Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, Tr. Colonel H. S. Jarret, second ed., Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Vol., II, Third Edition, New Delhi, 1978, p. 258

<sup>275</sup> *Mirat Supplement*, p.166

been neglected since a long time.<sup>276</sup> Further, to contain increasing insecurity a larger number of troops were recruited which the *Nawab* was in no position to afford. These financial compulsions provoked Momin Khan to assume a more aggressive stand and extend his sphere of operations beyond Cambay.

Initially he gave his troops permission to attack the Raja of Limdi. In 1754 we find him organizing incursions in surrounding areas where strangely, no resistance was encountered. Perhaps this emboldened him to conquer Ghoga<sup>277</sup> which in earlier times was under the jurisdiction of Cambay but currently was held by the Peshwa's officers. He replaced them with his own *naib*, Ibrahim Quli Khan who was stationed there with a contingent of a hundred Arab troopers. On his way back to Cambay Momin Khan further extracted *peshkash* from areas enroute.<sup>278</sup>

Shortly after, he sent an expedition to Gohelwad and kathiawad under the command of Muhammad Zaman, son of Fida-ud-Din and Brajlal Peshkar. As was the routine practice in these parts, the *zamindars* bought peace by paying *peshkash* which helped him to settle arrears and reorganize his forces. Again, on finding the *faujdar* at Petlad weak, he marched there and exacted large amounts. This was repeated in surrounding areas.<sup>279</sup>

Significantly, by this time Momin Khan's clout seems to have been firmly established. He now turned his attention to Jambusar, a *pargana* under the Bharuch *Sarkar*. In recent times most of the local merchants of Surat and Cambay used to make substantial transactions here bringing goods, particularly silk, by boats under the patronage of Nana Ratan, a

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<sup>276</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 753-54

<sup>277</sup> Ghoga was an important port town situated on the open sea where big ships which were unable to enter the port of Cambay were anchored and from here goods were transferred to smaller vessels for Cambay.

<sup>278</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 735-756

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*

prominent local merchant-banker. This arrangement naturally deprived Cambay of its revenues. In view of this and the absence of the local Maratha *faujdar* Ganesh Appa, who was away at Poona, Momin Khan attacked Jambusar in 1754. While Nana Ratan and the Marathas fled away, the residents were subjected to pillage and plunder. It is important to note that in this episode that the *Nawab* was working in collaboration with Zalim Jalia, the *koli* chief of Dehwan. It may be recalled that he was the same person who provided refuge to the fugitive Bharuch *Nawab* Muazziz Khan.<sup>280</sup> These successes emboldened Momin Khan to attack the Maratha stronghold at Borsad. However, timely arrival of Sayaji the son of Damaji II, forced him to retrace his steps back to Cambay.<sup>281</sup>

Significantly, we now find him feeling strong enough to conspire for the capture of Ahmedabad in 1756. Raghunath Rao, the Peshwa's brother, was away at Delhi. The damaged city walls and the small size of the Maratha contingent under the command of Raghu Pundit made his task quite easy. Momin Khan enlisted the support of two military leaders, Muhammad Lal, a Rohilla *sardar* and Ganga Jat who happened to be at the *suba* capital and were willing to offer their services to the highest bidder.<sup>282</sup> Next he won the support of Shambhuram.<sup>283</sup> Further on, the *qazi* of Kadi, Zainul Abadin, who was in discord with the local Maratha *faujdar*, Hari Ram joined Momin Khan II. Advances were given to

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<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, p. 780

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 783-84

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43

<sup>283</sup> Shambhuram career graph is quite interesting. He was a Nagar Brahman of Vishalnagar who had taken to the military profession, probably a conscious move in these fluid times of turmoil where mercenaries and opportunism was becoming commonplace. Starting his career as a soldier he became vakil to Mir Abul Qasim an important military officer who served under Momin Khan I. Following Momin Khan's I death when Jawan Mard Khan was rising in prominence at the *Suba* capital in 1744 Shambhuram attached himself to the powerful military leader Muhammad Shahbaz Rohilla. After the murder of Shahbaz in 1749 he was appointed to the post of *faujdar* of the suburbs and rendered important services during the Maratha siege of the city. After the fall of Ahmedabad to the Marathas in 1753 he enrolled 200 sepoys and joined the victorious Marathas. Shortly after seeing the changing scenario we find him working in conjunction with Momin Khan II. M. S. Commissariat, II, pp. 529-60.

Muhammad Hasim (Anba) and his brother Janbaz (Janmu), *kasbatis* of Kadi to enable them to create disturbances in those parts. Besides this, the assistance of the *kolis* of Dabhoda was also sought with temptations of liberal promises.<sup>284</sup>

On 6<sup>th</sup> September 1756 Raghu Pandit was murdered by the conspirators, and by 16<sup>th</sup> October Ahmedabad was captured by Momin Khan. However, this victory was short lived. The Marathas re-established their authority at Ahmedabad with Momin Khan being forced to surrender after a siege lasting about fourteen months in February 1758. He left the city on the agreement that the Marathas would receive Rs. 75,000 and fifty percent revenues of Cambay, while the port of Ghoga would be retained by him.<sup>285</sup> The *Nawab* was definitely hard pressed for funds and troopers had to be paid. He seemed to be conscious of their restlessness. The situation became quite disturbing following the murder of the *peshkar* Brajlal. Ali Muhammad Khan places the onus of this on the *Nawab*.<sup>286</sup>

At this juncture another discernible pattern is the emergence of the pro- Maratha and the pro-English lobbies amongst the local merchant community. While some of the prominent Muslim merchants (Arabs and Persians) showed an inclination to move to Ahmedabad, feeling insecure in the face of the above incident, the *bania* merchants prefer to stay back. It is possible that they were reassured by the English presence.<sup>287</sup>

On the whole, during the course of the second half of the eighteenth century, we find Momin Khan battling his way despite the expanding Maratha concerns and the steadily growing English influence resorting to

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<sup>284</sup> *Mirat*, p. 788

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 850-51. Also Cambay to Surat, 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1758, HN, p. 59

<sup>286</sup> *Mirat*, pp.858-60

<sup>287</sup> Ali Muhammad Khan discusses the exit of Zahid Ali Mir Najm-ud-din a frequent financier to the new polity and Muhammad Hashim Bakhshi in a very tactful manner. *Ibid*, pp. 861-66.

shifting stands of resistance, compromise and diplomacy. In 1759 he visited the Peshwa Baji Rao as a diplomatic move but accomplished nothing substantial.<sup>288</sup>

The scene changes from 1761 following the Panipat episode. On the one hand Momin Khan received orders from Delhi urging him to drive out the Marathas from the region on the other hand the Marathas were trying to come to terms with the defeat with its definite implications in the Maratha camp and beyond. In early April 1761, the new Maratha *sardar* in Gujarat, Appaji Ganesh arrived at Cambay to collect the Maratha share of revenue from Cambay which was agreed at Rs. 84000.<sup>289</sup> Shortly after various chiefs including Momin Khan II began to attack the Maratha held villages.<sup>290</sup> It is important to mention that Trimbak Mukund the *naib* of Damaji settled for a lesser amount of Rs, 54000 per year. Further Momin Khan's recruitment of mercenary *kolis* resulted in the Maratha withdrawal from Cambay. This was followed by further attacks on Maratha held villages in Petlad, Matar, and Dholka.<sup>291</sup>

Interestingly, the English seem to be supportive of Momin Khan at his stage. In September 1764, the *Nawab* sought the English assistance to capture the Tarraja (Talaja) fort, a formidable *koli* stronghold. Eventually in April 1771 a treaty was drawn to whereby it was agreed that the fort would be conquered by the English and then be sold to the *Nawab* for Rs. 75000 which was to be paid in five installments. Military action was significantly getting commercialized. However in a short time due to the

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<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, p. 879

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*, p.903

<sup>290</sup> Damaji to Peshwa, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1761, Historical Selections from the Baroda State Records, Baroda, Vol., I, p. 86. (Hereafter abbreviated as HS). Also *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 923-26

<sup>291</sup> Damaji to Gobind Rao (his son) Jan 1763 where he urges Gobind Rao to win over the *Nawab*'s adherents. HS, pp. 95-97.

fiscal crunch the *Nawab* was compelled to sell this fort for the same amount to the *Nawab* of Bhavnagar in January 1773 <sup>292</sup>

Meanwhile, following the death of Damaji on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1768 succession disputes arose between Fateh Singh and Govind Rao which made them relatively weak in comparison to their predecessors. This situation however provided some respite to Momin Khan. It is noteworthy that when Fateh Singh sent his men to collect revenues at Cambay the *Nawab* refused to pay the same.<sup>293</sup> Further on, in early February 1772, the Marathas were defeated when they besieged the town. Despite these setbacks, Maratha offensive continued to persist. Though the *Nawab* was successful initially in putting up resistance against the Marathas, it definitely must have been an expensive affair. Subsequently, Fateh Singh did withdraw in early March 1773, but at the instance of the English.

