CHAPTER - 2

With Swords and Diplomacy

Founding the Province of the North

(1534 A.D.)
2.1. The Beginning –

By 1510 A.D. the Western coastal India started to witness the daring activities of the newly emerging European naval power. The few years back on 20th May 1498 A.D. a Portuguese naval fleet consisting of odd four ships and one hundred and seventy men which included the ship pilots from Gujarat led by Vasco Da Gama had reached Calicut on the Malbar coast of Indian subcontinent. The Portuguese were the first among the Medieval European empires to circumnavigate the Southern tip of the African continent and to discover the sea route to India, the exotic land of gold and spices in the Orient as then it was famously called in Europe. Thereafter, for the Portuguese navigators, there was no time to turn back. One by one, the early Portuguese navigators while coming to India either discovered some stranger lands then unknown to Europe or enlisted more region to the empire while drifting away from the enroute (Chandra 2007). The personalities such as Vasco da Gama, Pedro Alvares Cabral, Fransisco de Almeida, Afonso de Albereque have an inerasable place in the history of exploration and colonization, navigation, diplomacy, geo-politics of the South Asia who opened the obscure and fabled land of the Orient to Europe for commercial exploitation. After travelling thousand of kilometers distance by undertaking a yearlong sea journey, the early Portuguese explorers cum diplomats, however, nowhere were ready to confine the presence of Portugal solely to the Malabar coast. In this process, the Estado da India was founded in 1505 A.D. and Dom Francisco de Almeida was appointed as the Portuguese Governor and Viceroy of Estado da India. The Europe then was undergoing through the mankind's one of the most illustrious intellectual and scientific Movement, aptly termed the Renaissance. This was the moment when the very soul of the feudalistic medieval Europe was being questioned and which was pointing to the rise of the nascent bourgeoisie in the European society. Once the mercantile feudalism started to expand, the search for the new markets and the resources started and thus, it paved the way for the Age of Discovery. Few South-West European empires, prominently the Portugal and Spain backed by the Papal Bulls initiated the race of maritime exploration (Kulkarni 200). The fall of Constantinople in 1453 A.D. in hands of Arabs added more fuel to the frantic search for the alternative route to the South and South-East Asia. To end the Arab monopoly over the trade in the Indian ocean, arduous Naval expeditions to explore and discover the unknown region for the trade, spices and resources started. Portugal took the lead in the overall events by discovering the
sea route to India, one of the most accomplished achievements of its time when just a half century before, the Europe was not even familiar with the area South of the Cape Bajedor in Africa.

2.2. The Portuguese Arrival in the North Konkan (1508 - 1534 A.D.) (Map - 4) –

The coastal region of North Konkan, starting from the area in the immediate South of Damanganaga river (presently in the Union Territory of Daman) to Chaul (presently in Taluka - Alibag, District - Raigad) in the Indian subcontinent was mostly ruled by the Sultanate of Gujarat (also referred as the Muzaffarid dynasty of Gujarat) and the Ahmednagar Sultanate, an offshoot of the former Bahamani Sultanate in the beginning of the 16th century. This region, which mostly falls in the North Konkan had a good number of cities and ports of importance, among which, Thane, Kalyan and Chaul etc. were famous for their great trade (Khobrekar 2002). Portuguese, however, for the quest of their dream, Diu, were already marauding through this region either for chasing the enemy ships or the Arab and the Muslim flotillas. The challenge of wresting the trade monopoly of the Western Indian sea from the Arabs was indeed a formidable task, considering the small number of Portuguese personnel involved in the mission who were thousands of kilometers away from their homeland. However, it was in the Arabian sea of the Western India where Portuguese fought their most heroic naval battles in the Indian Subcontinent and which in the first half of the 16th century earned them the biggest and richest territory in India. The region was famously called as the "Province of North". It is interesting to note that in the first decade of the 16th century, it was nowhere on the roadmap of the Portuguese Estado da India to secure such a territory or colony in the North Konkan as they were mostly focused on to secure Diu for controlling the rich trade of the Western India.

