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## Unraveling the Strands of Diplomacy in the Contest for Coastal Gujarat in the Sixteenth Century

*"Its [the Mediterranean Sea's] life is linked to the land, its poetry more than half-rural, its sailors may turn peasant with the seasons; it is the sea of vineyards and olive trees just as much as the sea of the long-oared galleys and the roundships of merchants and its history can no more be separated from that of the lands surrounding it than the clay can be separated from the hands of the potter who shapes it"*<sup>2</sup>

The province of Gujarat, located on the western seaboard of the Indian subcontinent, has served as 'the maritime gateway to India' from the western Indian Ocean region since the second century C.E. The Gulf of Cambay with its deeply indented coastline was dotted with numerous ports, which along with their high-yielding hinterlands had made the province an emporium of maritime commerce.<sup>3</sup> Its importance is best captured in the account of Tome Pires who remarked:

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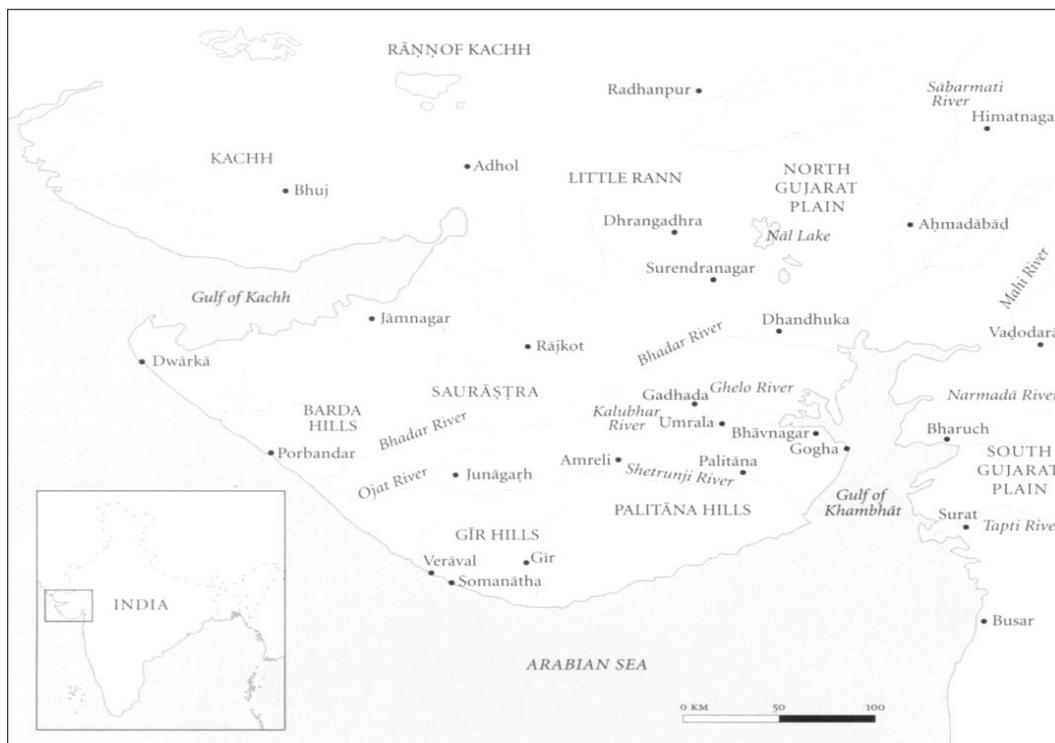
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<sup>2</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1, London, 1972-3, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Gavin R. G. Hambly, 'Gujarat', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* Vol. XI, Fasc. 4 (December 2002), pp. 385-390.

Cambay chiefly stretches out two arms, with her right arm she reaches out towards Aden, and with the other towards Malacca.<sup>4</sup>

These sea ports led to the emergence of a vast regional trading complex. Gujarat occupied a distinct position in the trade network as a site for the production and redistribution of goods. The overland network of trade intersected with and became crucial in the formulation of oceanic trade. The political authority was keen to trap the massive revenues and resources from this maritime trade and hence devoted sufficient attention to the requirements of merchants and often entered into mutually beneficiary arrangements with them.<sup>5</sup>



Map 1. Map of Gujarat and its littoral.

<sup>4</sup> Tome Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires, An Account of the East, From the Red Sea to Japan, Written in Malacca and India in 1512–1515*, The Hakluyt Society, London, 1944, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Samira Sheikh, *Forging a Region: Sultans, Traders and Pilgrims in Gujarat, 1200–1500*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 33, 40, 44–5.

Source: Himanshu Prabha Ray, 'The Artisan and the Merchant in Early Gujarat, Sixth-Eleventh Centuries', in *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 34, *Communities and Commodities: Western India and the Indian Ocean, Eleventh-Fifteenth Centuries* (2004), p. 41.

Michael Pearson has argued with regard to governments of pre-colonial Asia that controllers of small political units were bound to take more interest in overseas trade compared to rulers with large peasant populations that can be taxed relatively easily. The category 'port cities', which he defined as quasi-states enjoyed *de jure* or *de facto* independence from any inland political authority. Being territorially small entities, their revenues were not generated from the land but from taxes on commodities and trade, various merchant communities, and from the local rulers' own participation in trade.<sup>6</sup> Much in the same vein, Sanjay Subrahmanyam points out that these city-states based in ports rose during the course of the fifteenth century and came to dominate the trading world of the Indian Ocean from Melaka in the east to Aden in the west.<sup>7</sup>

In the first half of the sixteenth century, the port town of Diu, until its cessation to the Portuguese by Sultan Bahadur Shah in 1535, boomed under the sound administration of its governor Malik Ayaz who was also a great trader and ship owner. Diu's geographic advantage lay in the fact that it had access to the rich hinterland of Gujarat. The figure of Malik Ayaz exemplifies that strata of ruling class in medieval South Asia who combined in themselves both political and commercial roles.<sup>8</sup> The Bolognese merchant, Ludovico di Varthema, writing in the early sixteenth century

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<sup>6</sup> Michael N. Pearson, 'Merchants and States', *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350-1750*, ed. James D. Tracy, *Studies in Comparative Early Modern History* Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 69-71. The political establishment of port-cities confirm to the concept of state mercantilism which is based on the notion that states themselves can be active participants in trade. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Of *Imarat* and *Tijarat*: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400 to 1750', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Oct, 1995), p. 753.

<sup>7</sup> Subrahmanyam, 'Of *Imarat* and *Tijarat*', p. 756. Pearson states that the prosperity of these port cities was due to the fact that the rulers ensured a liberal atmosphere and an infrastructure that was congenial for trade that was conducted by diverse communities of merchants. Customs duties were low and relatively equitable, visiting merchants enjoyed almost complete juridical autonomy, reside with their community members and themselves handled most of their legal and commercial matters. Officials concerned with trade were instructed to encourage and welcome visitors and maintain a standard level of law and order. Pearson, 'Merchants and States', pp. 70-71.

<sup>8</sup> Michael N. Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, pp. 68-9. The overseas trade of Diu, in which Malik Ayaz was himself an active participant, yielded him half his income, which he used to fortify the port city and establish a strong

termed Diu as *bandar-i-rumi* on account of the large number of West Asian merchants, particularly Turks, who operated in it.<sup>9</sup> The Portuguese had their eyes fixated on Diu, whose acquisition was a pre-requisite for them to achieve a complete monopoly of the trade with India.