An English correspondence from Cambay dated 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1772, describes the dire financial condition of the *Nawab*. It is amusing to note that the soldiers whose salaries had fallen in arrears surrounded the durbar and stopped all food and drink to be sent to him till he resolved their problem. Eventually Momin Khan was able to pacify them by handing over his family jewelry and money which incidentally had been forcibly taken from his relatives.<sup>294</sup> Further in a letter from Cambay to Bombay the precarious conditions in the wake of ravages inflicted by the Marathas and the freebooters operating alongside them have been described. In response the Bombay government has referred to the *Nawab* “as an old ally of the Hon’able Company who has aided them in the

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<sup>292</sup> Cambay to Surat, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1764, HN, pp. 66-67. Incidentally, the chieftaincy at Bhavnagar was established in 1723 by Raval Bhavsinhji of Sihor during the *nazimship* of Sarbuland Khan. Commisariat, Vol. II, p. 434.

<sup>293</sup> Trimbak Pundit to Fatehsingh, Cambay, October 21, 1770, HS, II, pp. 163-64.

<sup>294</sup> Cambay to Surat, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1772, HN, pp. 77-78.

conquest of Bharuch”.<sup>295</sup> He was to be provided requisite assistance. Momin Khan’s diplomacy was indeed very important in sustaining the *Nawabi*. It may be mentioned here that Momin Khan offered to buy Bharuch from the English who however appropriately judged his inability to pay.<sup>296</sup>

In August 1773 a significant development was the murder of Narayan Rao Peshwa. He was succeeded by Raghunath Rao who incidentally was supportive of Gobind Rao and considered him as the Gaekwad chief. In February 1775 he was however displaced and as a fugitive he arrived at Cambay. Momin Khan was all set to receive him but on reports of his defeat he refused to permit him to enter. The *Nawab* had always maintained his leanings with the winning side. The English were however supportive of Raghunath Rao.<sup>297</sup>

From 1780’s factionalism was getting more definite and accentuated making it imperative for Momin Khan to play between the pushes and pulls of the pro-Marathas and the Pro-English lobbies in the court and go on with his battle for survival. During the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the revenues at Cambay were steadily falling, while financial pressures, particularly in maintaining defenses against the Marathas persisted. The immediate brunt of these fiscal problems fell on the residents of Cambay. Many of them felt compelled to migrate to safer areas like Jambusar, Bhavnagar and Bharuch leading to growth and prosperity of those areas. By the end of March 1780, the English Resident at Cambay was successful in persuading the *Nawab* to hand over the *furza* (customs) which marked a victory of the pro-English faction.<sup>298</sup> However, on seeing

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<sup>295</sup> Gense and Banaji, II, pp.150-52

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> Charles Malet, (Cambay) to Surat, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1775 in GB II , pp. 239-40

<sup>298</sup> Anurudh Ray, op. cit., p. 56.



the rising English prominence the *Nawab* shifted his leanings towards the pro Marathas faction thereby seeking to maintain a balance.

A striking pattern is discernible in Momin Khan's policies and actions following the surrender of Ahmedabad in 1758 till his death in 1784. He appears to be operating in a totally unscrupulous manner showing little concern for any person. Besides resorting to exactions from the residents, especially the commercial classes, which became a reason for them to look for alternative safer places, we find him being unsparing in his dealings with his officials and relatives. In 1758 he got his *peshkar* Brajlal murdered.<sup>299</sup> A more imaginative and far reaching act was the murder of his brother-in-law Rashid Beg in 1768. He was the husband of the *Nawab*'s wife's sister Khutbi Khanum. It is significant to mention that the *Nawab* was probably enamored by her and came under her complete influence following her return from Surat in 1780 where she had been residing when her husband was murdered. Khutbi Khanum favoured the pro-Maratha lobby and championed its cause. Her principal target was Mirza Zaman, a migrant prince from Iran who headed the pro-English faction, and more importantly he succeeded her husband Agha Rashid as the *Nawab*'s *naib*. In early 1780 he had been reinstated as the *naib* at the instance of Charles Malet, the English resident at Cambay who was persistently contemplating ways of increasing control over Cambay including its annexation. On account of her influence over the *Nawab*, the pro-Marathas lobby became quite strong. The significant dimension in this connection is that despite the reason underlying the *Nawab*'s inclination towards the pro-Maratha faction; it definitely undermined the English manoeuvres at Cambay, providing the essential breathing space to the *Nawab*. Subsequently, we find Momin Khan trying to weaken both

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<sup>299</sup> *Mira-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 58-60

the factions. In February 1782, he imprisoned his Hindu *diwan* Ranchod Patel, the leader of the pro-Maratha lobby. This was followed by the imprisonment of his *naib* Mirza Zaman, the leader of the pro-English faction.<sup>300</sup>

On the whole, throughout the tenure of the Momin Khan, we find him focusing his energies in consolidating his authority at Cambay, despite multiple pressures of varying intensity. The significant aspect to note is that he was able to withstand the impact of all these pressures by his multi- pronged policies of resistance, compromise and diplomacy and shifting leanings, depending on the exigency of the situation. While Bharuch succumbed to the English pressures, Cambay survived, though the stature of this domain was much diminished. According to James Forbes, the annual revenue in 1775, after paying the Maratha tribute, did not exceed Rupees 200,000.<sup>301</sup> The combined effects of the *Nawab's* policies, Maratha ravages and predatory activities of fringe categories was the migration of merchants and craftsmen, which overtime marked the economic decline of this port town, even though the *Nawabi* survived as a Native State under the British subsequently.

#### SURAT:

Besides the port towns of Bharuch and Cambay, during the first half of the eighteenth century interesting circumstances marked the rise of a *Nawabi* regime at Surat. This *Nawabi* was not destined to last long due to the English machinations in the region. A brief historical outline of this port town is important to understand the significance of the region and the factors which facilitated the rise of the new polity in the early eighteenth century.

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<sup>300</sup> Aniruddha Ray, op. cit., pp. 65-61

<sup>301</sup> James Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs*, ed. 1834, Vol., I, p. 324.

Surat located about 110 miles south of Ahmedabad constituted the most important port town of the Mughal Empire. The Mughals classed this port as 'Bandar Mubarak' or the 'Blessed Port' on account of its being the place from which pilgrims embarked for the pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>302</sup> The hinterland of Surat included the fertile plains watered by the rivers Tapi and Narmada and included important production centers like Bharuch, Cambay and Ahmedabad which specialized in the manufacture of a variety of textiles.

