

## **Portuguese and Urdu Historiography of Gujarati Navigation (India, 16th Cent) Conflicting Views?**

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The sorry history of the last king of the Muslim Indian Kingdom of Gujarat, caught between the increasing land based Mughal power and the strong maritime power of the Portuguese, in mid 16th Cent. is well known. Indo Persian historiography, that is the Persian Chronicles of Mughal India as well as local Persian Chronicles of the Gujarati Kings do give ample testimony of that struggle for power. However 17th Cent. Persian Chronicles of Mughal Emperors have a tendency to emphasize on the conquest of Gujarat by the Emperor, and we do not have much material from Gujarati based Persian Chronicles of, say, the last important king of Gujarat. Mughal Chroniclers do mention the Portuguese aggressions on the Gujarati ports and also relate the fact that Mughal power had an objective ally : the maritime power of the Portuguese.

Urdu local historiography of Gujarat (end of 19th unto mid 20th Cent.) is seldom quoted after the development of British and English language history of Gujarat before and after 1947, which explored quite thoroughly Indian and European sources and reigned supreme over this field. Though Urdu historiography of Gujarat of those years could not benefit of latest findings by Portuguese scholars, it was very thorough in exploring local sources, and describing peculiar cultural and material aspects. So Urdu historiography of Gujarat should not be forgotten : it is not only a mere compilation of Persian (and some European) sources, it is also a nationalist attempt to rehabilitate the glory that was Muslim Gujarat. More precisely we would like to have a close look to Gujarati and Indian (Muslim) navigation as seen by Urdu historiographers. Both fields being quite well investigated by Urdu modern historiography, although that is now considered as a minor literary genre.

On the other hand the Portuguese 16th Cent. chroniclers would also compile from Indian sources - in Persian and Arabic mainly- and from Portuguese first hand testimonies (be that oral or hand written) and do have a tendency to describe the « fierce and rich » Indian populations (Muslim and Hindus), the formidable Indian armies and naval forces to enhance their military feats, particularly in the case of Gujarati ports which were not easy to submit or conquer, and in order to justify their colonial and commercial domination, as well as to maintain a kind of « Crusade » spirit against the so called « *Moors* » or Indian Muslims. The

Portuguese chroniclers were not all Royal Chroniclers writing from the colonial archives in Lisbon, with the help of teams of translators, they were also individual writers or veterans from India, who had a good knowledge of Persian (to say the least). They would also include all kind of « career report » from independent soldiers and mercenaries who were anxious to get recognition of their past military services in India, sometimes disguising the fact that they had been actually in the service of Indian Princes : Muslim kings and princes in the case of Gujarat and the emerging Mughal power. Or they would acknowledge working as spies for the Portuguese Crown. The case of Diogo de Mesquita is particularly revealing ; his first hand testimony is related by the famous Portuguese chronicler Gaspar Correia in his *Lendas da India*. Correia's work was never published officially, it waited more than three centuries in the Royal Archives of Lisbon. That is not the only Portuguese testimony and description of medieval Gujarat we have, but it is a crucial one that coincides with local Indian testimonies because Correia was there for many years and in official service, even during the battles for Diu, and also because his writings were never published in those days, therefore uncensored.

### **Correia: a writer, secretary (escrivão) to the Portuguese Viceroy**

He spent more than fifty years in India where he landed at the age of twelve as a young secretary (page) to the Viceroy and was most probably taught Persian at St Paul's Goa College, as was customary. He served under two viceroys, Nuno da Cunha being the second one ; Correia's testimony is very important because he was in Gujarat with the Portuguese Viceroy and a witness of so the called (difficult) *Conquest of Diu*, and the Portuguese war against Bahadur Shah Gujarati, the last Gujarati king worth of the name, in 1534-35. Diu was a strong naval base and Correia's manuscript has a beautiful representation of the main island and forts under Portuguese occupation, a settlement that, actually, was not different from the Gujarati previous commercial and naval settlements, mosques and temples being replaced by churches.