Surat, one of the principal ports of Gujarat in the early sixteenth century, was rapidly emerging to rival the status of Diu. As a centre for redistribution facilitating global networks of exchange, Surat was the redistribution point for coloured woollen clothes and glassware from the Mediterranean, and items such as rosewater, opium, indigo and silver from west Asia, which were carried to the regions of the South China Sea. As an entrepot for export, Surat was the outlet for the different varieties of textiles manufactured in Gujarat. This comprised of both coarse and expensive fine-quality cotton as well as silk. The imports obtained from Malacca included Chinese goods such as silk and porcelain, Indonesian spices such as pepper, cloves, nutmeg and mace, besides woods and aromatics, and precious and non-precious metals such as Malayan tin.<sup>10</sup> The administration of Surat was in the hands of Malik Gopi, a Brahmin noble of the Muzaffarid Sultanate of Gujarat. Himself a great merchant, Malik Gopi had many factors and agents at his service, who traversed in his vessels plying to Malacca (and other parts of South-east Asia), importing textiles, the chief commodity in this trade.<sup>11</sup> Gujarati merchants were one of the major mercantile communities in Malacca who exported spices to the south-western Indian peninsula and thence to west Asia.

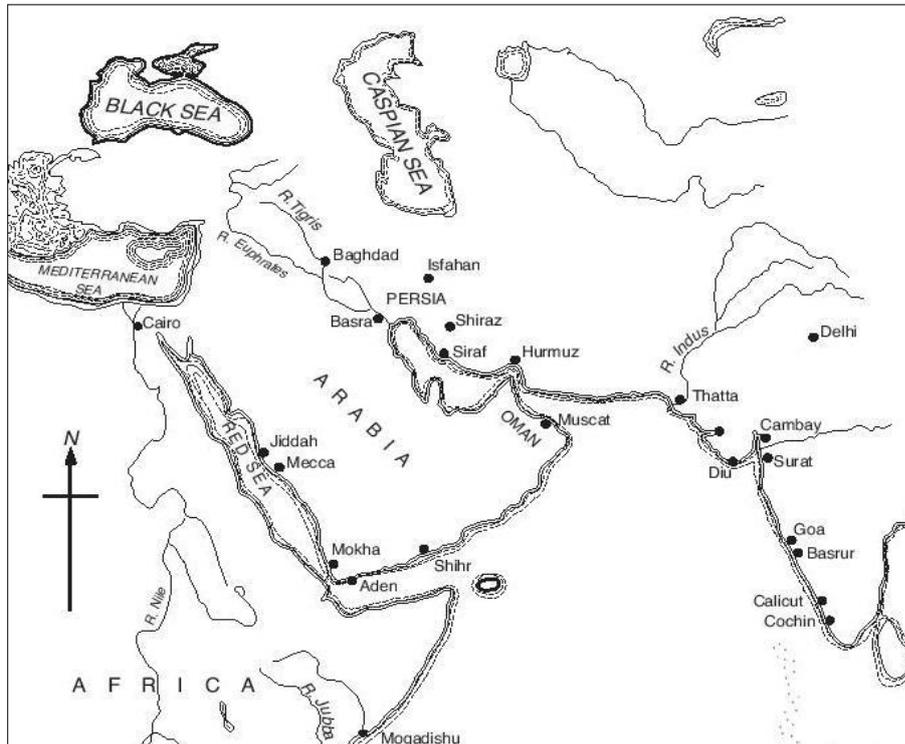
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fleet as well as wield power at the inland court. K.S.Mathew, 'Malik Ayaz and the Portuguese Trade with India', in *Portuguese and the Sultanate of Gujarat*, Delhi, 1986, pp. 24-40.

<sup>9</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Of *Imarat* and *Tijarat*', p. 765.

<sup>10</sup> Om Prakash, *The New Cambridge History of India, Volume 2, Part 5 European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-colonial India*, Cambridge University Press 1998, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> K.S.Mathew, *Portuguese and the Sultanate of Gujarat*, pp. 11-12.



Map 2. The western Indian Ocean.

Source: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: A Political and Economic History* (2nd edition: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), p. 328.

The first section of the paper deals with the defence mechanisms resorted to by the governors of Surat and Diu- Malik Gopi and Malik Ayaz respectively- in the absence of a navy to counter the Portuguese menace during the second decade of the sixteenth century. By showing how the two governors frustrated Afonso Albuquerque's efforts in procuring anything significant from the ports of Cambay, it highlights the efficacy of diplomacy as a tactic to stall invasion by force. The second section takes us to the mid-sixteenth century when the political authority of the Sultanate of Gujarat was fragmenting. Despite the cessation of Diu to the Portuguese by Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat in 1535, the rulers of the coast made a couple of attempts to retake it. Diu's second siege was spearheaded by its governor Khwaja Safar, whose stiff resistance compelled the then-Portuguese governor of Goa to seek diplomatic help in order to secure their possession for which they were desperate since the days of Albuquerque. Besides addressing the facets of diplomacy,

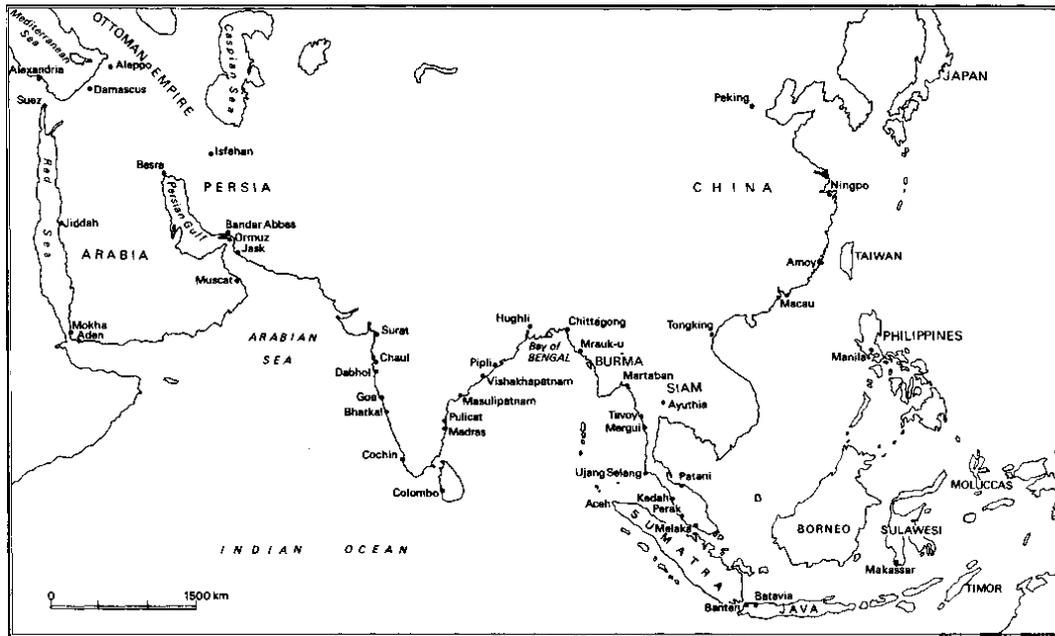
the latter part of the paper will also bring out the inexorable links between the maritime and terrestrial domains, thereby demonstrating the usefulness of Braudel's hypothesis regarding the Mediterranean in the context of South Asia and the western Indian Ocean.