The dramatic chain of episodes started from March, 1508 A.D. when the joint naval Expedition of Mamluk Sultan of Egypt under the command of Persian Noble Aamir Hussein, the Gujarat Sultanate led by the Commander of Diu, Malik Eiaz and Zamorin of Malbar confronted the relatively small but well equipped Portuguese fleet captained by Dom Lourenco de Almeida, a young and brave son of the first Portuguese Viceroy Dom Francisco de Almeida off the shore near Chaul. Lourenco, who was chasing the enemy fleet till Chaul was previously alerted by the informers about the possible attack. But Lourenco could not comprehend the danger lurking
ahead. Despite the dauntless fight, the Portuguese forces had to taste defeat and more importantly, D. Lourenco de Almeida lost his life in this battle. This was the first naval defeat of supposedly superior naval power like Portuguese in the Arabian sea, which must have endangered their stake for claiming the monopoly in the Indian Ocean (Cunha 1993). But the story did not end there. It initiated a quarter and long decade continuous fights between the Sultanate of Gujarat and the Estado da India in the Arabian sea, which in a due course of time shaped the future of this region. Enraged by the death of his son and more importantly by the Portuguese naval defeat, the Portuguese Viceroy Dom Francisco de Almeida sailed from Kannor to Diu with a sole aim to punish Aamir Hussein and to get Diu. Armed with nineteen vessels and one thousand six hundred combatants, he stormed Diu and defeated the joint Naval Expedition of Mamluk of Egypt and the Sultanate of Gujarat on 3rd February 1509 A.D. However, his attempt to take Diu by force did not succeed. To negotiate with the Sultan of Gujarat Sultanate Muzaffar Shah II, the Viceroy deputed two embassies to his Court, the first in 1513 A.D. and the second in 1514 A.D. The first one got no favorable response but the second consisting Diogo Fernandez, Diogo Teixera and Ganpatrao, a Hindu interpreter who met Sultan at Ahmadabad bore the fruit. The Sultanate authorities offered the alternative site of Mahim (presently in Mumbai) to Portuguese. The offer was completely turned off by the Portuguese delegation since they were not authorized to accept anything but Diu (Edwardes 1910). Nonetheless, Portuguese never left the hope to get the command of Diu from the hostile foe.

In a major development in 1516 A.D. Portuguese got the control of Revdanda near Chaul (at present in Taluka - Alibag, District - Raigad, Maharashtra) from Nizam-ul-Mulk of the Ahemadnagar Sultanate. Chaul was an ancient city, which had maintained its status as a nationally and internationally recognized emporium. This was the first territory which the Portuguese had acquired in the North Konkan amidst bitter struggle with the mighty regional ruling polities. As Portuguese started the construction of a fort at Revdanda, the fleet of Gujarat Sultanate often harassed the ongoing construction. To chase and destroy these fleets or to raid the coastal region from the Gulf of Cambay to Chaul while returning from Diu became the usual affair for the Portuguese forces who in the process often ravaged the coastal towns of greater prominence such as Thane, Vasai and extracted a lavish tribute from the local rulers (Khobrekar 2002). The fort in Chaul, nevertheless was completed by 1524 A.D. Meanwhile, one after another, the Portuguese Viceroy and Governors tried their best to capture Diu from the Gujarat
Sultanate but without success. It was only during the Viceroyship of Nuno Da Cunha (1529 - 1538 A.D.) that the concluding success for the two decades long pursuit of Diu could be achieved and which also parallelly led to the foundation of the Province of the North in the North Konkan (De'silva 2010).