## **1. Gujarat as maritime and continental power in 16th Cent. AD**

### **Urdu historiography and Gujarat**

Urdu historiography, that is local Indian historiography in Urdu flourished during late 19th Cent up to the first decades of 20th Cent, when it was superseded by Urdu translation of Persian Chronicles of India as well as by English historiography of India in the academic level. For quite a long time Urdu historiography was ignored by historians of Urdu literature and it was understood as a hobby for local erudite persons, at best as a secondary source for modern Indian history in English. After the colonial era we see a renewed interest for local historiography as opposed to the imperial and centralized point of view. No doubt Indian (and Pakistani) nationalist feelings and local pride helped. Reprints of Urdu historiography volumes (preferably 19th Cent. hand written printed volumes) are now regaining favor, sometimes

the English translation is reprinted with many foot notes and illustrations, a feature Urdu historiography is generally deprived of. A notable exception being Sayed Ahmad Khan's *Asār us Sanadīd (history of Delhi and its monuments)* first edition in 1847.

As far as Urdu historiography of Gujarat is concerned we mainly have two major works on medieval Gujarat by Maulana Sayyad Abu Zafar Nadvi (further quoted as Nadvi), *Tārīkh e Gujarāt : A History of Gujarat* and later on *Gujarāt kī tamaddanī tārīkh : A cultural History of Gujarat*, Dār ul Musannifīn, Ahmadabad, and Azamgarh, 1958 (both posthumous), at least *A cultural History of Gujarat* was reprinted in 2005, at Azamgarh (Shibli Aacademy). Dār ul Musannifīn (Writers House) does not seem to be very different from Nadwat ul Musannifīn, Azamgarh, itself an offshoot of *Nadwat ul Ulema*) created by Maulana Shibli for the promotion of Urdu language and literature. It is worth noting that Maulana Nadvi's works written before 1947, were published at the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Dār ul Musannifīn, around ten years after his death. A summary of his academic career is given in the preface of the 2005 Urdu edition of his *Gujarāt kī tamaddanī tārīkh* and we can deduce that this work was written around 1939. His writings go along a series of Urdu historical works about Arab navigation in South Asia.

In any case Urdu historiography of Gujarat does not take much pride in the last years of King *Bahādur Shāh*, treacherously assassinated by the Portuguese, neither in his bloody struggle for power. The two chronicles we examined prefer to refer to his father, King Muzaffar who's reign was the apex of the Gujarat Kingdom. But Nadvi's *Cultural History of Gujarat*, does not omit the last and desperate efforts of King Bahadur to regain his dear port of Diu. Nadvi's work is quite comprehensive and includes the whole period of the Muslim kingdom of Gujarat, describing, say the mode of government, religious and teaching institutions but also, and it makes its originality, quite a few chapters about the maritime power of Muslim Gujarat (starting even before that).

### **Gujarat as a maritime power as viewed by Maulana Nadvi**

Indeed Maulana Nadvi book has a very important and original section about the Gujarati fleet and ports : A rare feature in local Urdu and Persian historiography. We are given first of all a quite comprehensive retrospective of the past history of Gujarat as a maritime power, its naval trade and expansion, quoting Chinese, Persian and Arab travelers and historians. From Khambāyat (Cambay in Gujarat) to Java (let us remember that in any case Indian naval expansion to the Far East, is a very old phenomenon. But the maritime routes would also extend as far as Yemen and Madagascar, that too at a very early date.

### **A few key points (as evoked by Maulana Nadvi)**

The Urdu chronicler does describe the first age of Gujarati navigation from 2nd Cent. BC, the

expansion of trade towards East Asia before the coming of muslim and Arab navigation, this feature is remarkable, as it shows how open minded and proud he was of his country's early navigation achievements. He also suggests that Arab navigation was present in the Indian seas before the advent of Islam. Quite a remarkable point given the fact that Persian speaking Muslim chroniclers, his predecessors, would not bother to record earlier naval history so precisely.

Naturally, Nadvi, who is an Indian Muslim, proudly notes that the first ever recorded Arab ship to come on Gujarati shores did so in 633 AD, coming from Bahrein (although we definitely know that Arab navigation towards India must have been there before the advent of Islam and its political and commercial expansion).