The rise in prominence of this port-town can be traced to the early sixteenth century when Rander<sup>303</sup>, the twin city to Surat, fell a victim to Portuguese ravages. Another important factor was that Cambay port, the entrepot for overseas trade began to experience a setback, for reasons discussed in the earlier portion of this chapter. In the face of these developments, certain other ports acquired prominence. Ghoga, an important port town on the east coast of Kathiawad registered a substantial growth with larger ships preferring to anchor in the more navigable waters therein. Two other port towns assuming primacy in the region were Diu in Kathiawad and Surat in South Gujarat. In the development of these two towns, the role of Malik Ayaz and Malik Gopi under the Sultans of Gujarat is noteworthy. During the subsequent period, while Diu capitulated to the Portuguese, Surat survived their onslaught and developed as the hub of commercial activity. The establishment and expansion of the Mughal Empire characterized by

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<sup>302</sup> Coins bearing this epithet were struck at the mint in this city during the reign of Aurangzeb. Commisariat, I, p. 422

<sup>303</sup> Rander was an old port town on the bank of the river Tapi enjoying considerable commercial vibrancy till the commencement of the Portuguese onslaught from 1503's. Duarte Barbosa describes it as an ancient town dominated by a race of foreign Muslims who were classed as Navayats (new comers). These migrants were Arabs from Kufa, who being Shias and persecuted by the orthodox Sunnis fled their native lands and migrated to India settling at various places along the western coast. Being skilled navigators and enterprising, these migrants over time became very prosperous trading in their own ships with Malacca, China, Tenasarim, Pegu and Sumatra in spices, silks, musk, porcelain and variety of other commodities. Barbosa, I, p. 146

political and administrative integration and more importantly, commercial networking became the ideal background for the development of Surat as the hub of commercial activity. The port town came to be linked to the Mughal heartland of Delhi-Agra via the Mahi river valley, the Malwa plateau and the Chambal valley. Two important routes connecting Surat to Agra were: Surat-Burhanpur-Sironj-Gwalior-Dholpur to Agra and Delhi and Surat-Bharuch-Ahmedabad-Merta-Ajmer-Bayana to Agra. Resultantly, though Surat was not an important production centre initially, it became the converging point connecting important production centers of Gujarat with the Imperial cities.<sup>304</sup>

Ashin Das Gupta, however, views the rising prominence of Surat in relation to the establishment and expansion of three great Empires in the western Indian Ocean during the course of the sixteenth century: the Mughal, the Safavid and the Ottoman. Under these regimes, both the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea regions experienced great vibrancy which coincided with the diminishing Gujarati presence in the south East Asian trade where the Portuguese henceforth became dominant. Besides this, a new dimension added to the commercial scene was the entry of the English and the Dutch who also sought a share in the lucrative Asian trade. While these developments counterpoised the aggressive Portuguese presence in the western Indian Ocean, rivalry among the Europeans provided the essential equilibrium for indigenous overseas trade and commerce to flourish. In his view, the larger and more long-term effect of the disruptive Portuguese activities in Gujarat was the diversion of Gujarat's main commercial activity from south East Asia to the west Asia, wherein the focus shifted from trading in Indonesian spices to trading in Indian textiles, besides other commodities, to West Asia. In this

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<sup>304</sup>Sunil Munshi, A geographer's View Concerning the Study of Urban History of Surat, in V.K. Chavda. Ed. *Studies in Trade and Urbanisation in India*, Baroda, 1985, p. 75.

entire network of commercial activity, the position of Surat became very important.<sup>305</sup>

The two principal Imperial officials at Surat were the *qiledar*, the commander of the fort, and the *mutasaddi*, the port officer. The Europeans frequently refer to the *mutasaddi* as the local governor whose concerns were primarily the Imperial customs, besides the mints which he administered with the assistance of lesser officials appointed by him. Significantly, both these officers were directly appointed from the centre through Imperial *sanads* and thus technically were beyond the purview of the *suba nazim*, an office of a much higher *mansab*. Both these officials were also supposed to maintain a mutual check on each other, crucial in the Mughal administrative system of checks and balances. Besides a string of lesser administrative officials, a third important category of administrative officials at the Surat port were the *sidis* (Abyssinians) who were appointed as Mughal admirals, entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining a fleet to check sea piracy and protect pilgrim and commercial traffic.<sup>306</sup>

After a prolonged phase of commercial progression during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Surat began to experience a series of setbacks and disruptions which eventually culminated in the decline of the port's importance in the first half of the eighteenth century. A set of four factors, singly or in combination, are attributed to this decline. Firstly, the silting of the Tapi is supposed to have pushed trade further away from the city. Silting has been an ongoing feature along the Gujarat coastline. The decline of the ports at Bharuch and Cambay has been explained in this context. The second reason put forward is the

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<sup>305</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, 1700-1750*, Wiesbaden, 1976, pp. 3-4

<sup>306</sup> *Gazetteer of the Gujarat State: Surat District*, Ahmedabad, 1962, p. 113, Also *Mirat Supplement*, p. 214

experiences of the two Maratha attacks under Shivaji's leadership in 1664 and 1670 and many more following his death in 1780 which have been discussed at length in chapter one. Besides these reasons, pirate attacks on the city's commercial marine are viewed seriously. Lastly, the rise of Bombay is considered as an important factor hastening the decline of Surat.

Ashin Das Gupta, in his comprehensive study of the port town, takes a different position in his explanation to the decline. He opines that while these factors were relevant, the intensity of their implications were not catastrophic. In his view, the silting of the Tapi was a reality to which the city merchants responded ungrudgingly by transferring their goods to river barges. While the entire process of transferring goods involved additional expenditure, he notes that the Surat residents were not particularly bothered, though the English seem to have expressed some concern at the loss of navigability. As far as the role of Shivaji's sack of Surat is concerned, he remarks that it definitely involved monetary losses besides generating a mood of insecurity. The English were indeed contemplating shifting to Bombay, even when no signs of a permanent disruption were discernible.<sup>307</sup> At the turn of the eighteenth century, while the picture of the city reveals no sign of any permanent damage, the older generation was being replaced by newly affluent men: the bohra shipping magnate Mulla Abdul Ghafur, the Chellabys, the Rustomjis, the Paraks (Parikhs) and the Parsis: categories more prominent and politically relevant in the changing times. The city in fact seems to display more of resilience than disruption. Further, as regards the issue of piracy, Ashin Das Gupta notes that the implications of the attacks by the Red Sea pirates were quite serious in the last two decades of the seventeenth

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<sup>307</sup> Responses to Shivaji's raids have been discussed in chapter one. Refer to pp. 49-52

century but thereafter these subsided. Moreover, the existence of a powerful mercantile marine based at Surat, numbering at least one hundred and twelve sea going vessels, the largest in India in 1701 is in no way indicative of a crippled city. A reference in the Dutch records indicates that in 1710, trade was normal at Surat, Cambay, Bharuch and Ahmedabad.<sup>308</sup> In his opinion the experiences of raids and piracy were unfortunate episodes which the port town was able to withstand at least for some time. Quite possibly, it was Imperial concerns in the region which was experiencing a crisis which did not necessarily coincide with an immediate crisis for the merchant community and in commercial activity. Though losses were incurred, they were viewed as minor or even serious disruptions but not of a catastrophic nature. Desertion was not a trend operative in the latter part of the seventeenth century which undermines the impact of the four explanations discussed above. In fact, the consultations of the Bombay Council in the 1720s and even in the 1730s return often to the problem of settling Bombay with prosperous tradesmen and it notes the disinclination of established men of Surat to shift to Bombay despite offer of major inducements. It may be appropriate to reiterate his classical remark : "The fact of the matter was that Surat did not decline because Bombay grew; Bombay grew because Surat declined. The history of Bombay does not begin properly till about the middle of the eighteenth century"<sup>309</sup>.

In the backdrop of these four factors for decline of Surat, Ashin Das Gupta examines the issue in a much larger perspective. He explains the Surat decline in the context of the same reasons which marked its ascendancy during the course of the sixteenth century. The perpetual

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<sup>308</sup> Uma das Gupta, p. 149

<sup>309</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat: 1700- 1750*, Wiesbaden, 1979, pp. 7-12

conflict in the Red Sea region, the decline of the Safavid dynasty in Persia and the glaringly visible pattern of Imperial collapse under the later Mughals were simultaneous developments which destroyed Surat's connectivity with its larger hinterland and overseas markets. This indeed was a serious situation.