## I

The discovery of an alternate route connecting Europe and Asia via the Cape of Good Hope (around the tip of Africa) by the Portuguese eventually saw their appearance on the western coastal enclaves at the turn of the sixteenth century. The chief aim of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth century was to redirect the trade (mainly in spices) from Asia to Europe via the Cape route to bring prosperity to the Iberian Peninsula. They sought to monopolize the supply of spices to Europe and to control and tax all other Asian trade. The Portuguese attempts at hegemonic control and domination by deploying military force came as a shock to the old, established trading culture of the Indian Ocean that were now threatened and the traditional beneficiaries of this lucrative trade—especially the Arabs and the Gujarati merchants—stood to lose out financially. The Portuguese intended to control the huge sea trade of Gujarat and increase the effectiveness of patrols across the mouth of the Gulf of Cambay.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Michael N. Pearson, 'India and the Indian Ocean in the Sixteenth Century', in *India and the Indian Ocean*, p. 84; Michael N. Pearson, *The New Cambridge History of India*, (Volume 1, Part 1): *The Portuguese in India*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 31.



Map 3. Trading Networks in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1650.

Source: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce Southern India 1500-1650* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 107.

The biography of Afonso de Albuquerque (1453–1515), which will be our chief source for the first section, was compiled by his son Brás de Albuquerque on the basis of his father's documentation. It comprises of a detailed account of the protagonist's exploits and adventures as well as his interactions with rulers of many Asian kingdoms located on the coast. The letters and the dialogues contained in these four volumes allow us to understand the multiple challenges before the Portuguese in their initial decades in a distant corner of the globe, all of which could not resolved by their invincible naval power. They bring out the profound utilitarian role of diplomacy in these spatial and temporal contexts in resolving, mitigating or exacerbating disputes arising out of controlling maritime resources.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Afonso [Brás] de Albuquerque, *Comentários de Afonso de Albuquerque*, English translation by Walter de Gray Birch, *The Commentaries of the Great Afonso Dalboquerque, Second Viceroy of India*, 4 vols., Hakluyt Society, London, 1880; reprint:

**Keeping the Foe Closer: Diplomacy in the Defence of Surat**

The Portuguese intrusion into the eastern Indian Ocean was done with the motive to seize the large volume of trade between China and India which passed through the narrow strategic straits of Malacca. The port city of Malacca which controlled this trade was captured by Albuquerque in 1511.<sup>14</sup> Together with the fall of Goa in the previous year, the new situation created panic and alarmed Malik Gopi, who felt it pragmatic to follow a policy of appeasement rather than challenging the Portuguese, whose naval supremacy was unparalleled. Albuquerque's typical method of constructing a string of fortresses along the coast and introducing the *cartaz* (which was a safe-conduct that the Asian merchants had to purchase from the Portuguese at a fee in order to enjoy the right to passage in Asian waters) struck a heavy blow to the merchant community of Gujarat in Malacca.<sup>15</sup>

The Portuguese problem for Malik Gopi worked at two different levels. On the one hand, he could not afford to lose out on the prosperous trade that Surat enjoyed with South-east Asia. On the other hand, he wished to enhance Surat at the cost of Diu, whose booming commercial contact with the Aden-Hormuz complex brought in enormous revenues leading to urban growth. So that the Portuguese do not impede their activities, which was the lifeline of his income, Malik Gopi acted in compliance with Portuguese demands and indeed extended all possible assistance to them. His repeated overtures of friendship were done to this effect:

True friendship such as I have in my soul Afonso Dalboquerque!... And know you also that in the kingdom of Guzarate a true friend of yours am I and everything which shall be necessary between you and the king in respect of alliance and friendship that will I accomplish.<sup>16</sup>

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Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2000. Afonso de Albuquerque was the celebrated governor of the *Estado da India* (1509-1515) whose successful military campaigns in the shores of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf laid the foundations of the first Iberian colonies in maritime Asia.

<sup>14</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia*, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> Mathew, *Portuguese and the Sultanate of Gujarat*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Albuquerque, *Commentaries*, vol. 4, pp. 212-3.

The friendship was appreciated and very well received at the other end too as the *Commentaries* would have us to believe:

...And to Milecopi [Malik Gopi], Afonso Dalboquerque wrote many thanks for the care he had taken in the affairs of the king, his lord, leading him to indulge in hope of a great reward for his services...<sup>17</sup>

He had also been pushing for an alliance between the Sultan of Gujarat and the King of Portugal (through Albuquerque):

the ambassador... from the King of Cambaya he gave him also a letter of credentials and told him that the king his lord was very desirous of having peace and alliance with the King of Portugal and that many times already he had sent to say so.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the governor of Surat was in a hurry to seal the pact:

and that now he [Malik Gopi] had been informed that his lordship Afonso Dalboquerque was making himself ready to pass through the Straits of Mecca and if it were true he begged him earnestly to arrange so that in his journey he should pass by his land and he would come and converse with him in any of his ports that might be selected and there they would settle the terms of their mutual alliances.<sup>19</sup>

Keen to be in the good books of Albuquerque, Malik Gopi was intent upon releasing a bunch of Portuguese hostages at Champaner who were captured off a Portuguese ship on the Gujarat coast in 1510.<sup>20</sup> The event is related in some detail in the *Commentaries*:

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> Albuquerque, *Commentaries*, vol. 2, p. 210.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Mathew, *Portuguese and the Sultanate of Gujarat*, pp. 15-16; S. A. I. Tirmizi, *Some Aspects of Medieval Gujarat*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1968, p. 63.

...the ambassador [from the King of Cambaya] put into the hands of Afonso Dalboquerque a letter from the Christians who were there in captivity wherein they showed how D Afonso his nephew had sailed out from Cocotora in the ship Suneta Cruz and while they were making their passage across the gulf of India they took a very richly laden ship of Cambaya and after having taken her being as far advanced upon their course as the shallows of Padua so fierce a storm broke over them that they scudded along under bare poles and at length reached a port of the Guzarates called Nabande and there they ran the ship upon some shallows and it was wrecked. And the letter continued when the ship had struck D Afonso and five or six men thinking that they could save themselves by swimming because they were close to the shore cast themselves into the sea on boards and because the storm raged very violently and the sea was running so boisterously they were overwhelmed in such wise that all of them were drowned while those who remained on board the ship about fifty in number waiting for the low tide escaped with their lives. And when they had got to land they were immediately taken prisoners in consequence of the representations of twenty Moors whom they had with them men who had belonged to the ship which had been taken as a prize.<sup>21</sup>

Capitalising on his good rapport with Sultan Mahmud Begarah (r. 1458-1511), Malik Gopi arranged the release of the prisoners, in what was a deliberate act of appeasement. This move was undertaken because of the commencement of the eastward voyage of Albuquerque to Malacca in 1511, which had exposed to danger Malik Gopi's trading vessels plying between south-east Asia and the west coast of India.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the envoy had reported that a certain ship from Gujarat had been captured by the Portuguese, which the Sultan wanted to be returned to him. The Sultan on his part made it known to the Portuguese governor that

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>22</sup> Mathew, *Portuguese and the Sultanate of Gujarat*, p. 16.

