

MARITIME TRADING SETTLEMENTS IN THE ARABIAN SEA REGION UPTO 1500 A.D.

V. D. DIVEKAR

From pre-historic times peoples of the Indian Ocean region have crossed the seas and established their settlements in distant lands. The settlers migrated as colonists, invaders, mercenaries, refugees, slaves and others. But the chief cause for their migrations, in the case of many of them, was economic in origin.

From the point of view of maritime trade history, the Indian Ocean region may be roughly divided into two parts: the Arabian sea region, and the rest of the Indian Ocean region. In the Arabian sea region, as compared to the rest of the region, there were longer traditions of empire-building, rise of civilizations, and expansions of maritime and inland trade. Also, due to their nearness to the Mediterranean regions and their advancing civilizations, and the consequent rise in demand for Asian and African luxuries, the peoples of the Arabian sea region had greater opportunities of becoming the pioneers in long distance international trade, and of establishing trading settlements in distant lands.

When the Portuguese traders entered the Arabian sea in 1498, they were a state or quasi-state establishment and had instructions to drive out the Moors from the eastern trade. Moreover, they had also orders from their king to build forts at the trading centres. This was, indeed, a novel situation with revolutionary possibilities. The earlier resident foreign traders, though autonomous groups in the trading centres, were not state or quasi-state bodies; and had migrated for trading along with others and not to expel others out of the trade.

Thus, the end of the fifteenth century marked a divide in the history of international maritime trade and trading settlements. In the present paper it is proposed to describe and analyse the old order that prevailed for centuries before it was challenged by new forces generated in Europe.