The entire course of decline is discernible from the phase of anarchy following the death of Aurangzeb in the very heartland of the Empire. The direct consequence of this anarchy was the cutting off of distant areas like Agra, Benaras etc from Surat. Insecurity along the trade routes resulted in the contraction of trade which had drawn upon the wide hinterland extending over much of northern and western India in the preceding era. The focus of activity was located more within the province. By the 1730s, Gujarat was in the thick of Maratha depredations and a steady pattern of Imperial administrative collapse was in operation. As a result of this, the earlier losses of connectivity to distant production centres and markets in the Empire was often replicated at the level of the *suba* whereby supplies often failed to be maintained from the important production centers like Ahmedabad and its hinterland, which concentrated on textile production.

The concerns of Surat were increasingly restricted to the city and its immediate hinterland. It may be recalled that the areas of south Gujarat had virtually passed under the Maratha control. The surrounding countryside was dominated by the Maratha *sardar* Pilaji Gaekwad who had established his headquarters at Songhad in Surat district by conquering its hill fort in 1719. Steadily, befriending the neighboring ruler of Rajpipla and making common cause with the *bhils* and *kolis* in South Gujarat he consolidated his position in south Gujarat. Annual depredation of villages in the Surat district for claims to *chauth* had



become an increasingly regular feature. It is important to mention that the Imperial officers at Surat did make efforts to resist the Marathas till 1725, but thereafter they felt compelled to reconcile to their presence.<sup>310</sup> A reference to the revenue figures may be relevant and insightful here. The total revenues accruing from this *sarkar* during Akbar's reign amounted to 19,035,180 dams.<sup>311</sup> According to the *mirat* the figure had risen to 49,463,662 dams in early eighteenth century.<sup>312</sup> While these figures indicate an obvious enhancement, they are quite out of context in view of the turbulent nature of politico-economic conditions prevailing at Surat during the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

In 1719 the governor of Surat, Shaikh-ul-Islam Khan sent an army to undermine Pilaji under the command of Saiyid Aqil Khan and Muhammad Panah, but the latter was wounded and taken captive to be released only on the payment of ransom.<sup>313</sup> Thenceforth, Maratha raids for the collection of *chauth* from the Surat *athavisi* led to a serious loss in revenue. In 1724, Momin Khan Dehlami, the *mutasaddi* of Surat, initiated another offensive against the Gaekwad which however was unsuccessful.<sup>314</sup> During the tenure of the next governor Rustom Ali, while the offensive launched against the Marathas proved to be somewhat more effective, a tragic event aborted the entire initiative. Shujat Khan, the *naib nazim* of Sarbuland Khan and Ibrahim Quli Khan, the two brothers of Rustom Ali were killed in the operations against the rebel Hamid Khan in 1724. In these circumstances Rustom Ali felt compelled to end hostilities and collaborate with the Maratha leader to lead operations against the rebel. This was the final earnest effort to reassert Imperial authority in the

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<sup>310</sup> Commissariat III, 517-520

<sup>311</sup> Ain, II, PP.261

<sup>312</sup> *Mirat* Supplement, pp.187-89 and Surat district Gazetteer, pp. 115

<sup>313</sup> Bombay, Gazetteer, VII, Baroda, pp.168-69

<sup>314</sup> Commissariat, Vol, II, pp. 400-02

province. However, Rustom Ali was treacherously killed in 1725 at Adas with Pilaji switching sides and joining the rebel Hamid Khan.<sup>315</sup> Henceforth, the Maratha presence in these parts remained more or less uncontested.

In political terms, Surat was increasingly getting cut off from the surrounding countryside and also from the Mughal Imperial administration which by this time was reduced to merely issuing *sanads* and making appointments which was infrequently an 'arranged' affair. Thus, the port town of Surat which witnessed the rise of the *Nawabi* regime was far removed from concerns at Ahmedabad and in terms of revenues a much diminished zone as compared to the preceding century. Later governors were forced to manage with resources which were strictly located within the city. The pressure naturally fell on the prosperous commercial classes.

The rise of the *Nawabi* regime at Surat may be traced to the compulsive circumstances which developed during the governorship of Sohrab Khan (1725-32).<sup>316</sup> His actions and policies provoked a popular upsurge in favour of Togh Beg Khan in which the Bohra merchant Muhammad Ali played the principal role. The fact that such an event, wherein merchants recruit troops had no parallel in the region's history, makes it highly fascinating and insightful.

Following the death of the valiant Rustom Ali Khan at Vaso in 1725, the office of the *mutasaddi* at Surat passed on to his son Sohrab Khan who was barely seventeen years of age. It may be recalled that while Rustom Ali had been successful in retrieving areas in the Surat district from Pilaji, these were however lost to the Marathas after his death. The

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<sup>315</sup> Commissariat III, 520

<sup>316</sup> The Dutch and English sources refer to him as Sohrab Khan, the son of Rustom Ali, while Ali Muhammad Khan classes him as Behram Khan. The dates and corresponding events indicate he is the same person. Hence forth he is referred as Sohrab Khan.

contraction of revenues in the face of the strong Maratha presence, besides conditions of anarchy and disruptions and virtually no assistance from the Mughal Imperial authority or the *suba nazim* was a challenging situation for the Mughal bureaucracy at Surat.<sup>317</sup> Their only hope and source for survival was obviously the mercantile classes and their assets, besides the European establishments at Surat.

In May 1725, Raghuram, the *peshkar* of the *mutasaddi* Sohrab Khan made repeated demands to the English Factory for an advance payment of the annual *peshkash* which was conceded but with reluctance and on the assurance that “there was no likelihood of a change in government before 2<sup>nd</sup> September next, the time it becomes due otherwise we may involve ourselves in disputes with the new government on this course”<sup>318</sup>. Shortly after, disputes arose between the governor and the English over the minting of coins at Bombay which amounted to a loss in Mughal revenue at Surat.<sup>319</sup>

For sometime hereafter, Sohrab Khan maintained some restraint. However, from 1730 he resorted to wholesome extortion, probably being hard pressed for funds.<sup>320</sup> It is quite likely that he might have been inspired by similar tendencies at Ahmedabad where *nazims* were indulging in irresponsible extortion, trying to gain the maximum as long as they were in authority in the concerned area.

It is pertinent to mention that around this time three individuals had their eyes focused on the governorship of Surat. The first was off course Sohrab Khan who was holding this office but remained apprehensive

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<sup>317</sup> The revenues to maintain the governor and his establishment were to come from the twenty eight villages the Surat athavisi which were attached to the city. These areas had been invaded by the Marathas and remained under their control after Rustom Ali's death. See Commissariat, Vol. II, pp.450-507.

<sup>318</sup> Quoted from Commissariat, Vol. III, p. 521, from Surat Factory Diary, Letter from Bombay, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1725

<sup>319</sup> Commissariat, p. 522

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid*

about his term being cut short at any time. Next in line was Mustafid, whom Ali Muhammad Khan classes as the discharged Qazi, who had recently obtained an Imperial *sanad* for this post and was on way to Gujarat from Delhi being a part of the contingent of the new *suba nazim* Abhay Singh.<sup>321</sup> Lastly, Tegh Beg Khan, the nephew of the *qiledar* at Surat, who had briefly enjoyed this office in 1729, was keen to acquire the same once again.

In the early eighteenth century an important dimension at Surat was the towering presence of the famous merchant prince Mulla Abdul Haye, who received the title of Muhammad Ali from the Imperial court. He was the heir of Mulla Abdul Ghafur, the shipping magnate who had amassed a vast fortune from profits in the Red Sea trade.<sup>322</sup> During the late 1720s we find him making attempts to carve out an independent niche for himself.