...he had under his protection a few Portuguese who had been wrecked in a ship which had run ashore on the coast in one of his ports and he would immediately send them on to him.<sup>23</sup>

Malik Gopi not only secured the liberation of these prisoners by convincing the Sultan to issue orders to that effect, he also housed them at the capital at his own expense and treated them sympathetically. This friendly treatment meted out is attested by the Portuguese themselves:

[W]hen Gopicaica chief Alguazil of King of Cambaya was informed that the Portuguese in captivity in those parts and suffering ill treatment the hands of the people of the land he had prevailed the king to send for them and they were now dwelling Champaner and begged his lordship Afonso to devise some plan whereby he might procure release.<sup>24</sup>

Malik Gopi himself sent a letter to Albuquerque through the envoy of the Sultan. He would certainly not let go of an opportunity to sing in glory of himself and his kind deeds towards the Portuguese before the governor. The incident is narrated once again and the friendly disposition of Malik Gopi is highlighted, indeed contrasted, to the hostile attitude of the rest:

After due commendations I give you to know that one of your ships fought with a ship from Paverij and took her and carried her away to Cochim and while they were on their voyage thither a storm struck them and your ship reached the shore in a harbour of Guzarate where she was lost and there came in her about sixty Portuguese more or less and twenty persons belonging to the ship of Paverij. I was informed that the men of your ship had put to death certain persons of the ship of Paverij which they had taken and those who came with them told it to the people of the said harbour where your ship ran ashore for which reason the people of the harbour desired to kill them but I when I heard this news laid the matter before the king and he issued a command that they should be immediately brought before him. Then Caixa an alcaide of Nabande sent

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<sup>23</sup> Albuquerque, *Commentaries*, vol. 2, p. 211.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

them loaded with irons to the king and I presented them to him and he forthwith ordered their irons to be struck off and commanded that they should be supplied with everything that was necessary for their maintenance and your own people are writing letters to you whereby you will know that all this really took place.<sup>25</sup>

Having presented a noble picture of himself before Albuquerque, Gopi finally comes to the bargain. Along with the release of the prisoners he was also willing to let the Portuguese have a free hand to use the ports of Gujarat for trading purposes. In return, he sought safety of navigation for his own vessels, so that they were not subject to plundering and marauding activities of the Portuguese on sea. The goodwill was reiterated and the conditions were laid down in following words:

It is necessary that you should send hither one of your people, a Christian, and a trustworthy man with an assurance that your ships shall not cruise about ruining our maritime traffic and robbing in the seas and then we will immediately give orders that your Christians be released and your ships shall be able to go and to come unharmed to and from the ports of Cambaya buying and selling in them and all the ports of Cambaya shall be at your disposal and this your man you can send in a ship to the port of Surat and he might bring some good thing of service to the king and I will present him to the king and I will befriend him and I will conclude matters with him in such wise that the ports of Cambaya be at your service and you shall know that my friendship is true and in this manner it will be augmented.<sup>26</sup>

The stroke worked in the favour of Malik Gopi and his concerns were answered by Albuquerque:

As soon as I received this news which you wrote to me I immediately commanded that due respect should be paid to the people who were taken in the ship *Meri* which had been taken by one of my ships which I sent to Cocotora and the chief captain and governor of those parts who

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212-3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

is now here with me brought her with him. Now let the king consider what he will command to be done to the ship and to the Moors for I shall be pleased to serve him in everything and so also will the chief captain of those parts do who is here together with me... I should be very happy if the King of Cambaya would send me these Christians for in all other I shall be happy to please him and all shall be done according to his desire.<sup>27</sup>

During the initial decades of this century, the Portuguese were anxious to obtain a foothold in Diu to monopolize the trade in spices to West Asia.<sup>28</sup> Through his emissary Tristao Dega to Sultan Muzaffar II (r. 1511-26) in 1512, Albuquerque sought permission to build a fort at Diu for the safety of the Portuguese personnel.<sup>29</sup> On his return from the mission, Dega reported to Albuquerque at Chaul that the Sultan had refused to hand over Diu and was stubborn on his stand. As a compensation, he had offered some other islands along the coast which the Portuguese could fortify and settle down on. It is interesting to note that the ambassador also reported that he had 'learnt from Milecopi that Milequeaz [Malik Ayaz] was at the bottom of all this, being annoyed at finding himself kept out of Diu...'.<sup>30</sup>

A couple of years later, Albuquerque send two more ambassadors, Fernandez de Beja and James Teixeira, to the court of Gujarat to press the matter. On this occasion too, Malik Gopi had tried the best in his capacity to help the embassy achieve its target.<sup>31</sup> On their arrival at the capital Champaner, Malik Gopi gave them a warm welcome:

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>28</sup> Pearson, *Portuguese in India*, p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> Albuquerque, *Commentaries*, vol. 3, p. 245. '...the instructions which our ambassador carried were to demand leave to erect a fortress in Diu, for the security of the subjects and property of the King of Portugal; and that the merchants of that kingdom should send their merchandise to Goa and not to any other part, and there they would find everything they required by way of a homeward-bound cargo; and that the king should not receive any Rumes or Turks into his kingdom, because they were capital enemies of the Portuguese.'

<sup>30</sup> Albuquerque, *Commentaries*, vol. 4, p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> Mathew, *Portuguese and the Sultanate of Gujarat*, p. 17; Tirmizi, *Some Aspects of Medieval Gujarat*, p. 65. Both authors make mention of a letter to Albuquerque from Malik Gopi (which none of them unfortunately produce), dispatched through the messenger of the Sultan, in which he had probably tried to instigate the governor to take action against Malik Ayaz, stating that the latter had bribed the Sultan to prevent him from surrendering Diu.

...he sent one of his sons in charge of a large body of men on horse and on foot, with a great company of trumpeters, to receive them, and there they passed the night, being richly entertained and nobly banqueted by Melecopi, to whom Diogo Fernandez de Beja delivered the letter which he had brought from Afonso Dalboquerque, and with it a present, and gave him an account of the business for which he had come, for in this way he had been instructed to act.<sup>32</sup>

Gopi also went out of his way in chalking out strategies for the envoys in that direction. The chronicler continues:

After long conversations held upon this matter, Melecopi on his part giving them advice how to conduct themselves, and pointing out to them the position which they ought to take up in the business, they took their leave of him, and set out on their way to Madoval where the king lived, and Melecopi sent with them one of the principal men of his household, with six horsemen in his train, in order to accompany them, and told them on no account to lodge anywhere except where this man of his indicated to them.<sup>33</sup>

### **Holding Back the Invader: Diplomatic Strategies in Safeguarding Diu**

These set of negotiations lead us to the spirited resistance through diplomacy to the repeated Portuguese attempts to gain mastery over Diu by its celebrated governor Malik Ayaz till the early 1520s. Unlike Malik Gopi, Malik Ayaz was essentially opposed to the Portuguese, and his diplomatic stance allows us to compare and contrast the contrary methods of resistance with the purpose of protecting a similar end. A singular statement aptly brings out the essence of the tussle:

as long as he [Albuquerque] was Governor of India, Miliqueaz never felt himself very safe in Diu, although he was very crafty in dissembling this fear.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Albuquerque, *Commentaries*, vol. 4, p. 97.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>34</sup> Albuquerque, *Commentaries*, vol. 3, p. 246.

A study of these 'crafty' moves which were carried further by his successors as well as Sultan Bahadur till the mid-1530s will explain the multiple shades of diplomacy that often overlapped each other and worked in tandem concerning a single issue.

