
India's Maritime History: Sea-faring groups and Maritime Icons

■ By Dr. Neeta Khandpekar

Abstract

One can find daring sea-faring groups along the vast coastline of Indian Peninsula and in the process has given rise to famous maritime icons. The first half of the paper highlights sea faring

The picture of 16th and 17th Centuries Konkan depicts peaceful coexistence of various religious communities (groups) engaged in maritime activities such as fishing, sea-faring, sea-trade, navigation, shipbuilding and net-weaving along its long coastline. These



groups on the west coast of India and the second half deals with some of the the maritime icons like Siddis, Kunjali's, Kanhoji Angre and Marthanda Verma.

groups included Kolis, Gabits, Bhandaris, Bhois, Mangelas, Daldis and Agris. Many of these groups supplied crew for the Maratha navy. The Kolis

played an important role in the history of Maharashtra during the pre- Maratha period and have inhabited the Bombay region from very early times. Kolis and Bhandaris due to their knowledge of navigation achieved a distinct position in Shivaji's maritime force. Gabits by considering it a taboo to burn the leaves and wood of Panchpalla trees displayed their environmental consciousness. Some were herdsmen like Dhangars and Warlis, preferred the hilly areas adjoining the coastal belt. Bhandaris were notoriously faithful to their salt and were also fearless sailors. Bhois were fishermen by occupation and were highly skilled in weaving different varieties and sizes of fishing nets. Mangela's migrated from Thane to Gujarat and Daman during Shivaji's expedition of Paneraport. Daldis were Muslim fishermen. The success of the Siddis was the result of their military and maritime skills. Kunjali the admirals of Zamorin played a heroic part in the Naval wars with the Portuguese. Admiral Kanhoji Angre acted as the Guardian of the West Coast. Marthanda Verma, the Maharaja of Travancore faced the superior Dutch forces and won the battle at Colachel.

Sea-faring groups on the West Coasts of India (Konkan)

In the period spanning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we find the peaceful coexistence of several communities, belonging to different religious persuasions in the Konkan region. Most of them were maritime groups given to fishing and sailing. Some were herdsmen like Dhangars and Warlis, preferring the hilly areas adjoining the coastal belt. The long coastline of Konkan provided ample opportunities to different indigenous communities to engage in maritime activities such as fishing, sea- faring, sea- trade, navigation, shipbuilding, net-weaving etc. These groups included Kolis, Gabits, Bhandaris, Bhois,



Slide : Ghedia Koli Community

(Ashvin Mehta, The Coasts of India, Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1987, p.21)

Mangelas, Daldis and Agris.

Kolis

“ **Kolis always constituted the bulk of the naval force of the Maratha rulers. Innumerable stories of their deeds of courage and valour are told. For instance, a Koli diver was specifically taken to Raigad from Kolaba to extricate a gold vessel that had fallen in to a deep well (A.D 1745) . If Maratha ballads also called Povadas may be relied on to some extent as contemporary history, then according to the oldest ballad depicting the death of Afzal Khan (1659) at the hands of Shivaji written by Agindas, the Kolis appear to have been employed in considerable numbers in Maratha service.** ”

The word Koli has been said to be derived from Kuli or clansmen who are described as ‘aboriginals of the plains’. The term Koli also means fisherman, a batch, a group and the workers who

work in Kols or small boats. We can also interpret that these Kolis were the descendants of the primitive Kols who inhabited central India and its western part . As the legend goes, the Kolis claimed to be the descendants of the black dwarf who is believed to have emerged from the body of the famous king Vena.

According to another tradition, their supposed connection with Valmiki of the Ramayana rests on occupational identity. The Koli group included a number of communities with varied occupations and socio-cultural variations . E.g.The Ghedia Koli Community in Gujarat grow betel leaf or ‘Pan’ one of the main cash crops of the region.