2.3. Founding the Province of the North (1534 A.D.) –

After taking the Viceroy’s office in 1529 A.D. Nuno da Cunha wasted no time for undertaking direct action on Diu. In one of the biggest naval expeditions seen on the Arabian Sea in 1530 A.D. Cunha backed by an armada comprising four hundred large and small sized ships and an army comprising more than twenty five thousand soldiers first paraded on the plain of Bombay island and later on stormed Diu. But this time too, it remained allusive. Nevertheless, Portuguese won Daman and the nearby islands. The Portuguese meanwhile had become much apprehensive of any attempt of the Gujarat Sultanate to construct or strengthen fortifications in the territory controlled by them on the Western shore particularly on the Northern Konkan as it would have proven detrimental for the Portuguese ambition to control Diu. In 1533 A.D. on the orders of Bahadaur Shah, the Sultan of Gujarat Sultanate, Malik Tughan, a son of Malik Eiaz constructed fortification in Vasai with moats and ramparts and deployed a force comprising fifteen thousand men for its protection. Nundo da Cunha, on this descended on Vasai with one hundred and fifty armed ships and four thousand soldiers. Meanwhile, Malik Tughan had fortified the both sides of the river and added ditches to the newly built citadel which he had garrisoned with more than ten thousand fighters and a good number of artillery pieces. Governor Nuno da Cunha demanded from Malik Tokan to hand over Vasai to which Malik Tokan showed reluctance. On 20th January, 1533 A.D. which coincided with the St. Sebastian Day, the Portuguese forces under the command of Nuno da Cunha attacked the fortification built by Malik Tughan in Vasai which owing to the fierceness of the Portuguese attack could not withstand longer. Thus, the Portuguese celebrated their victory on Vasai right on the day of St. Sebastian with good wine and meat. Nuno da Cunha knighted few of his young officers for their bravery in the raid. Still, obsessed with Diu and with no intention of occupying and fortifying Vasai, on the order of Governor Nuno da Cunha, the Portuguese army razed citadel to the ground and went back to Goa with four hundred pieces of captured artillery. Nuno da Cunha, however again took recourse for diplomacy
by sending delegations to the Gujarat Sultan's Court for Diu which still could not yield any success (Cunha 1993).

The grand entry of the Mughals in India after the first battle of Panipat in 1526 A.D. had great convulsions in the contemporary Indian geopolitics and the Mughal rulers had begun their quest of the larger empire in the Indian subcontinent. The Sultanate of Gujarat too was on the kingdom expansion spree by its successful campaign in the Deccan and Malwa, which ultimately brought the Mughal armies to its door. Sensing the trouble and with no one in alliance to confront the such powerful enemy, it is not surprising that the Gujarat Sultanate offered the hand of friendship and assistance to none other than their arch foes on the sea, the Portuguese. Impressed by the military skills, the fire arms and the navy of Portuguese, the Sultan Bahadur Shah went forward with the call of strategic friendship and offered the coastal strip stretching from Aagashi in the North (presently in Taluka - Vasai, District - Palghar) to Karanja in the South (presently in Taluka - Uran, District - Raigad) as a mark of friendship to Portuguese through the treaty concluded on 23rd December, 1534 A.D. onboard the ship St. Matheus at Vasai. This treaty not only acquired the fertile region of Vasai with revenue benefits under the Estado da India but also sealed the naval supremacy of Portuguese in the Arabian sea and the Indian ocean. The treaty was signed by the Governor Nuno da Cunha and the Ambassador of the Sultan Bahadur Shah Khwaja Sheikh Iyaz with Martin Afonso, the Chief Captain, Farnao Rodrigues de Castelo Branco and others. This event of signing the treaty was witnessed by Garcia da Orta, the famous Portuguese Physician who later on became the landlord of Mumbai group of islands. The articles of this famous treaty of Vasai are given below.

The Clauses of the Treaty -

1. The Sultan Bahadur gives to the king of Portugal, forever, the city of Bassein (Vasai) with all its adjoining lands, islands and seas with all its jurisdiction and an empire with all its economic benefits and royal laws, which he, Sultan Bahadur, the king of Gujarat, until then had possessed and from that day onwards he gave up all his rights that he had in those lands, islands and seas, and transferred everything to the king of Portugal. He thought it was all right that his officers, (of the king of Portugal) take possession of all the above mentioned.
2. With the condition that all the ships that left the kingdom and land of Sultan to enter the strait of Mecca would go to Bassein (Vasai) to get cartazes from the Captain of the king of Portugal, who is there and on the way back they would go to the mentioned city and pay duty, so that Portugal would not lose the merchandise and that the Captains would keep it as the pillage from the victory in the battle without the king of Gujarat being against it or being offended by it.

3. That all the ships of his kingdom (the Gujarat Sultanate) could sail everywhere unless they were going to Mecca, would take same cartazes and the Captain would charge each of them one tanqa and with those cartazes they would having any other obligation but this would not be necessary in the case of every small boat that usually went along the coast.