Unlike the seizure of Goa which was completed within a short span of time without investing much military might or diplomatic feats, the capitulation of Diu and its subsequent control turned out to be an arduous task for the Portuguese. I do not intend here to present a summary of the encounter between the political aristocracy of the Gujarat Sultanate and the Portuguese and how it was entangled with the court politics of the Muzaffarids nor the rivalry between Malik Ayaz and Malik Gopi due to their maritime trade oriented policies, which have been studied at some length.<sup>35</sup> Rather I seek to highlight certain resilient features in the diplomatic attitude of Malik Ayaz to address the nuances of early modern diplomacy.

Two traits are particularly discernible in Malik Ayaz's approach to the problem: the idea of military prowess and the consequent fear that emanates from it and the practice of bribery. While his naval strength was a deterrent for the Portuguese to engage in any full-scale armed encounter, showering lavish presents on the Sultan was his ploy to keep the latter in good humour and desist him from striking a cordial deal with the Portuguese, which would have meant the cessation of Diu, benefitting Surat. The Portuguese did not risk launching a full-scale aggression on Diu because of its formidable defences and a powerful navy.<sup>36</sup> However, this did not induce complacency in Malik Ayaz who time and again kept himself updated on the naval preparations and estimated strength of the Portuguese fleet at Goa.<sup>37</sup> A military attack being imminent anytime, Malik Ayaz always treaded a cautious path.

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<sup>35</sup> K.S.Mathew, 'Malik Ayaz and the Portuguese Trade with India', pp. 24-40; Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, pp. 67-71; Pearson, *The Portuguese in India*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>36</sup> Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers*, pp. 69-70. The author notes that the entrance to Diu could be blocked by a large iron chain and three large hulks which were ever-ready to be sunk when needed. Apart from a stockade, there was a fort on an artificial island in the middle of the entrance, surrounded by an artificial reef so that ships could not approach it. The governor's navy comprised of at least a 100 *fustas*, each having 25 pairs of oars, one heavy cannon and two lighter pieces. He also had few larger war vessels as well as a fleet of armed merchant ships.

<sup>37</sup> Mathew, *Portuguese and the Sultanate of Gujarat*, pp. 34-5. Malik Ayaz repeatedly send his informant, one Sidl Ali, to keep a close watch on the military developments at Goa. The event cited below is from 1512; after which he send him again prior to 1514 and 1521.

This fear induced attitude was not lost upon the Portuguese who tried to overwhelm him (through his messenger) about their striking power:

...Afonso Dalboquerque dispatched a messenger who had come from Miliquiaz to visit him...and before this one returned, orders were given that he should be taken round to inspect the king's arsenals, which at that time were full of artillery, saddles and horse gear, weapons, and all kinds of munitions and material of war, and all the stables filled with horses, and a general review of all the crossbowmen and musketeers was ordered...<sup>38</sup>

References to bribery occur a number of times in the *Commentaries*. Fernao Maitinz Evangelho informs Albuquerque, of other things, that:

...Miliqueaz had set out to the King of Cambay's court in regard to the affair of Diu, carrying a considerable quantity of silver and gold, jewels and rich cloths, and two hundred horses, to entice the king and his governors; carrying also, as a present for the king, the sword which his lordship had at a former time presented to him.<sup>39</sup>

Malik Gopi had also spilled the beans to the envoy Diogo Fernandez de Beja that:

...Miliqueaz, after the departure of Tristao Dega had gone to the king's Court, and spoken frequently with the king, advising him by no means to grant a fortress in Diu to the Frangues; for, if they wished to build it there, it was in order to wrest his kingdom eventually from him; and so the king had strongly fortified Diu, and now had no apprehension that any power in the world could prevail against it.<sup>40</sup>

That such a ploy had its desired effect on the monarch is evident from Diogo Fernandez and James Teixeira who reported to Albuquerque that:

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<sup>38</sup> Albuquerque, *Commentaries*, vol. 3, p. 246.

<sup>39</sup> Albuquerque, *Commentaries*, vol. 4, p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

...the king was very far from granting them a fortress in Diu, for Miliqueaz was intriguing against it by no means of corrupt bribes, which he was constantly giving to Bilirrane, the king's chief wife who ruled him.<sup>41</sup>

Malik Ayaz's bestowal of riches on the king along with his counsel did not fall on deaf ears as can be seen from the rigid stance of the latter during his dialogue with Diogo Fernandez, whose emissary ended in a dismal failure. Muzaffar Shah told the embassy that he:

would be happy to grant him [Albuquerque] a site for a fortress in any one of the following places at his pleasure...Beroche, Currate, Maim, Dumbes or Bacar, and let him send him word in his despatch as to which of these places he would desire to accept; but if he would not accept these terms, he should consider that the heart of the Captain-General was not good. Diogo Fernandez replied that he carried no instructions from Afonso Dalboquerque enabling him to accept any other fortress than in Diu, and seeing that he (Codamacao) was so important a personage, and one in whom the king reposed great confidence, he ought to consider very seriously how much honour and profit he would acquire if the King of Portugal's people were to carry on trade in his land, for by these means the kingdom of Cambay would again become noble, and greatly improve her revenues beyond their present condition, and her ships would perform their merchant voyages in safety without any one doing them any injury, Codamacao, however, asked him if, provided that the king kept on terms of peace and friendship with the Portuguese, they would hinder the Cambay ships from making their voyage to the straits [of the Red Sea] and to Adem, on condition they did not carry spice. Diogo Fernandez replied that it would not be reasonable for the ships of Cambay to make voyages towards those parts, because they belonged to the nations with whom the King of Portugal was at war...Codamacao then said that, inasmuch as according

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6.

to this rule the ships of Cambay would be unable to make their voyages in security to the Straits and to Adem, which were the principal centres of their commercial traffic, what profit would the King of Cambay gain by an alliance with the King of Portugal? And as for the request which the Captain-General of India had made, he had already given it to his slave Miliqueaz; and if the terms of the despatch were unwelcome to them, he could not undertake to broach the subject any more to the king.<sup>42</sup>

These deliberations worked in the favour of the Muzaffarid governors who managed to retain their ports and continue trading, albeit rather cautiously now. However, sustained military pressure from the Portuguese coupled with the threat of Mughal invasion from the northern frontiers of the province finally bore some fruits of labour for the former. The treaties of December 1534 and October 1535 by which Sultan Bahadur Shah handed over Bassein and Diu to the Portuguese respectively required that all ships from Gujarat bound for the western Indian Ocean had to call at Bassein to take a *cartaz* and pay customs duties on its return. The naval strength of the Sultanate of Gujarat was extinguished.<sup>43</sup> The truce following the abortive first siege of Diu (1538) weighed heavily upon the tottering Sultanate as coastal trade also came under the purview of *cartazes*. All ships now had to call upon Diu and not Surat (as was the case previously) which was a serious infringement on Khwaja Safar's shipping and suffocated his politico-mercantile ambitions.<sup>44</sup> Throughout the early 1540s, tensions continued to surmount regarding the shares of the revenues at Diu finally culminating in the second and final siege in 1546, to which we now turn.

## II

Diu's formidable defences and local resistance had ensured that it could not be consolidated by the Portuguese despite their repeated attempts by launching military strikes. The governor of the

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

<sup>43</sup> Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers*, p. 76.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79; Mathew, *Portuguese and the Sultanate of Gujarat*, p. 47.