R.E. Enthoven (1922) states that the Kolis of Bombay , Deccan and Konkan were divided into three occupational groups, namely Dhor Kolis who were bamboo cutters, Mahadev Kolis, the most famous in Thana history, who were cultivators, cattlekeepers and labourers and Son Kolis who were fisherman. The Gazetteer speaks of the Son Kolis as being “older than the coconut palms, older than the Bhandari palm tapper, with their patron deity Mumbadevi



Slide : Postal stamp issued by Philately, Department of Post.

situated to the south of Dongri” .

According to Nirmal Kumar Bose, Kolis were divided into three categories viz, Dhor Kolis, Son Kolis and Raj Kolis. Son Kolis

As occupational fisherfolk, the Son Kolis along the coast of Konkan subsisted mainly on fish and rice . The Maharashtra Dnyanakosha refers to a theory of the origin of Son Kolis as

Indian shipping has thus had a long and brilliant history covering a period of about five millennia from the very dawn of India’s civilization in the Indus Valley. Both Hindu and Buddhist texts are thus replete with references to the sea-borne trade of India that directly and indirectly demonstrate the existence of a national shipping and shipbuilding. It was one of the great national key industry of India.

given in Shiva- Nibandha. It mentions Champavati or Chaul as the most important place of Son Kolis . Son Kolis had their own explanations for the origin of their name. One was that Bhandar, the turmeric sacred to Khandoba, their family god, and which they daily applied to their forehead and scattered in large quantities during festivals, was 'Son' i.e.

golden or yellow in colour. It has been universally recognised by all the groups of the Kolis that Son Koli was the highest group among the Koli.

The Kolis came to prominence as a people of political consequence even during the pre-Maratha period . The earliest reference to

the Koli inhabitants of Bombay appears in Mahikavatchi Bakhar, published by V.K. Rajwade. The Bakhar covers the events in the history of North Konkan during the period Shak 1060 to 1422, i.e A.D. 1138 to A.D 1500. It refers to the Kolis along with two or three other aboriginal tribes as having occupied the region in A.D 1138, when Pratap Bimb invaded Mahim . The Kolis of Vesave called themselves Thal Koli .

The Kolis in charge of the hill tracts around the forts of Sinhagad and Purandar were made use by Chhatrapati Shivaji to guard the approaches to the forts .

The north- eastern forest belt around Kalyan and Bhiwandi was the home of the Kolis. The primitive Koli tribes of the region made good seamen . The

Traveller's Records too have mentioned that the Kolis of Kalyan could imitate the construction of foreign ships around Kalyan and Bhiwandi. Dwelling in the coastal belt they were daring mariners. They had comprehensive knowledge of the configuration of the coastline, its shoals and rocks. The celebrated Janjira fort was possessed by a Koli named Ram

Patil. He and his followers were attacked by the Siddis and lost their stronghold.

The Sindhudurg site as a suitable focal point for the construction of a fort was pointed out by a Koli. Shivaji's statue at Sindhudurg bears witness to his great love for this community. He is seen wearing Koli headgear. Laya Patil, a Son Koli, was invited by Subhanji Kharade Sarnobat and Subhanji Mohite, Havildar of Padmadurg, to enter the fleet. Moropant Peshwa had made a plan to scale the Janjira fort with the help of Laya Patil. The enterprising Koli chief executed his role very well, although the Peshwa failed to arrive in time. Shivaji honoured the Koli chief by bestowing on him the title of Sar Patil and the



distinction of riding in a palanquin. As the Koli chief would not accept this distinction, Shivaji had a new ship constructed and named it Palkhi .

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Gabits

Gabits have been referred to clearly as sea- fishers and sailors. Travellers and historians like James Grant Duff and George Forrest have recorded the community and occupation of the Gabits as Kolis or fishermen. Even other scholars of the Maratha country have listed them as Kolis. But they are distinctly distinguished from the other Kolis in the western coastal region. By environmental compulsion the coastal Gabits were fishermen. The Gabits of the interior were, however, cultivators.