In 1728, Muhammad Ali directed his resources towards colonizing the rocky island of Piram on the kathiawad coast. He spent quite a fortune in raising fortifications. Further he induced and persuaded people of surrounding areas to settle there. However, the island was soon found to be so infested by snakes and reptiles that many of the new settlers were killed while the survivors chose to flee the place. This ambitious experiment thus proved to be a hopelessly expensive venture.<sup>323</sup> It is impressive that Muhammad Ali was not particularly disheartened, as shortly thereafter we find him working towards actualizing his ambitions at Surat itself.

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<sup>321</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p.470

<sup>322a</sup> Abdul Ghafur, is considered to be a resident of Patan who moved to Surat a poor man. He taught for some time in a school and thus was addressed as Mulla. After sometime he took to trading which made him very rich. He is supposed to have owned nineteen ships and died leaving a fortune worth eighty five lacs. This was wrongly confiscated on his death by the *mutasaddi* Haider Quli Khan but was returned with due honors on an appeal to the Emperor to his grandson Muhammad Ali". Surat District Gazetteer, Ahmedabad, 1962, fn, p. 143

<sup>323</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 457

Muhammad Ali's inheritance included a garden house to the north of the city, a residence in the town and a wharf to the south of it. It was the last property, located in the village of Athwa on the Tapi not far from Surat which he began to develop with fortifications.<sup>324</sup> Sohrab Khan, the *mutasaddi* obviously raised objections. In response Muhammad Ali sought the assistance of the *qiledar*, Beglar Beg Khan for the expulsion of the governor. In return, he promised to 'arrange' the *sanad* for this office for Tegh Beg Khan his brother. The *qiledar* after initial hesitation agreed but on the condition that Rs. 25,000/- be paid to him and gunpowder and other essentials be provided.<sup>325</sup> Meanwhile, apprehending loss and damages in the conflict, the city merchants intervened and persuaded both sides to end hostilities and await definite orders from the Imperial court.<sup>326</sup> This sort of collective merchant concerns finds a remote parallel to merchant leagues in northern Europe in the later middle Ages though the context and concerns there were of a different nature and magnitude. Probably this was the last collective effort of town to survive. Sohrab Khan vacated the durbar while Tegh Beg Khan assumed the functions of the *mutasaddi*. The entire episode is reflective of the utter breakdown of the Imperial administration where an ambitious merchant assumes the role of a 'king' maker. The new arrangement was in tune with the emerging trend of administrative offices becoming familial affairs which undermined the basic administrative principle of checks.

After assumption of office both, the *qiledar* and the new *mutasaddi* raised objections against the fortifications at Athwa on the rationale that this was not permissible without royal sanction.<sup>327</sup> Such objections were definitely not acceptable to Muhammad Ali who had invested a large

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<sup>324</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid*, p. 457

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 457-58

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid*, p. 462

amount in the changeover. He thus began parleys with the expelled *mutasaddi*, promising to 'arrange' his reappointment provided he agreed to remain pliable. Sohrab Khan out of desperation responded in affirmation. Ali Muhammad Khan states that the "leading merchant spent nearly eighty thousand rupees for managing to obtain a sole *sanad* for him" following which Sohrab Khan was back in office.<sup>328</sup>

Muhammad Ali transformed the old wharf in an impressive new suburban complex. Roads were laid out, houses were built, and bazaars were developed with artisans and merchants being invited to settle at Athwa. More important was the appointment of a *qiledar*, a *kotwal*, besides retinues and the installation of 'dragon like' canons on the turrets of the fortifications. The merchant prince himself resided at Athwa. Within a short time this complex began to prosper splendidly. The most important significant part in this setup was that commodities which arrived from abroad in his fleet of ships began to be unloaded at Athwa, thereby depriving the Imperial *mutassadi* at Surat of substantial revenue accruing from customs duty.<sup>329</sup> Muhammad Ali had managed to establish his monopoly in the trade to the Red Sea. He disembarked most of the cash and cargo brought in his ships at Athwa which remained unaccounted for as far the *mutasaddi* was concerned.<sup>330</sup>

Despite the revenue loss, for sometime Sohrab Khan turned a blind eye to the happenings at Athwa. It may be noted that he was also heavily indebted to his new patron. Further, he was continuously borrowing from him as well as from Seth Dayaram, the broker of the Dutch East India Company. In desperation, he was compelled to assign a portion of the customs of the Surat port to Muhammad Ali who collected duty through

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<sup>328</sup> *Ibid*, p. 462

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*, p. 462

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid* p. 462

his own *diwan* Manikchand. In February 1730, the merchant prince received Imperial permission to further expand his defenses at Athwa and run a personal mint for making copper coins. Thus, while Athwa emerged as a rival to Surat; Muhammad Ali was practically independent though without an official *sanad* to that effect.<sup>331</sup> He was too content with this situation. He would like to have a pliable governor for whom he would be working to arrange the *sanad* of appointment.

While Sohrab Khan was helplessly dependent on his principal patron Muhammad Ali, the latter was seriously concerned about the rising debts of the *mutasaddi*. He increasingly became more and more reluctant to clear further loans which were essentially sought to meet his personal needs, besides the expenses of running the Imperial establishment. These difficult circumstances forced Sohrab Khan to resort to extortion. Information on his tyranny and oppressive extortion has been recorded in the Dutch sources. Accordingly, on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1730, he extorted Rs. 22,000 in un-minted bullion from the shroffs of the mint. Next, on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1730, Rajaram, a Khatri merchant, was fined Rs 700 without being given any reason. On 12<sup>th</sup> April 1730, the governor summoned the merchants from Multan and Lahore to the durbar and asked for a loan of Rs. 200,000 to which they responded by pointing out that they had come to Surat to make money and not give it away. It seems that both were subjected to much hardship before their return. Further on, the Dutch Diarist writes thus “once more a frivolous pretext from our governor to obtain some money. He asked all insurers and negotiators of the ‘respondentia’ to produce their books which they refused. They were then arrested along with the leading shroff, Dada Parak because he pleaded his inability to furnish a loan of one lakh rupees in the form of a

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<sup>331</sup> Uma Dasgupta, (ed.), *The world of the Indian Ocean Merchant 1500-1800, Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta*, OUP, Delhi, 2001, pp.352-54

bill of exchange to be sent to the court. On this being known all the leading shroffs have closed their books and shut up their shops”.<sup>332</sup>

In about a week's time all business came to a standstill. The governor in response gave assurances of 'good conduct' in future which was an irrelevant commitment as clashes were quite inevitable. With no change in circumstances, Sohrab Khan was again back to his old posture. Accordingly, on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1730, when an Armenian merchant Khoja Saffer (Khwaja Safar) died his properties were ordered to be sealed. Next, Sohrab Khan extorted Rs. 6000/- as fine from a Muslim merchant for having relations with 'girls of pleasure', something utterly preposterous. This was followed by a fine of Rs. 1700/- from a Bohra merchant on charges of dishonest dealings. City shroffs too were not spared which compelled many of them to leave the town. Further, he also began to farm out offices for exorbitant sums. Rumors went around that the governor had recently poisoned one of his principal officers in order to sell his office.<sup>333</sup> In the wake of these developments it is significant that Seth Laldas, Dayaram and several other leading merchants warned Sohrab Ali in open Durbar that they would migrate from the town if he did not mend his ways.

Meanwhile, the crisis at Surat worsened towards the end of May 1731 due to failure of rains and resultant famine conditions: shortages and sharp price rise of grain. Both the English and Dutch records provide highlights on the dire conditions in the town. It seems that about five to six thousand people from neighboring countryside turned up at Surat for sustenance before finally moving towards the Deccan.<sup>334</sup> Earlier in 1729, the Marathas had ceased all supplies to the town as a pressure tactic to

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<sup>332</sup> *Ibid*, quoted on p. 355

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid*, quoted on pp. 356

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 356



appropriate *chauth* which led to shortages. Eventually, a few months later supplies were resumed but at the instance of the leading townsmen who reached an agreement with the Marathas. The circumstances in which Sohrab Khan was functioning were definitely challenging.