*Estado* Dom João de Castro (1545-8) now had to resort to diplomatic means to achieve the long-sought Portuguese objective as well as extend the hand of friendship to potential foes in the future in order to firmly entrench Portuguese authority in Diu which had so long been defied. This then brings us to his communications with Islam Shah Sur, the then Afghan ruler of north India. The entire correspondence is to be found in the account left behind by the governor's personal chronicler Leonardo Nunes, which has recently been brought to light and translated into English by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam.<sup>45</sup> The first of these was written by Castro from Goa on July 4, 1546, during the second siege of the port town of Diu, which we shall refer to in some detail in the following discussion. The next is the response it evoked from the Sur ruler, who penned it in October of the same year but reached the *Estado* headquarters early in 1547. The response was despatched in February from Diu.

### **Offering Assistance or Soliciting Support?**

The second siege of Diu in 1546 provides us with the immediate context of the first letter, which was written by Castro from Goa on July 4.<sup>46</sup> Its contents bring out the keen understanding of politics in the subcontinent that the Portuguese had acquired. After the customary display of respect to the addressee, the letter goes on to describe the present situation in the province of Gujarat, which had been rendered fragile and was susceptible to attack:

First of all I would like to recall to Your Highness that the Kingdom of Cambaya today is so greatly weakened that for a king of far less greatness and power than Your Highness to take it, and even one of your smaller captains could do so if he so desired. For the king is a boy and immersed in all sorts of vices and evil customs besides being distant from the use of

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<sup>45</sup> Leonardo Nunes, *Cronica de Dom Joao de Castro*, ed. J.D.M. Ford, Cambridge, Mass., 1936, pp. 59-65; 72-4; trans. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Letters from a Sinking Sultan', in *Writing the Mughal World: Studies in Political Culture*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 73-8. I have had to rely on these translated portions given my current linguistic limitations to read the text in original.

<sup>46</sup> Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers*, p. 78; Mathew, *Portuguese and the Sultanate of Gujarat, 1500-1573*, pp. 42-5.

arms, and having forgotten his honour and Republic; and on this account is badly viewed by all his people for his cruelty and tyranny.<sup>47</sup>

The reference here is to the Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah III (r. 1537-54) who had become an object to be deposed in the eyes of many of his contemporaries. The cruelty and tyranny alleged to have been practised by him upon his subjects is typical of European narratives of medieval Asian states, which viewed their rulers as despots who wielded absolute authority. The letter continues in the same vein, giving an account of the military incapability of the people of Gujarat to defend themselves from external aggression:

...at any time when Your Highness decides to make war on them, they will have no other recourse nor confidence in other sorts of arms and defence, save to throw themselves at the mercy and pity of the victors, without ever thinking to place their affairs in the hands and movements of Fortune to ascertain through the use of arms the justice of their affairs, honours, lives, goods and liberties.<sup>48</sup>

Going by Castro's words then, Gujarat was in a highly vulnerable situation and would easily capitulate when exposed to attack. In the following lines, Castro explicitly declares his intentions of not sheltering Mahmud from any kind of armed incursion:

For it is notorious that the king of Cambaya lives with no other expectation, were he to receive news that Your Highness had advanced against his kingdom, nor can he hope to save himself by any other military means or effort, and can only scurry off and secrete himself in the most hidden and remote places in his land which are situated on the seafront, and there place himself under the shadow, protection and favour of the Portuguese. Which from now on will forever be denied to him on account of the many signs of ingratitude that he has

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<sup>47</sup> Dom João de Castro to Islam Shah Sur in Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'Letters from a Sinking Sultan', p. 74.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

shown in the past few days, despite the great friendship and good works that he has received from the very high and very powerful king of Portugal, my master, and more generally from all of the Portuguese nation that frequents these parts.<sup>49</sup>

It seems from the tone of confidence of the *fidalgo* that the Portuguese were in a commanding position at the coastal enclaves. What these lines try to conceal is a rapport between the Sultan and his noble Khwaja Safar,<sup>50</sup> who were putting up a spirited resistance against Portuguese efforts to grab Daman and Surat and, more importantly, trying to recover the lost possession of Diu, which the late Sultan Bahadur Shah (r. 1526-37) had no other option but to cede to them in 1535.<sup>51</sup> The bitter disposition of the Portuguese governor towards the Sultan is evident in ‘the many signs of ingratitude’ on the part of the latter, which had apparently led to the complete collapse of all relations. What were then the acts of ‘ingratitude’ perpetrated by Mahmud that had displeased Castro? For this we will have to look at the settlement which had been reached between them following the first failed, indeed abortive, siege of Diu (1538) and how its terms were subsequently violated by both parties.

The Portuguese control of trade and navigation in the western Indian Ocean had become further stringent, now that all ships leaving Diu and plying on the coastline were to pay customs duties there in return for which they acquired a *carta* (a safe-conduct that the Asian merchants had to purchase from the Portuguese at a fee in order to enjoy the right to passage in Asian waters). The revenues so earned were to be divided between the exchequers of Goa and Champaner (the capital of the Muzaffarids) in the ratio of two-third: one-third.<sup>52</sup> However, the arrangement did not work

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>50</sup> Khwaja Safar was a former official of the Sultan of Cairo, well trained in the art of maritime commerce and its fiscal management. He took service under Sultan Bahadur around 1530 and rose in rank and prominence thereafter. By 1536-7, he was an important merchant of Surat and heavily invested in the trade with the Aden-Hurmuz complex.

<sup>51</sup> Pearson, *The Portuguese in India*, p. 52; Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers*, pp. 76-7

<sup>52</sup> Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers*, p. 79.

out smoothly as Khwaja Safar undertook the fortification of Diu which was viewed in the *Estado* circles as a threat to their position.

Correa notes that the plea from Goa to have the fort demolished fell on the Sultan's deaf ears who refused to acknowledge Portuguese claims in that region. Zealous about the fortunes accruing from this lucrative trade, Khwaja Safar complained of the coastal trade being subject to the harassment of the *cartaz*.<sup>53</sup> The temperature of this politico-trading world escalated when Khwaja Safar's Red Sea bound vessels either refused to take or were denied a *cartaz* and were engaged in skirmishes with the Portuguese fleets early in 1546. The Sultan, for his part, in a bid to retake Diu, appealed for assistance to the adjoining Indo-Islamic states whose shores were also washed by the Arabian Sea and whose ports too had been wrestled away from them by the Portuguese.<sup>54</sup> Though our sources do not mention any favour bestowed by Castro on Sultan Mahmud, the former was quick to seize upon the impending belligerence to get rid of his rival.

Returning to Castro's missive, it moves on to a proposal, in the form of an invitation, to the ruler at Agra

...in order to accomplish the addition of these kingdoms of Cambaya to his own and thus enlarge his greatness and singular virtues.<sup>55</sup>

Castro even goes a step ahead to aid the Sur monarch in this task:

And in order that Your Highness might more easily acquire these lands without loss of his own people or expense from his own treasuries, I have reached a secret agreement with some Guuzerate [Gujarati] lords and very important people in that kingdom, so that as soon as they hear that Your Highness has entered those lands, they will rise up in rebellion with their

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>55</sup> Dom João de Castro to Islam Shah Sur in Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'Letters from a Sinking Sultan', p. 75.

places and fortresses. So that, My Lord, the kingdoms of Cambaya now await you with their doors open, and with no resistance or impediment to be foreseen. Therefore Your Highness should not lose such an occasion as Time has now brought forth and Fortune has prepared for him.<sup>56</sup>

Castro then goes on to state that he would launch a full-scale offensive on the entire Gujarat coast and then proceed southwards towards the Konkan.