It is not definitely known how the word Gabit was derived and when it came into use. Puranic literature records many castes of the time but the term Gabit is missing.

Traditionally the word is explained as having a foreign origin. The term Gabit or Ghurabit or Grabit is said to be derived from the Arabic word Ghurab i.e. a coasting vessel. This type of Arab vessel is mentioned by scholars including G.C. Whitworth .

Gabits called themselves Konkani Marathas and manned the navy of Shivaji. Some of them are still known as Gurabi tandel or captains of grabs i.e

small vessels of war. On the conquest of the Peshwas by the British and the consequent abolition of the Maratha navy, they took to fishing, which somewhat isolated them from the mainstream of the communities of Maharashtra.

The Gabits, as a fishing community, were spread over the Konkan region of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa. The Gabits of Thane, Kolaba, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg regions of Maharashtra and the north Kanara regions of Karnataka were probably migrants from Goa. This point is also supported by Enthoven. He stated that the Gabits fled to the coast of Ratnagiri and Kanara regions during



Slide : The present 9th Battalion of the Madras Regiment is historically linked to the personal body guards of Martand Verma raised in 1704. The stamp shows the scene after the heroic battle of Colachel.

Portuguese expansion and settled there. A small section of the community was also to be found in Surat. It was held that the Gabits used to go to Vengurla, Malvan for catching fish and afterwards they settled there. They were locally recognised as Gabits and regionally called Kharvis, which was the generic term for fisherfolk.

Gabits could be recognised by their dwellings. Almost all the houses of Gabit community displayed their own nets for catching fish. They worshipped

the Hindu gods and goddesses like Bhavani, Mahalakshmi, Bhadrakali, Shiva etc. They use devak or panchpallav for religious functions. It was a taboo among them to burn the leaves and wood of these trees, since they are used for rituals.

Bhandari

The name Bhandari is derived from the word Bhandar, meaning treasury. In Marathi, Bhandari means storekeeper. The origin of the Bhandaris and Bhangolis is rather obscure. However mention may be found in the Brahmatta Khanda of the Skanda Purana and in the Katha Kalpataru, wherein it is said that

the progenitor of the race, by name Bharaguna, was created by Siva for the purpose of bringing to him sweet toddy to allay his thirst after a severe fight with the demons. Bharaguna, having thus acquired the esteem of Siva, was elevated to the rank of a treasurer, hence his name of Bhandari .

Enthoven mentions that the Bhandaris were also known as Bhavagunas, and goes to report eight endogamous

divisions viz. Kitte, Bherle, Gavade, Bhande, Kalan, Thale, Shinde and Kirpal. Bhandaris

were faithful to their salt and were also fearless sailors .

In Maharashtra, the Bhandaris were spread over the coastal areas. They were concentrated in the Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg and Thane regions. Before the advent of Muslim rule to Thane, the port and the adjacent area were under the rule of the Bhandaris . Some Bhandaris certainly acquired a position of power in Chaul and neighbouring areas before the fourteenth century. They also represent

an early element of Bombay's societal structure, and wielded political and military influence in the immediate neighbourhood of Bombay at the end of the thirteenth century. They were also given land by the Portuguese and earned sizeable revenue joining the ranks of the affluent. However, it took them some time to achieve social recognition.

According to historical evidence, the famous Hetkaris of Shivaji belonged to the Bhandari community. The Bhandaris

navy. Subsequently, when the maritime power of the Peshwas disintegrated, the Bhandaris became largely unemployed and resorted to toddy tapping. The chief instrument used in tapping was a heavy broad-bladed knife. This process was done thrice a day, in the early morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening. Women and children took no part in the tapping.

Later, the Bhandaris were enlisted by the British to form the bodyguard of the

fishers, palanquin-bearers, melon growers, cultivators and labourers. Enthoven describes the Bhois as a fishing and litter-bearing community of the Konkan region.