While the famine conditions were at its peak, friction was growing between the *mutasaddi* and the merchant prince which culminated in a revolt which was supported by leading elements of the town. It ended with the exit of Sohrab Khan and the ascendancy of Tegh Beg Khan under whom the *Nawabi* regime grew at Surat.<sup>335</sup>

The main issue of contention between Sohrab Khan and Muhammad Ali was the suburban complex developed at Athwa, a symbol of his towering personality. Besides the loss of revenue incurred by the governor, this area had become a refuge zone. Ali Muhammad Khan states that “he (Muhammad Ali) so organized it (Athwa) that any one who sought refuge there, no one had the courage to bring him out”<sup>336</sup>. Meanwhile, Sohrab Khan was also apprehensive about the arrival of Mustafid Khan. Interestingly the Dutch records indicate that Muhammad Ali was in close contact with the new *mutasaddi* designate, besides important city merchants.<sup>337</sup>

Sohrab Khan appointed a *faujdar* at Athwa with the counsel and consultation of his *naib*, Mir Adur Rahim, to maintain a check on the accounts and revenues therein. Further, he demanded the revenue dues on goods which had been disembarked at Athwa in the recent past. Eventually the matter was settled at “payment of Rupees one lac” against outstanding dues in spite of Muhammad Ali having made a proposal for deduction of expenses incurred for the arrangement of the Imperial *sanad*

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<sup>335</sup> Mirat-i-Ahmadi, p. 495

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid*, p. 495

<sup>337</sup> Uma Das Gupta, *Op. cit.*, pp. 357

for this office which was brushed aside. Further, the *naib* finding the situation opportune to make some money demanded an additional sum of ten thousand rupees for himself, which however was refused. This sort of assertion was perceived as highly provocative by Muhammad Ali who decided to organize resistance for the dismissal of Sohrab Khan and replace him with Tegh Beg Khan. The entire course of developments is discussed at length by Ali Muhammad Khan.<sup>338</sup>

Muhammad Ali impressively rallied support from different quarters which is quite reflective of the nature and functioning of power relations at the port town. Firstly, he summoned a meeting of all the leading merchants at his residence on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1732, to discuss plans for launching an offensive against the governor against whom everyone present had some or the other grievances. Muhammad Ali had a contingent of two or three thousand troops ready. Besides this, other merchants also agreed to raise troops; prominent among which was the Turkish contingent of Ahmad Chellaby who significantly was supported by the *sidis*. Among others participating in the conflict was the Maratha contingent of 10,000 cavaliers led by Devji Nagvir. While the English openly joined the merchants in this revolt, the Dutch, after initial procedural hesitation, too chose to join the allies.<sup>339</sup> Next, Muhammad Ali won the support of the *qiledar* Beglar Beg Khan who, however, did not miss the chance of reminding the merchant of a similar alliance earlier which was short lived. It was agreed that Tegh Beg Khan would become the governor after the expulsion of Sohrab Khan and the merchant promised to arrange the necessary *sanad* from the Imperial court.<sup>340</sup> The help of a local religious leader Syed Ali was also enlisted. It is

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<sup>338</sup> *Mirat*, pp. 495-503

<sup>339</sup> Uma Das Gupta, pp. 358-59

<sup>340</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 497

noteworthy ali Muhammad Khan describes as “a source of mischief and disturbance who (however) had a large number of disciples”<sup>341</sup> Muhammad Ali sent two thousand rupees as a gift and apprised him of his plans to which the preacher responded in affirmation. Next morning an assemblage of religious elements was summoned at the Khanqah of Syed Zain, the heir of Syed Idrus which included among others, the preacher Syed Ali, the *qazi* and the *mufti* besides the leading merchants. Occupying the chief seat, Syed Ali addressed the *qazi* and the *mufti* saying “where is it from Islam? In what religion and book is it allowed for Behram Khan (Sohrab Khan) to demand sums of money from the merchant prince? Now he makes another demand without any reason”.<sup>342</sup> This strategy definitely had the desired impact and hostilities commenced, which involved considerable loss of life and property in the town. Eventually Sohrab Khan was forced to yield.

It is quite ironical that on vacating the *darbar* he sought refuge at Athwa, the very complex which he sought to undermine.<sup>343</sup> Subsequently, while Sohrab Khan left Surat and proceeded to Ghoga, Tegh Beg Khan assumed the governorship of Surat in 1732 which he retained this time till his death in 1746.<sup>344</sup> Significantly he discarded the designation of *mutasaddi* and in its stead, styled himself as the *Nawab* or viceroy.<sup>345</sup>

Tegh Beg Khan's regime from the outset was characterized by a marked difference from that of his predecessors. The entire governance of the town had virtually become a familial affair with Beglar Beg Khan as the *qiledar* and Tegh Beg Khan as the governor. To further strengthen his position he appointed his third brother Ghulam Muhammad, later styled

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<sup>341</sup> *Ibid*, p. 495

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid*, p. 496

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, p. 499

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid*, p. 503

<sup>345</sup> Surat District Gazetteer, Ahmedabad, 1962, p. 141

as Safdar Khan, as his *naib* or deputy entrusted with the charge of managing financial and administrative affairs. Next he sought to undermine the merchant prince, his patron, whose ambitious pretensions would not permit him to function independently.<sup>346</sup>

An opportunity in this regard surfaced very soon when Muhammad Ali went a step further in elevating his position by attempting to ennoble his youngest son, Fakhr-ud-din. He wrote a letter to Hafiz Khidmatdar Khan, his patron at the Imperial court, who was a favourite of the Emperor, to arrange a *mansab* of 3000 and a *sanad* for the post of *mutasaddi* of Surat with the permission to enter the name of the new incumbent for himself. To 'process' this request he sent a *hundi* of sixty thousand rupees. Accidentally, this letter fell in the hands of the *Nawab*'s officers near Bharuch. The *mutasaddi* naturally confronted his patron and eventually placed him in confinement. The warehouses and properties of Muhammad Ali were sealed and most important, his hoarded cash estimated at eighty lacs of rupees was confiscated. About ten months later in 1733, he was killed.<sup>347</sup> It is quite likely that this wealth in its entirety or a portion of it facilitated the new polity to consolidate itself. Resultantly, in comparison to his predecessors he was definitely less hard pressed for funds.

Hereafter, the efforts of the *Nawab* were directed towards dealing with the Marathas in definite terms. It may be recalled that they had been an important component of the alliance which facilitated the rise of Togh Beg Khan. The Maratha presence in the *suba* was a harsh reality by this time. Further, their concerns at this juncture were not strictly predatory; rather they (at least the Gaekwads in south Gujarat) treated the region as

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<sup>346</sup> *Ibid*, p. 142-44

<sup>347</sup> *Mirat*, pp. 501-3. It is noteworthy that Muhammad Ali had secretly tried to seek the intervention of Nizam-ul-Mulk who did mediate but the *Nawab* proved to be smarter. He simply eliminated Muhammad Ali.

an area to be administered where stability and security were important. Overall though they were dreaded and abhorred, the only strategy of dealing with them was to reconcile to their presence and come to a workable understanding with them. This explains the rise of sharing and dual rule in different parts of the *suba*, Bharuch, Cambay or even the capital, Ahmedabad. Tegh Beg Khan too fell in line with this trend. Though he dreaded the presence of Damaji II, the son and heir of Pilaji, he prudently managed to keep an outwardly friendly appearance.