...I am now preparing myself to go forth this very summer and make war with fire and blood on Cambaya both by sea and on land, and to sack and destroy the whole sea-coast, and in the winter I will take up stations in Baçaim with six hundred cavalymen with gilded spurs and silk standards and Arabian horses.<sup>57</sup>

### **Demarcating Spatial Boundaries**

Castro's repeated invitations and overtures to Islam Shah Sur can thus be read as a veiled appeal for help to engage the military resources of the Sultan of Gujarat on northern frontier of his kingdom so that he can take control of the coast. In the words of Alam and Subrahmanyam, the cessation of Diu had come about because 'caught between Mughal Scylla and the Portuguese Charybdis, Bahadur's instincts were to resist the one and appease the other.'<sup>58</sup> Fresh in the memory, Castro was trying to create a similar situation and reap benefits out of it. The final section of his first letter is a pointer in this direction and can be considered as its most important part. For it is here that the *fidalgo* talks about his own interests in the matter and tries to strike a political bargain with the Afghan monarch:

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Dom João de Castro to Islam Shah Sur in Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'Letters from a Sinking Sultan', p. 75. Bassein had been ceded to the Portuguese during the tenure of the previous Governor Nuno da Cunha in 1534.

<sup>58</sup> Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'Letters from a Sinking Sultan', p. 71.

I will cause such difficulty to the king that most certainly Your Highness can then come and take away his entire land; from which I want no more for the king, my master, other than a few maritime places that I will take...and thus we will settle peace and perpetual friendship between Your Highness and the king of Portugal, my master, forever...And in this way Your Highness will remain with the best and the greatest part of the land, and the king my master will possess the sea, with nothing in the world that could cause annoyance or disgust to you or prevent you from enjoying your empires...<sup>59</sup>

The elaborate missive thus closes with the offer of an alliance and perhaps must have been drafted with precisely this object in mind. There is a clear division of the territory that is being spelled out in advance: the ‘maritime places’ (coastal enclaves with its ports) were to belong to the Portuguese; and the rest of the province (the terrestrial areas) were to remain with Islam Shah.

The other interesting aspect of this extract is the pre-emptive alliance that is being pushed for. Apart from the repetitive invitation to launch a military offensive on this ‘greatly weakened’ kingdom, Castro was anxious to win the friendship of Islam Shah. Being on cordial terms with the latter was an attempt by Castro to guard the establishment of the Portuguese against any other opponent. Sharply intelligible to political trends in South Asia, the retrospective inevitability of a state with a strong fiscal base in the Doab coupled with a war machine of decisive striking power to expand in search for coastal outlets, did not miss his strategy formulations. The Sultanate of Gujarat, which had imperial pretensions of a northward expansion even about a decade before, was now trying to hold its fragments together. It could no longer serve as a buffer between the Indo-Gangetic plains and the west coast. Moreover, Gujarat had held out against Portuguese depredations for almost four decades now. In this scenario, it became imperative to ensure the extinction of the regional polity, which unfortunately, was a feat not feasible for Castro alone to

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<sup>59</sup> Dom João de Castro to Islam Shah Sur in *Ibid.*, p. 75.

execute. Hence, it was to be conquered by a superior power on land, with whom then the *Estado* would forge a bond and have a well-demarcated boundary.

Such an alliance was also conceived in the hope that the neighbouring polities that were an imminent threat to the Portuguese would also be taken care of in the process. The fearful apprehension is brimming in Castro's reference to 'the kings and lords' who might provoke a conflict, most probably hinting at the Sultanates of the Deccan which were also a cause of discomfiture to the authorities at Goa. A powerful state in the neighbourhood would either act as a pressure on these states or eventually engulf them. Castro's calculations were to a large extent also motivated by the political formations obtaining in central India over the past decade, which had the potential to spread to the Deccan and Gujarat. For this, we shall slightly read backwards into time to arrive at a complete understanding of Castro's moves.

Sometime in August-September 1535, shortly after the fall of Mandu to the Mughal army, Humayun (r. 1530-40; 1555-6) had written to Nuno da Cunha as a response to the offer of friendship which had been made to him by the latter.<sup>60</sup> Judging by the contents of Humayun's message, Cunha's demands were very much similar to that of his successor: to have possession of the seaports to tap the revenue from trade. Humayun's concerns would be voiced four decades later by Akbar when he would open communications with the Portuguese:

Regarding the sea-ports [Bassein and Diu], you have written to me that you wish to retain them with all their revenue; for those that I have in my power, I send you this *formao*, and I concede to you what you have asked me for, with the condition however that whoever wishes to sail should be allowed to do so without being persecuted... And you can seize the lands

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<sup>60</sup> Letter from Humayun to Nuno da Cunha in Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *História*, vol. II, p. 736 trans. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

that you find close to you, without troubling yourself about those that are far, for when the time comes I will take them.<sup>61</sup>

The liberal tone of the letter, lays down two principal clauses. It advocates liberty of trade and navigation in the waters of the Indian Ocean which the Portuguese should not hamper. Secondly, the Mughal monarch allowed the Portuguese have the ports along with the hinterland, which were highly productive, but he drew a line between the terrestrial zone and the maritime space, asserting his rights on the former. There was also a mild hint of the Mughal strength contained in the line:

And from such a king as I, you may expect to receive further grants, and I would want that you pursue proper justice in every place that you have in your power.<sup>62</sup>

Surely then Humayun saw himself as master of the entire province of Gujarat sooner rather than later, reiterating the obvious rhetoric of Mughal expansion. Castro was certainly not operating on a *tabula rasa* then: his moves and calculations were chalked with a view to guard against any eventuality.

Despite Humayun's offer, the Portuguese chose to sign the treaty with Bahadur Shah. The *Estado* still saw Diu under the legal jurisdiction of Bahadur, who was now surrendering his claims to it. A pact with Humayun would, however, imply the *de jure* sovereignty of the Mughals on the island, which would leave scope for deliberations in future, if Mughal power became firmly entrenched in Gujarat. The letter contains, in a nut-shell, Mughal attitudes towards physical spaces and the demarcations that they drew between land and sea. Humayun's terms cannot be dismissed as an 'embarrassingly generous offer'<sup>63</sup> as it offers us a crucial insight into how medieval states and governments chose to define their boundaries and the spaces they saw as their rightful arenas of sovereignty and jurisdiction. The political divisions which this letter seeks to create is also an

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<sup>61</sup> Humayun to Nuno da Cunha in *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

indication that Humayun did not seek to enter into any confrontation with the Portuguese following his conquest of Gujarat and maintain cordial relations with his neighbours on the coastal enclaves. Humayun's letter serves as an important prologue to what would be the parameters of relations between the Mughals and the Portuguese during Akbar's reign following the successful annexation of Gujarat into Mughal domains, which brought them in direct contact with each other.