The Bhois were highly skilled in weaving different varieties and sizes of fishing nets. They attributed names for the different varieties and sizes of fishing nets they wove such as kandala, gula, bhusa, botka, soara, jhelto and mahajal. Every house has an altar to



were consummate seamen. Maya Nayak (also written Mainaik) Bhandari was one of Shivaji's chief naval officers who took part in the conflict with the English. The Bhandaris had various surnames. Mahanayak was one name from which the word Maynakis derived. Sarang and Tandel are other names. Udaji Padwal and Sawalya Tandel are famous names. The Tandel was the head of the crew. The Sarang observed the direction of the wind and gave warning of storms.

After Shivaji, there was also a fair number of Bhandaris in the Maratha army. During the Peshwa period they played a significant role in Maratha

Governor at Bombay. They also acted as scouts for the Bombay Marine, nimbly climbing up the tall palm trees to warn against sudden sea assaults.

Thus although their hereditary occupation was the tapping of the palm-tree and the manufacture of palm liquor, they possessed a traditional inclination to martial pursuits and formed an efficient element in the forces of both the Marathas and the East India Company in the seventeenth century.

Bhois

Bhois were fishermen by occupation. Some of them were also fresh water

Manasamata, whom they regarded as their kulaswamini. Besides this, they also worshipped Khandoba. They were quite often addressed as Kolis on account of the similarity of occupation between the two groups.

Mangela

The term Mangela is derived from the word Mag a fishing net or from Mangheri meaning a sailing vessel. Fishing was one of their main occupations.

They migrated from the Thane area to Gujarat and Daman during Shivaji's expedition of Paneraport. They

worshipped both Shiva and Vishnu and minor deities such as Khandoba, Bahiroba, Cheda, Narsha and Gangud.

Daldis

Daldis were Muslim fishermen. The name comes from Dalad fishing. Some of them were sailors and cultivators but most restricted their occupation to fishing. They claimed to be partly descended from Arab and Persian settlers, some who fled from Kufa in the Euphrates valley, about the year 700, to escape the cruelties of the fierce governor Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf, and others who came as traders and adventurers. Their forefathers probably settled at different times between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries in the Konkan region.

Early in the tenth century, Arab and Persian Muslims were settled in large numbers in Chaul, where they had mosques and a governor of their own who decided their disputes.

The Daldis were more enterprising than their Hindu seafaring counterparts. They were ready to leave home wherever better remuneration was available. Many of them were employed as artillerymen in the navy. They had fewer social taboos than the Hindus. It is known that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Muslims as a whole exhibited a keener aptitude for sea trade than the Hindus.

The Bhandaris, Daldis, Sonkolis, Gabits and Bhois were the main seafaring groups of Konkan region which supplied crew for the Maratha navy. All these groups were well trained for seamanship and "the sea was in their veins". Their knowledge of seafaring and fishing was handed down from father to son. The fisheries were the training schools for seamanship. They possessed practical knowledge required for sea voyages; of

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the geography of the surrounding coast, the sunken reefs, the shallow banks, and other points of danger. They had a fair knowledge of the monsoonal winds and also of the signs of a coming storm.

Agris

Mention about Agris also should be made who lived along the coast and creeks. From the Marathi word 'Agar' we get the word 'Agris', and 'an Agari' in

Marathi connotes 'one who works in an Agar.' The word 'Agar' means either a plantation of palms (trees) or 'a salt pan' According to the District Gazetter of Kolaba the word "Agari" means "literally a gardener." They are found along creek banks in Alibag and Pen. Some of them are Mithagaris (salt makers and tillers of the salt, rice lands) and Dholagris (called so from beating the drum, dhol.) According to one of their stories they were the musicians of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, who in recognition of the services rendered to him conferred them with some lands on the western coast.