4. That in no part belonging to the kingdom of Gujarat, as in all the lands that he had from then onwards, should warships be made and if there were some already made, they should not sail. However, they could construct all the trading ships they wanted in their own style for their own use and business.

5. That neither his majesty, the Sultan Bahadur, would be allowed Rumies (Arabs) to enter any port of his kingdom and they (the people of Gujarat) would not give them protection, favor them, help or anything that they had in this land.

6. That all the money from the land of Bassein that had not yet been collected which Melique should have had since the Muslim year until that day, the Governor could send to collect in the name of the king of Portugal.

7. That he would hand over immediately old Diogo de Mesquita, Lopo Pinto, Manuel Mendez and Joao de Lima and all other Portuguese who were his prisoners.

These seven clauses or conditions which of the official of the king of Portugal presented, were accepted by the Ambassador of his majesty, the Sultan Bahadur and he was obliged to follow them and abide by them, as if those were in each of the, without deceiving and being careful with
all the truth and assurance of the king, immediately afterwards. The Ambassador presented other clauses of his majesty Sultan Bahadur as follows.

8. That all the horses that came from the strait of Maacca and Arabian countries in the first three years after the fort of Bassein had been finished would come to it, so that the Sultan Bahadur and his vessels could send for them, to be bought, paying duties to the king of Portugal as they were paid in the city of Goa and that they would not go to the port of Deccan, Canara or Malabar, and if those horses were not bought in Bassein, their owners could take them wherever they wanted.

9. That any ship that came from the kingdom of Cambay or from anywhere else, would not pay duty if it had less than sixty horses.

10. That if any ship, except from the strait of Malacca, which arrived due to bad weather in the kingdom of Gujarat, as soon as it was within the port, no one would have anything to do with it and it would return to any town it wanted.

11. That 5000 Tangas of Larims that there were taken from the income of Bassein (Vasai), to be spent on the mosque would be paid to him (Bahadur Shah or his agent) and that would be the mosque of the land of Bassein and no one could either interfere or make any changes in the prayers that were said in the mosque.

12. That 200 Pardaos that were paid from the income of Bassein to the soldiers of the two fortresses Aceira (Asheri Fort) and Coeja (Kohoj Fort) that are between the land of Bassein and those of Rebutos. would always be paid from the same income as they had been paid until then.

These twelve clauses were accepted by the Governor in the name of the king of Portugal and he promised to fulfil his obligations honorably. (De'silva 1985: 83 - 88).

Despite being tempted by the repeated Mughal offers to join their camp against the Sultanate of Gujarat Portuguese did not leave the alliance with Sultan Bahadur Shah though they showed the signs of fluctuations in the beginning. This act of the Portuguese prized them with the possession
of Diu, which was the much awaited moment in their two and half decade existence on the Western coast of India. To solidify the alliance, Gujarat Sultan Bahadurshah under another treaty concluded with the Estado da India on 25th October 1535 A.D. handed over Diu and confirmed the earlier cessation of the coastal territory from Aagashi to Karanja. Thus, by 1535 A.D. the Portuguese became the righteous owner of the territory which including Diu, consisted of a long coastal strip in the North Konkan from Aagashi to Uran and Chaul which ultimately became the famed Province of the North of Portuguese Estado da India (Edwardes 1910). The famous Portuguese poet Luis Vaz de Camoes has heaped praises in the honor of Governor Nuno do Cunha in his well-known literary work Lusiadas (1572 A.D.) and the stanza (Canto X) celebrating the success of Governor Nuno da Cunha is reproduced below in its English version -

"Then the fierce Sampaio shall be succeeded by
Cunha, who the helm long time shall wisely guide,
The lofty towers of Chale he shall raise on high,
While famous Diu shall tremble when by him tried.
Strong Bacaim (Vasai) shall not its artillery deny,
But not without bloodshed; Melie with humbled pride
Shall see her superb palisades downtorn,
And not less because the work of the sword shall mourn".