In 1735, the *Nawab* managed to work out an arrangement with Damaji to share the revenues derived from the Surat District. As has been mentioned earlier, the *parganas*, *mahals*, and *qasbas* located with the *sarkar* of Surat were classed as the Surat athavisi.<sup>348</sup> Till the governorship of Rustom Ali, the revenues from these areas were received by the *mutasaddi* though with disruptions sometimes. But after his death, the revenue inflow ceased completely with Pilaji forcefully assuming control over these areas in face of virtual absence of resistance. Though Sobrab Khan tried to reclaim these areas, his efforts proved to be futile. Tegh Beg Khan, however, seems to have come to an agreement with Damaji II for sharing the revenues.

A memorandum drawn up in Persian in 1785 during the reign of *Nawab* Hafiz-ud-din Khan, provides important information on the settlement, though the ratio of sharing is not clear. An English translation of this document is found in the Bombay Diary. According to details provided therein, it appears that the total amount granted to the *Nawab* was Rs. 2, 36,000 besides the Amil's *sukhdi* (literally a local sweet) or fee or perquisite. This document also enumerates the names of the *parganas* and *qasbas* in Surat district and the Mughal share accruing from each,

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<sup>348</sup> Details of the *parganas* comprising the Surat athavisi with revenue figures around this time are given in the Gense and Banaji, I, pp.17-18

besides details on deductions to be made under the heads of '*jagir* for the castle and *tankha* for the fleet' etc. The balance, after these deductions received by the *Nawab*, amounted to Rs. 1, 09,992.<sup>349</sup> Despite this settlement, it seems that initially, Damaji evaded the payment for three years. Thereafter, however, this arrangement remained in smooth operation for about half a century.<sup>350</sup> Besides this share in revenues, he imposed new taxes on the trade of Surat in 1735<sup>351</sup> a move strongly resisted by the resident merchants. This tax was called *Ekotaro*, signifying one percent and was levied with variance: Hindu traders paid seven percent while Muslims and Europeans paid three and a half percent.<sup>352</sup> It is noteworthy that unlike his predecessors, Tegh Beg Khan was relatively less hard-pressed for funds, a situation which facilitated him to consolidate his position.

Apart from these measures for consolidating his position, Tegh Beg Khan went a step further, which had serious implications. He tried to evade the payment of *tankha* or annual subsidy of Rupees three lacs due to the Sidis, the admirals of the Mughal fleet.<sup>353</sup> In the early eighteenth century they had lost their efficacy at the sea, a reality which they themselves acknowledged.<sup>354</sup> In 1733 they had been defeated by a

<sup>349</sup> A translation of this document is given in Gense and Banaji, Vol. I, pp. 16-18

<sup>350</sup> Henry Lowther to John Horne, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1735, Gense and Banaji, I, p. 18

<sup>351</sup> Commissariat, III, p. 589

<sup>352</sup> Surat District Gazetteer, p. 145. Also see, S.B. Rajyagor, History of Gujarat, p. 333

<sup>353</sup> The Sidis were navigators of Abyssinian descent, based at Janjira, a small island fortress on the Konkan coast some forty-five miles south of Bombay. Besides this island, they also controlled Danda Rajpuri and the adjoining territory on the mainland. On account of their abilities and powerful fleet they had been appointed as the Admirals of the Bijapur Sultans. Incidentally Sidi Jawahar, failed in an expedition against the forces of Shivaji and was put to death on charges of treachery. His successor Sidi Sambul in these circumstances shifted his allegiance to the Mughals. He was thus appointed as the Admiral of the Mughal fleet in 1670 with the official designation of Sidi Yakut for himself and his successors. He was to receive Rupees one lac fifty thousand annually from the Surat treasury to equip and maintain his fleet and his chief responsibility was the protection of the Mughal merchant ships and pilgrim traffic against pirates and other trouble makers at sea. This amount had later been enhanced to Rupees three lacs but in the 1730s it seems that only Rupees two lacs reached them while the balance was pocketed by the Surat *Mutasaddi* as his perquisite. Commissariat, II, pp. 172-73 and Vol III, pp. 532-32. *Mirat*, p. 244. D. R. Banaji, Bombay and the Sidis, London, 1932

<sup>354</sup> D.R. Banaji, Bombay and the Sidis, pp. 213-14

combined force of Shahu Raja and the Angria chiefs as a result of which they lost all their possessions except for the island of Janjira. In the face of these losses and the evasion of *tankha* by the regime at Surat, they were forced to turn to the English, who at their end were always inclined to patronize such elements. This was particularly important in view of the rapidly growing Maratha power on the Konkan coast and beyond which could make the English concerns at Bombay quite vulnerable.<sup>355</sup>

Interestingly, around this time the English too were aspiring for the position of Admirals and more importantly the grant or *tankha* attached to this office on the rationale that their primacy on the sea was well established. The company chief at Surat tried to induce Tegh Beg Khan to arrange the transfer of this subsidy to the Company, a demand quite contrary to the *Nawab*'s intentions.<sup>356</sup>

It may be recalled here that the role of the English in the recent conflict to displace Sohrab Khan was very decisive. Henry Lowther, the chief of the English Factory at Surat, besides being the principal strategist, was also the main source of artillery and ammunitions. In fact, during the course of the military operations, when the allies faced serious monetary problems, it was Lowther who managed to raise Rs 50,000/- of which Rs 30,000/- were the Company's funds. These inputs were indeed the decisive factor. The active involvement of the English in the episode in 1732 accorded them an important status, besides goodwill of the new rulers at least for some time.<sup>357</sup>

The *Nawab* definitely owed his position to the English and felt somewhat obliged for the same. However, in a short time when he had consolidated his position his stand changed. If given a choice, he would

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<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*, p. 216

<sup>356</sup> Commissariat III, P. 532

<sup>357</sup> Quoted in Commissariat, III, pp. 525-26 from Bombay Quarterly Review, IV 1856, pp. 186-86, (Hereafter cited as Bombay Quarterly Review IV)

have preferred that the post of the admirals remained with the Sidis who in wake of recent developments had become quite weak to insist on the full *tankha* amount. In comparison to them, the English were much stronger and in far better position to demand the entire amount. Despite prolonged negotiations Tegh Beg Khan was successful in keeping both sides engaged without any conclusive outcome for some time.

Meanwhile the Sidis made a representation to the Imperial court to intervene in the matter in June 1733. Promptly a positive response came forth in July 1733 wherein the court requested the Company President at Bombay to assist the Sidi in recovering his lost territories. While this request was turned down, the English resorted to a double edged policy. On the one hand they extended aid to the Sidis from Bombay, while simultaneously they were working towards undermining them of their hereditary office of the Mughal admirals.<sup>358</sup>

Besides these three contenders for the Tankha, at a little later juncture the ambitious Gaekwad chief Damaji II also cherished the desire of securing this much coveted office and the handsome amount attached with it. This dimension is evident in letter written from the Surat Factory to the Court of Directors at Bombay dated 10<sup>th</sup> April 1742, which besides this intent also provides insights in Damaji's growing naval formidability on the Gujarat Coast. "The Marathas have taken a large ship bound to Jiddah, belonging to this place, and worth between three and four lakhs of Rupees; but we presume they may restore the ship and cargo for some consideration, as we are of the opinion that they have taken this step to render themselves more formidable to the traders of this port and by that means to enjoy the duties or *jagir* which the Sidis are now in possession of, who are so miserably reduced that they are neither able to protect the

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<sup>358</sup> Commissariat, III, PP. 532-39, Also see B. R. Banaji, Bombay and the Sidis, pp. 213-39



trade of this port or their own territories; but, in case the Marathas should not so immediately succeed in acquiring this subsidy, they will however oblige the merchants to take their pass.”<sup>359</sup>

During the early phase of the *Nawabi* regime, while Tegh Beg Khan was devising ways to maintain his primacy, despite other ambitious concerns in south Gujarat, the English were definitely sore over the failure of negotiations. They soon realized that they were no longer dealing with an aspiring *mutasaddi*, but the *Nawab*, who was self-obsessed, ambitious and shrewd. In 1733-35 Tegh Beg assumed a very stiff posture against the English and their dependents at Surat. The restraint maintained in view of their earlier obligations was put aside.<sup>360</sup>

Thus Jagannath Laldas, the influential English broker was arrested on a very flimsy charge of inappropriate salute to the *Nawab*. Likewise, other associates of the English, members of the Parsi family of Rustom Manek, were subjected to heavy exactions on the ground that custom duties on imported goods had been evaded. Again, another leading shroff Shivdas Parakh was discredited at the provocation of the prominent Turkish merchant Ahmad Chellaby and Manekji Nowroji, a member of Rustomji Manekji's family who fell out due to internal differences. Incidentally, the latter two were allies of the *Nawab* in his activities against the English.<sup>361</sup> In the view of the English, these measures of the *Nawab* were in contradiction to the privileges claimed by the English, whereby their brokers and others attached to their factory were their dependents which entitled them to protection against any harm or arbitrary action on the part of the Surat regime. Though Farrukh Siyars's *farman* of 1716 granted numerous privileges, these were often abused by

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<sup>359</sup> Gense and Banaji, I, pp. 41-42.