The main coastline was generally inhabited by fishermen (Kolis) and allied communities. While on the creeks (Creeks of Kalyan,

Bassein, Nagothana, Panvel, Roha, Mhasala) one gets a glimpse of a conglomeration of Agri houses and hamlets.

The presence and socio-economic activities of indigenous communities in the Konkan hold significance. Kolis and Bhandaris due to their knowledge of navigation achieved a distinct position in Shivaji's maritime force. Gabits by

Yukti Kalpa Taru, a treatise compiled by Bhoja Narapati has been translated and published by Prof. Aufrecht in his 'Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts.' Study of this treatise had been undertaken by Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji entitled 'Indian Shipping' and was published by Orient Longman, Bombay in 1912.

The treatise gives a technocratic exposition on the techniques of shipbuilding, providing minute details on various types of ships, their sizes along with materials from which they were built. The Yukti Kalpa Taru sums up in a condensed form all the available information. Apart from describing the qualities of the different types of wood and their suitability in shipbuilding, the Yukti Kalpa Taru also gives an elaborate classification of ships based on their sizes. The primary division is into 2 classes: Samanya (ordinary) and Vishesha (Special).

The ordinary type was for sea voyages. Ships that undertook sea voyages were classified into dirgha type of ships which had a long and narrow hull and the Unnata type of ships which had a higher hull.

considering it a taboo to burn the leaves and wood of Panchpalla trees displayed their environmental consciousness. They believe that the coconut tree needs the company of human beings. A coconut tree from an uninhabited place yields less fruits, according to Gabit tradition . Bhois provided infrastructural facilities in the form of fishing nets to the Kolis and other fishing communities.

The Maritime Icons in the West coast of India

The Siddis

About the middle of the fifteenth century A.D (1437), when the Bahmani dynasty became independent of Delhi and interaction with north India became less, the trend arose of bringing to western India a large number of Abyssinians and other East Africans. These men formed the Arab El Habish; The people of north-east Africa were usually referred to as Habshis or more often as Siddis .

Actually the word Siddi is derived from Syed i.e. man of a priestly calling or tendencies .

It was through the ports of Konkan that commodities and immigrants arrived from outside the country. Arabs, Turks and Africans came in streams to settle down in the Bahmani kingdom. Goods of value and much priced horses were brought from overseas. With the establishment of Bijapur and Ahmadnagar as successors to the Bahmanis, the control of Konkan passed

to Ahmadnagar in the north and of central Konkan to Bijapur in the south . The Siddis now primarily settled down near Danda Rajapuri.

Marathi documents describe them as 'Shamal' (black faced), because of their dark complexion. Other historical documents, written in Portuguese and English, refer to them variously as Seede, Siddis, Siddie, Siddee, Sidy, Sidi, Sidy, Sedee, Scidee, Scidy, Seydee, Sciddee, Abexin, Abeixm, Habshis, Abyssinians, Caffre, Caffree, Kaphirs, Kafra, Mullatos etc . Enthoven has noted that Siddi literally meant a master .

The Siddis were introduced to western India by Arab, Portuguese and Dutch traders . Ibn Battuta states that Abyssinians were used throughout the Indian Ocean region as armed guards on merchant ships. The presence of merely one was enough to dissuade pirates .

Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Siddis made their mark in Gujarat where Sultan Bahadur employed thousands of them, having been highly impressed by their fighting powers . In fact, the people that traded with India in the fourteenth century were the Muslims of southern Iran and 'Arabistan' and since Abyssinia was not far from there, a few Abyssinians in course of time also started to trade with India.

However, the Siddi community came into prominence after dramatically occupying the island fort of Janjira .It

was Malik Ahmad (1490- 1508), the founder of the Nizamshahi dynasty of Ahmadnagar, who initially installed the Siddis as the captains of Janjira, the nearby port of Danda - Rajpuri, situated half in the sea and half on the land. At this point of time, Janjira was a Medhekot meaning a wooden fort, and its Koli captain defended it valiantly for long.