The policy of local Indian Rajas towards Persian and Arab merchants : Nadvi is keen to remark that, before the conquest of Gujarat by the Mughals, his ancestors were welcoming trading fleets from Persia and Arabia and would trust the management of foreign trade and fleets to Persian and Arab port commanders i e shah bandar, from Persian [šāh e bandar]. A fact that the Portuguese also recorded, though they were completely mistaken when they thought that those foreign grandees of the realm could be easily subdued.

Continuation of this policy by the first Gujarati Muslim kings : they actually were Rajput Rajas of clear hindu ancestry, conveniently converted to Islam around 1300 AD, they would marry local hindu Rajput princesses, sending both pilgrims and merchants to Macca, thus enhancing their occidental naval network.

Nadvi's chapter about Gujarati maritime power at the time of Muslim medieval kingdom:

He describes the merchant fleet as differing from the war fleet, the crews, the different kinds of ships and their specific technical names, the importance of naval artillery and armored ships etc: this is indeed a very important chapter. He goes, under the pretext of cultural History, into very accurate technicalities related to the Gujarati fleets, naming things and institutions. He is so precise that he even has a special sub chapter on the Gujarati tradition for giving proper and carefully chosen names to their individual ships.

He is proud of those features and keen to show that his homeland (Gujarat) was once a formidable naval power, up to Malacca (while the so called Mughal Empire, rather sultanate was never a significant naval power). Naturally the Portuguese chroniclers do not fail to show the importance of the Gujarati trade, but for them it is Muslim expansion and they do not realize how closely knitted the Hindu/Muslim maritime society could be, particularly in the case of Gujarat. Though, particularly in the case of Correia, they gave a very precise political history of the last Muslim kings of Gujarat, and describe some of their ports, but stressing on their conquest, officially motivated by the spirit of crusade wars.

Maulana Nadvi hardly mentions the Portuguese but does insist on the Gujarati naval resistance (under Bahadur Shah Gujarati) against them underlining the treacherous

assassination of Bahadur Shah, giving him the palm of martyrdom while his is shown as a dubious character and a murderer by the Portuguese witnesses of his sorry end.

### **A final note**

Though written in the beginning of 20th cent. Maulana Nadvi's writings, based on Sanskrit sources, Arab, Persian, chronicles, and, last but not least, Gujarati traditional sources when British historians of those days would, before modern archeology, confine themselves to Persian and Arab chroniclers, are still quite relevant. Also his technical and lexicological efforts in, say, naming precisely the different kinds of ships, for war and trade purposes, are praiseworthy. His local Gujarati (provincial) point of view is also of some importance considering that in those days the historical official point of view was to describe the *rise and fall* of Mughal Empire ; while the Portuguese chroniclers were focussing on their military conquests and naval victories, in the name of Christian expansion against receding (?) Muslim powers relating the building of a vast maritime *Empire*, conveniently forgetting that without the cooperation of Gujarati merchants in ports like Diu, and of the coastal subsisting Gujarati ships that would help loading and unloading high sea Portuguese vessels (not to mention the local ship builders) and without the enslaving of so many Indian mariners (without converting them) their expansion towards Malacca and Japan would have never taken place.

Nadvi's *Cultural History of Gujarat* is then still very much worth comparing with 16th cent Portuguese writings because of their opposed point of view and also because they complete each other, especially when we look at Portuguese manuscripts included in the *Chronicles*, and *Lendas* by Correia, besides it would bring new annotations of the Portuguese histories, giving Indo Persian orthography of proper names and of indigenous for geographical locations. But, more important, it would help in confronting Indian local views of the naval conflict with Portuguese classical interpretations.

Further we think that new editions of Urdu hand written printed chronicles of Gujarat would greatly benefit from illustrations taken from Portuguese chronicles, also quoting Portuguese chronicles (Correia's Portuguese chronicles and papers) would definitely give a different view of the last part of Bahadur Shah Gujarati's reign: notably his last attempt to retake the key naval position and fortress of Diu.

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