<sup>360</sup> D.R. Banaji, op. cit., pp. 229-30

<sup>361</sup> Commissariat, III, pp. 543-546

the Company officials in conjunction with local elements. Much of the private trade pursued by the Company officials yielded high profits because of tax evasion on the pretext of the privileges sanctioned in this *farman*, which in principle was a violation. Likewise, instances abound wherein substantial commercial activity operated under English protection, which in effect meant a revenue loss for local authorities in those areas. It is quite likely that the *Nawab*'s actions were a combination of arbitrariness in some cases and an assertion of authority against such violations in others, resulting in revenue losses.<sup>362</sup>

For quite some time antagonism persisted between the *Nawab* and the English. It assumed serious proportions in the years to come. A formal statement listing demands and grievances of the Company was submitted to the *Nawab*. It was also conveyed that refusal to remedy matters would amount to serious disruption of trade at Surat. The principal demands of the English were that: they should be ensured protection in accordance with the terms of the Imperial *farman* of 1716, that all persons including the governor owing money to the English or to their brokers should be paid back. That their vessels should not be molested or be required to pay custom duties and lastly, their dependents at Surat should be compensated for all the ill treatment that had been meted out to them. In response to these demands Tegh Beg Khan presented his own set of demands to the English where he emphatically expressed his concern at the English private trade. The *Nawab* insisted that the English had been evading duties on their own private trade under the cover of exemptions which had been granted only for the Company's own goods imported from

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<sup>362</sup> An English translation of this Imperial *farman* of 1616 has been reproduced in Gense and Banaji, pp. 21-22. A very insightful article on English private trade is written by Bruce Watson. Indian Merchants and English Private Interests: 1659-1760 in Ashin Das Gupta and M. N. Pearson ed., India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800, Delhi, 1999, pp. 301-316

Europe. Thus, they must pay Rupees 27000/- annually in addition to the sum of Rupees 10000/- which they already gave as *peshkash*.<sup>363</sup>

It is interesting to note that the English at this juncture were offered assistance by Damaji which they however refused. Meanwhile Togh Beg Khan tried to undermine the English by inciting the Sidis to attack the English vessels at the Surat Bar. However, they were forced by the English to flee. Situation was further worsened with the English resorting to trade blockade stalling supplies, resulting in shortages and price rise. In face of these developments, the *Nawab* was forced to concede to the demands of the English in February 1735.<sup>364</sup>

Meanwhile, the Sidis remained persistent in their efforts to secure the *tankha* due to them from the *Nawab*. When Peaceful means proved futile, in March 1735, they too attacked the Surat Bar, capturing a large number of ships loaded with cargo and carried them to their base at Janjira. The *Nawab* was forced by the merchants to sign an obligation to submit the dispute between him and the Sidis to English arbitration.<sup>365</sup> It is pertinent to take note of the level of confidence the Surat merchants placed on the English vis a vis the *Nawab* whose accession was the outcome of a popular merchant revolt. It would not be inappropriate to say that while the legitimacy of the new regime was subtly being eroded, that of the English was beginning to gain some ground. Subsequently, after much deliberations and negotiations in August, 1735, though Togh Beg Khan agreed to pay Rupees 2,40,000 against arrears of the *tankha* and Rupees 1,50,000 for the current year, he evaded the payment. Consequently, the Sidis again blocked all trade and this time raised their demand to Rupees 9,00,000. Once again the *Nawab* turned to the English, who however

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<sup>363</sup> Bombay Quarterly Review, IV, pp.196-98

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 200-02

<sup>365</sup> D. R. Banaji, Bombay and the Sidis, pp. 236-37.

chose to refrain from intervening. Tegh Beg Khan was forced to resolve the crisis on his own. Finally, in February 1736, a compromise was reached.<sup>366</sup>

During the next decade the relations between the *Nawab* and the English remained quite strained. Developments during this entire period is a saga of contentious issues, representations, negotiations and half hearted promises on the part of the *Nawab* who was working against heavy odds; the Marathas, the Sidis; the merchants and their patrons; besides the Dutch and the English. The most important among all these were the English whose presence in the 1740's and 1750's became increasingly pervasive, particularly in the wake of their policy, both at Surat and Bombay, of assuming the role of mediators and arbiters in political and private tiffs besides providing asylum to distressed elements. Yet it is impressive that Tegh Beg Khan was able to meet the challenges of all these odds and sustain himself, compromising only when left with no alternative.

Similarly, Tegh Beg Khan's measures and policies proved to be quite discouraging to the merchants; many of whom contemplated leaving the city. In the 1740's a serious crisis surfaced with reports of the appointment of Abdul Aziz Khan, a protégé of Nasir Jung (the rebel son of Nizam-ul-Mulk) as the governor of Gujarat, with authority over Surat. The Nawab felt compelled to rally support from all relevant quarters. In desperation he even produced a royal *farman* (probably a fake one) in which the Sidi Admiral, Europeans, and resident merchants were commanded to support him and oppose the traitor (Abdul Aziz Khan). It is interesting to note that the *Nawab's* posture in these circumstances became very accommodating. He solicited the leading merchants to voice

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<sup>366</sup> *Ibid*, p. 249

their grievances and demands. In response they presented their demands, important among which were that the new imposts should be nullified;<sup>367</sup> that civil cases, if not settled within fifty years should be closed; that all charges and suits instead of being decided in an arbitrary and summary manner should be referred to the customary jury selected from the litigants castes. Hard pressed for popular support, the *Nawab* promised to satisfy these demands which was a flimsy commitment as is evidenced by the fact that the taxes persisted.<sup>368</sup>

In 1743, Togh Beg Khan entrusted all authority to his brother and *naib*, Safdar Khan, whose regime proved to be no different from the preceding one. Subsequently, the death of Togh Beg Khan in August 1749 became a turning point in the *Nawabi's* fortune. The entire period from 1749 to 1759, when Surat was captured by the English, was marked by family dissensions and civil strife in which interestingly, both the Dutch and the English turned against each other as partisans of rival claimants. The important categories playing partisans in this strife were the Dutch, the English, the Sidis (who by this time had regained their position impressively) and the Marathas, who were habitually shifting sides keeping their gains in mind. Eventually, in 1759 it was the English who prevailed. In alliance with the Peshwa and the Surat traders the English decisively defeated the Sidi leader and his ally Mia Achan which gave them control of the castle and subsequently the town. A sanad to this effect was 'arranged' from the Emperor. Henceforth, the Nawab was merely a nominal head with virtually no authority.

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<sup>367</sup> *Togh Beg Khan* had introduced new duties on all goods passing through Surat. These new taxes were classed as *makat* and were continued by his successors which yielded an impressive amount of Rs. 4,26,000 in 1778. Full details have been given in the *Bombay Gazetteer*, II, (Surat and Bharuch), p. 138

<sup>368</sup> *Commissariat*, III, PP. 589