Their success was the result of their military and maritime skills, for the Siddis proved themselves able seamen and reliable soldiers . Their power grew especially when Aurangzeb gave them official sanction to operate in the Arabian Sea, specifically against the Marathas . This is evidenced by the fame of their leaders, men like Malik Ambar, Malik Yakub and Malik Kafur .

An often recounted episode merits mention here. One dark night, a camouflaged Abyssinian fleet anchored off Janjira and a small delegation led by Perim Khan, the new Wazir of Nizamshah, disguised as a trader, humbly sought permission from Ram Patil, the Koli Captain of the island, to unload 300 boxes of wine and silk, as he feared danger from the pirates in the vicinity. After a great deal of persuasion, Ram Patil was persuaded to bring in only the goods, while the men were to be kept off the fort. The 300 big size boxes were brought inside the fort. As a response to cordial feelings, the guards

India has a rich maritime history dating back 5,000 years. The world's first tidal dock is believed to have been built at Lothal around 2300 BCE during the Indus Valley Civilization, near the present day Mangrol harbour on the Gujarat coast. A compass, Matsya yantra, was used for navigation in the 4th and 5th century AD. The very word Navigation is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Navgatih'. The word navy is also derived from Sanskrit 'Nou'.

There were Sanskrit terms for many parts of a ship. The ship's anchor was known as Nava-Bandhan-Kilaha which literally means 'a nail to tie up a ship'. The sail was called Vata Vastra, which means 'wind-cloth'. The hull was termed Stula Bhaga i.e. an 'expanded area'. The rudder was called Keni-Pata, Pata means blade; the rudder was also known as Karna which literally means an 'ear' and was so called because it used to be a hollow curved blade, as is found today in exhaust fans. The ship's keel was called Nava-Tala which means 'bottom of a ship'. The mast was known as Kupadanda, in which danda means a pole.

Boat-making and ship-building industries were found in India since ancient times. In the Vedic period, sea was frequently used for trade purposes. The Rig Veda mentions "merchants who crowd the great waters with ships". The Ramayana speaks of merchants who crossed the sea and bought gifts for the king of Ayodhya. Manu legislates for safe carriage and freights by river and sea. In some of the earliest Buddhist literature we read of voyages 'out of sight' of land, some lasting six months or so.

In Kautilya Arthashastra the admiralty figures as a separate department of the War Office; and this is a striking testimony to the importance attached to it from very early times. In the Rg Veda Samhita boats and ships are frequently mentioned. The classical example often quoted by every writer on the subject is the naval expedition of Bhujya who was sent by his father with the ship which had a hundred oars (aritra). Being ship-wrecked he was rescued by the twin Asvins in their boat."There was also extensive intercourse of India with foreign countries, including the Mediterranean lands and the African continent, naturally led to piracy on the waters. There then arose the need for the protection of sea-borne trade, and we are told that "at the outset the merchant vessels of India carried a small body of trained archers armed with bows and arrows to repulse the attacks of the pirates, but later they employed guns, cannon and other more deadly weapons of warfare with a few wonderful and delusive contrivances."(source: The Commerce and Navigation of the Ancients In the Indian Ocean - William Vincent pp. 457). These are probably the beginnings of the ancient Indian navy.

In the Shanti Parvan (59, 41) of the Mahabharata it is said that the navy is one of the angas (part) of the complete army. Examples of ships being used for military purposes are not lacking. When Vidura scented danger to Kunti's five sons, he made them escape to the forest with their mother, crossing the Ganges in a boat equipped with weapons having the power of withstanding wind and wave.

there were offered wine by Perim Khan and some Siddis accompanying him. The Kolis drank to excess and when they were in state of inebriation, the hidden armed soldiers from the boxes emerged, surprised the garrison and captured the fort in 1490. Nizamshah had the fort reconstructed during 1567 - 1571.

