

Pattern of Maratha Trade in the Konkan Region, c 1600-1800 A. D.

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The present paper is divided into two parts. Part I deals with different aspects of trading and transporting activities of the Marathas in the 17th-18th centuries in the Konkan region, and also their trading between coastal areas and Desh region of Maharashtra. It presents together briefly relevant information on the subject with illustrations drawn generally from the accounts available in the Peshwa records. Part II is more general in approach and attempts to answer certain basic issues such as: why was it that the Marathas, or any section of them, did not develop themselves into a significant maritime trading community, in spite of their having a long sea coast from Daman in the north to Goa in the south with a string of ports in between? How far was the geographical factor important in this regard? What part was played by the socio-political attitudes of the Marathas? Which were the basic forces which shaped differently the business histories of two neighbouring peoples — the Marathas and the Gujaratis?

It appears from the present study that geographical factors such as lack of agricultural surplus, bad transportability and the barrier of the Sahyadris, along with such human factors as lack of tradition and suitable socio-political attitudes played a vital role in this respect. As a result, the trading activities of the Marathas in coastal areas throughout remained at a moderate and local level, as compared to those of important trading communities like the Gujaratis, who operated on the international level.

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Maharashtra has to its west a long sea coast of the Konkan region. For at least two thousand years the Konkan coast, with its string of ports is known to have been busy in international maritime trade. However, it appears that the traders who traded on the western coast of Maharashtra were predominantly and mostly the 'outsiders' like Gujaratis, Arabs and Europeans, and that the native traders of Maharashtra themselves lagged much behind in the sea trading activities. They appear to have operated only on a