### **The Rationale of Diplomatic Conduct**

The reply from Islam Shah Sur to the Portuguese governor— who penned it in October 1546 but reached the *Estado* headquarters early in 1547— was rather lukewarm and did not address the question of the proposed joint endeavour. It is obvious that a plan to invade Gujarat was not on the cards immediately. Given that he had just ascended the throne, Islam Shah must have been busy with the affairs of north and central India, which had been left incomplete and in a somewhat hotchpotch state by the sudden death of his father Sher Shah Sur on account of a grenade explosion during the siege of the fortress of Kalinjar. This is made evident in the next and last epistle from Castro to Islam Shah Sur, that written after the successful defense of Diu:

...I remained all of the summer in this city of Dio, waiting for Your Highness to send someone to take over the kingdom of Cambaya. And now that I see that on account of some reasonable activities could not be done...<sup>64</sup>

Castro emerges as a celebrated personage in Portuguese chronicles of the period for his successful repulsion of the attack on Diu. However, he did not want to be robbed of a moment of glory and was anxious to seal the deal:

...I learnt of the desire you have to make such a form of peace and friendship with the most high and most powerful king of Portugal, my master, that it might last forever; which I, more

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<sup>64</sup> Dom João de Castro to Islam Shah Sur in *Ibid.*, p. 78.

than anything else in this world, find to be most fortunate and honourable, for it is through my effort that such an alliance and friendship has been made....Regarding the matters of Cambaya, I wish to inform Your Highness that I have put Mahmude who calls himself king of Guuzeraate in such a state that any captain of Your Highness could now enter into his lands, and I would be in a position to hand over the whole kingdom to him most peacefully, for I defeated his whole army on the battlefield, and I have killed all the foreign people that he had, including all the famous captains of the kingdom, and I have seized all the artillery and munitions from his camp, as well as his strong and great city of Dio; and through my captains I have had all the sea-coast destroyed and devastated, and they seized the cities of Guogua, Guandar from him.<sup>65</sup>

Moving ahead, it seems that the disturbances in Bassein, formerly port of the Nizam Shahi Sultanate of Ahmadnagar, had also been quelled as is borne from the confidence in Castro's tone:

And in Baçaim I will import a great number of Arabian horses, so that I may serve Your Highness by sea and by land and so that I may succeed in handing over these lands of Guuzeraate to him... I will send you an ambassador through the land of the Inizamaluco [Nizam-ul-Mulk] with a very beautiful Arabian horse, despite the fact that it may seem a very difficult task to pass through so many places that are inimical and contrary to us. But since it will be recommended by your great good fortune and negotiated with my greatest diligence, I hope in Our Lord that it will reach you safely.<sup>66</sup>

The principal mode of warfare in medieval South Asia was cavalry charges, based on a mounted archer shooting arrows. Locally bred horses failed to meet the quality standards required for these

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<sup>65</sup> Dom João de Castro to Islam Shah Sur in *Ibid.*, p. 77. The 'foreigner people' here refer to the waves of immigrants from Turkey who found service in the administrative and military apparatus of the Sultanate of Gujarat and were known as the Rumis. They were particularly skilled in artillery warfare and also served as the channel that facilitated diplomatic contact between Constantinople and Champaner-Diu. The Portuguese fears of an Ottoman incursion into the Arabian Sea were for a while dealt with as this community, which Castro had briefly touched upon in his previous letter, was claimed to have been extinguished.

<sup>66</sup> Dom João de Castro to Islam Shah Sur in *Ibid.*, p. 78.

attacks, which produced the demand for imported breeds from Central and West Asia. The Konkan ports of Dabhol, Chaul and Goa were the gateway for these horses that came from the Persian Gulf area. The significance of Dabhol in this regard is borne in the writings of Athanasius Nikitin who described Dabhol as ‘a very extensive seaport, where many horses are brought from Misr, Arabia, Khorasan, Turkestan, Neghostan.’<sup>67</sup>

Though courteous to be a supplier of horses to Islam Shah and generous enough to gift him one, Castro was driving an implicit message through his gestures. By contending his hold over Bassein and taking up the issue of horses, Castro wanted to make it known to the ambitious ruler of Agra that he was in control of a crucial resource for the latter’s success and hence should not be taken lightly. In other words, Castro was trying to mitigate something that might turn into a bone of contention and lead to hostilities. The letter ends on a similar note:

And since Your Highness will rejoice to have Arabian horses in your stables, were you to come and settle in the city of Amadaba [Ahmedabad] I promise that each year I will send you more than a thousand horses there, with which— and taken together with your great effort and wisdom— within a few days you can become lord of all the kingdoms of the Orient, and acquire such fame and renown in all the land that the memory of the great King Tamerlane will be entirely forgotten.<sup>68</sup>

These negotiations highlight the variegated meanings of physical spaces as perceived by the early modern governments. They address how a maritime entity conducted itself vis-à-vis its immediate terrestrial spaces. Their attitudes towards these spaces explains the *raison d’être* of diplomatic decision making. For instance, in the Lusitanian perception, Indo-Islamic dynasties particularly in

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<sup>67</sup> Athanasius [Afanasy] Nikitin, 'The Travels of Athanasius Nikitin of Twer' in *India in the Fifteenth Century*, tr. R. H. Major, Hakluyt Society, First Series no. 22; repr. New York, 1970, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> Dom João de Castro to Islam Shah Sur in Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'Letters from a Sinking Sultan', p. 78.

the northern plains were terrestrial entities with little or no interest in long-distance commerce across the ocean. This is clearly revealed in the terms that the Portuguese governor laid before Islam Shah Sur, which is based on the assumption that the latter would be content to be the supreme lord of the lands while he would be the master of the seas.

That such an impression was far from the truth is made evident in the letter from Humayun that has been cited here, which convincingly challenges the conventional shibboleth of historiography that states in early modern South Asia were principally oriented towards proceeds from the land and hardly had maritime concerns. Humayun's letter serves as an important prologue to what would be the parameters of relations between the Mughals and the Portuguese during Akbar's reign following the successful annexation of Gujarat into Mughal domains, which brought them in direct contact with each other. The complex dialectics that transpired between the potentates offers a glimpse into their notions of territoriality that were crucial determinants of their ideas of sovereignty. For Humayun, it was imperative that the merchants and other seafarers, who were his subjects, could traverse the ocean hassle-free. This demand, or rather order, would be the fulcrum around which his cordiality with the Portuguese would have been determined. Similarly, it was Akbar's chief anxiety to ensure safety of passage to the *hajj* pilgrims bound to the Holy Lands of Islam and initial phase of his relations with the Portuguese would see tensions in this regard. Successive Mughal governors of Surat, much like their Muzaffarid predecessors, would be keen to safeguard their vessels loaded with merchandise headed to the Red Sea and occasions of sporadic belligerence were not missing either.

The essay demonstrates that given the inextricable connections between terrestrial and maritime spaces, demarcating zones of conflicting interests became politically expedient to mitigate rivalries. The tottering structure of the Sultanate of Gujarat had created a vacuum which was eventually filled by its annexation into the Mughal state in the early 1570s. The correspondence analysed in this essay outlines the crucial determinants of diplomacy in early modern South Asia and sets the

tone for the Luso-Mughal interactions and encounters post 1573. Given the prevailing political scenario, little did the Portuguese governor foresee that his words would be reversed— that in the final quarter of the sixteenth century, the correspondent of his successor at Goa would no longer be the Afghan dynasty of the Surs but the descendants of Timur.

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