According to a Persian inscription in Nastaliq script dated A.H. 1122 (1710-11 A.D.), the fort of Jazira was originally constructed in A.H. 984(1576-77A.D.) during the time of Murtada I Nizamshah, by Fahim Khan and all the bastions, walls and gates were again strengthened by Yakut Khan II.

The rise of Malik Ambar, his statemanship and bravery against the Mughal attacks further boosted the Siddi morale. During his time the country between Nagothana to the river Savitri was under the Siddi of Janjira with the headquarters at Danda Rajapuri. The Siddi was governing the area on condition to protect the trade against the pirates and to safeguard the pilgrims to the holy city of Mecca. The Siddi of Janjira, Surul Khan, soon thrived and was raised to the position of Wazir in 1618. In 1636, the area under the Siddis

came under the Adilshah, who recognised the Siddi's position. In accordance with the naval tradition of the Siddi community, it was also resolved that upon the death of the Wazir the first officer of the fleet and not the son of the deceased Wazir was to succeed .

The Bijapur rulers had entrusted the Siddis of Janjira with the responsibilities of patrolling the seas to check the minor instances of piracy. In 1636, Sultan Adilshah of Bijapur agreed to pay tribute to the Mughals. Shah Jehan made over the Konkan to him and among the places ceded were Chaul, Panvel and Danda Rajapur. To stabilise their control over the region the Sultan of Bijapur entered into an agreement with the Siddis of Janjira. The submission of the Siddis to Bijapur was not a smooth process. Instances of rebellion and retaliation were frequent. Given the contested and fragmented nature of political authority in the Konkan, Bijapur as well as the Mughals had to deal with the pretensions of coastal chiefs of Maratha extraction not to speak of the encounters with Shivaji. It was during the Mughal Maratha conflict in the Deccan that the

Siddis transferred their allegiance to the Mughals and transferred their fleet to the service of emperor Aurangzeb .

The Emperor in return invested the leader of the Siddis with the office of imperial Admiral of the Empire and an assignment of Rs. 30, 000 on the revenues of Surat. The confederacy at Janjira was also provided for. Its various constituents chiefs were assigned important offices and a corresponding share of revenue. In addition to the imperial fleet commanded by the Siddis, there was the Kochari fleet, a minor fleet comprising half a dozen small crafts intended primarily for watching the river and detecting smugglers and protecting the imperial coastal shipping and trade from the perils of piracy.

The real threat to Siddi came from Shivaji who acquired the fort of Torna (1646) and the Siddi's forts of Tala, Ghosala and Rairi in 1648. The Siddi Chief recovered the lost forts soon but only to be regained by Shivaji in 1656. In 1661, Shivaji again attacked the Siddi Chief, Fateh Khan, and inflicted great losses. His commander Vyankoji Datto created terror in the Siddi's remaining territories . The Siddis also built a fort at

Karanja in 1662 . Shivaji's main concern in building a naval force was to check the activities of the Siddis as well as that of the English. To dominate the sea - coast and make his State a sea power and also to capture the trade built a strong mercantile force. In 1670 Fateh Khan found himself hard pressed and decided to part with Janjira to Shivaji in compensation of a rich Jagir. But his officers, Sambal, Qassim and Khairiyat defected to Aurangzeb and sought Mughal aid. Fateh Khan was captured and Aurangzeb sent 36 warships from Surat port to Danda Rajapuri.

In 1671, Aurangzeb appointed Siddi Qassim and Khairiyat as Commander of Janjira and Danda Rajapuri respectively and Siddi Sambal his Admiral with a Jagir worth rupees 3 lakh annually. As a result of this alliance, the Siddis held the island, regained the capital and much of their inland territory . From then the title of Yakut Khan was conferred on the first Siddi Admiral, while the Siddi was to protect the trade and Haj pilgrims going to Mecca. Siddi Qasim who excelled in his daring deeds was known for bravery among his men and use to remain in armour in day and night.

In 1679, enraged with the English for permitting the Siddi fleet to take shelter in Bombay harbour, Shivaji's Admiral took possession of the small rocky island Khanderi (Kenery) to built a naval base. It was about 16 Kms south of Bombay. There was a difference of opinion between the Surat factory and the Bombay factory, on the issue of Shivaji's activities in Khanderi. The Surat factory was not much in favour of any attack on Shivaji but the Bombay factory was in favour of an aggressive policy against him. But finally the British decided to withdraw from this conflict . Shivaji occupied the Khanderi island whereupon the Siddi fortified its neighbour island of Underi with the result that vessels entering the Bombay harbour were liable to attack from one or the other . It is of

great significance that the Portuguese fully supported the Siddis and the British in their move to evict Shivaji from Khanderi. The Portuguese Viceroy sent congratulations to the Siddi in a letter dated 28th February 1680 for his victory over Underi.

The power of the Siddis on the Konkan coast was practically unchallenged till 1683. In that year Maratha Admiral Sidhoji Gujar took Suvarnadurg and Vijaydurg, the two important bases on the coast. Sidhoji who died soon afterwards, was succeeded in his post as Admiral by Kanhoji Angre .

The Siddis entered into an alliance with the Portuguese in 1699 to defeat Kanhoji Angre but failed to subdue him. They finally sued for peace and agreed to cede him the territory of north Chaul and to pay him half the revenue of south Chaul

Though the Siddis did not make a significant name in trade as such, they soon attained eminence as a naval power in the Konkan coast due to their ability as daring seafarers under the Nizamshahi kingdom of Ahmadnagar. They served in turn the Shahs of Ahmadnagar and Bijapur and later the Mughal emperors. Their stronghold however, was a constant source of irritation to the Marathas as well as the British.

Four Kunjalis served the Zamorins Here only Mohammed Kunjali Marakkar, the first Admiral of Calicut who offered to the Zamorin his sword, ships and services, dedicated his entire energies in fighting naval wars with the Portuguese.

The greatest Indian maritime commander of his time was also a surprisingly learned man, his original family name was Sankpals. Kanhoji Angre recruited sailors from the Seafaring communities mentioned above. In 1699, as Admiral he took over command of the Maratha fleet. Since then, for a period of 3 decades, he engaged the European powers with his daring actions at Sea. His fleet considerably reduced

British trade between Mumbai and the Malabar Coast. He captured Kolaba from the Siddis in 1706. A year later, maritime trade in the Indian Ocean was threatened by Arab pirates operating from Muscat. Admiral Angre drove the pirates away with his fleet of 10 ghorabats and 50 gallivats. Thereafter, he established mastery over the Konkan coast by fortifying his base at Gheria(Vijaydurg) . He controlled about 300 miles of coastline from Kolaba(his headquarters) to Gherai and imposed restriction on free movements of ships. He acted as a guardian of the Western coast and wanted to in return take money for guarding the coast by issuing Dastaks. By 1710 he fortified Khanderi Island commanding entrance to the harbours of Bombay. To check him two European rivals Portuguese and English forget their old animosities and joined hands in an alliance on 20th Aug 1721 to attack Kolaba. Kanhoji's last act of hostility against the English was the seizure of the company's galley King William in 1728. Today the Western Command of the Indian Navy behind the Town Hall is called INS Angre which is of great sentimental value to the navy.

The Travancore Raja Martanda Varma in the 29 years of his reign, from 1729 to 1758, brought about an amazing expansion of the Travancore State. In this he had the extremely rare kind of genius which could persuade others to fight his battles when his own fortunes were at lowest. In August 1741 he attacked the attenuated Dutch forces at Kolachel in South-west India and beat them, a severe blow from which the Dutch never fully recovered, for it broke their prestige. In due course Travancore was able to penetrate further north and control Quilon, Marta, Kayamkulam, and Purakkad.