2.4. The Province of the North - Brief Information (1534 - 1739 A.D.) (Map - 5) -
The Portuguese had already built a fortress at Revdanda in Chaul but its territories to the North of Chaul lacked such big defense architecture by that time. Vasai, though had one small factory, was not made into impregnable stronghold by then. In 1535 A.D. when Portuguese faced the heat of the Mughal raid on Vasai, it became obligatory on their part to manage the proper security of their territory which they had captured after great efforts. Thus, in 1536 A.D. the foundation ceremony for the construction of a fort at Vasai was done and by 1538 A.D. construction of the citadel was completed. Portuguese named this fortification in the honor of St. Sebastian and called it St. Sebastian Fort (D'Silva 2004). Ultimately, it was Vasai which became the capital of the Province of the North and was subsequently called "a Corte do Norte" for its opulence and luxury. In 1556 A.D. during the Governorship of Francisco Barreto, Portuguese conquered
Asheri and Manor region and in 1559 A.D. Portuguese under the Viceroyship of Constantine de Braganza captured the Daman Fort and consequently the both territories became a part of the Province of the North (Pissurlekar 1967).

It was with swords and muskets that the Province of the North was founded. It is also a moment of great astonishment as one distant European power entered in the geo-politics of Western India after crossing thousands of kilometers by the sea, without any pretext engaged in an open war against the powerful regional ruling polities for its well established motives, roamed through the sea and the coastal region with an iron fist and founded its own principality on the Western coast of Indian subcontinent and all this was achieved despite being inferior in the numeric of armed forces. The humane qualities like valor, sheer determination no doubt played an important role in the formative period of Portuguese expansion in the Indian subcontinent but more importantly, the background of Renaissance, which paved the way for many breakthroughs in science and technology and which revolutionized the navigation, military methods and technology proved to be the decisive factors in these engagements. It is a well known fact that the Indian monarchial polities in the medieval and late medieval period were very less concerned with securing the coastal boundaries with a powerful navy, with the sole exception of the Maratha ruler Chhatrapati Shivaji who understood its importance and tried to raise a small fleet in a very limited capacity and resources. Therefore, the paradigmatic shift, which the Portuguese brought in the Indian geo-politics with the help of superior navy, military technology, tactics and organization was later on carried out by the other European trading powers such as the Dutch, French and English in which in the final instance, the English acquired the hegemonic status.

The Portuguese, in the form of the Province of North, ruled the region of North Konkan from 1534 A.D. to 1739 A.D. by holding a strip of coastal land stretching from Daman (though a part of the Province of North, Diu is excluded here, as it is not situated in the North Konkan and lies in Gujarat) to Karanja in Uran and thereafter, Revdanda and Korlai near Chaul, a territory approximately one hundred and seventy five kilometers in length and thirty five kilometers broad at the maximum. From the administrative point of view, the Province of North was mainly divided into the two principal regions, Daman and Vasai (Bacaim, Bassein). Daman had four sub-divisions under its control, namely, Sanjan, Dahanu, Tarapur and Mahim, whereas Vasai had jurisdiction over the eight sub-divisions of Asheri, Manor, Vasai/Saivan, Thane, Sashti (Salsette), Mumbai (former Bombay), Belapur/Shahabaz and Karanja while Chaul with its
subsidiary fortification of Korlai was an independent division (Campbell 1881). Under such large administrative divisions, there were many villages, Mandovis, Tanadaris, Cacabes, Hortas, Pacarias, Sarretors etc. The Portuguese crown, following the classical feudal land holding system, leased /awarded a majority portion of the Province of North to the distinguished Portuguese nobles who had to pay a certain amount of quint rent to the royal treasury and had to participate in the military campaigns whenever required. Besides they had to manage the security of their estate. As per the Ecclesiastic policy of the Portuguese crown, the large estates were also awarded to the Christian religious missions in the North Konkan.

During the formative period of the Province of the North, Portuguese were engaged in the continuous fights with the Islamic Sultanates of Gujarat, Ahemadnagar and Vijapur in the 16th century. It is to note that during their confrontation with the regional monarchial powers, on the many occasions, Portuguese had lost some of the portions of their territories but it was later on restored to them through the political treaties. In their overall existence of two hundred and five years in the North Konkan, Portuguese were constantly at loggerheads against the regional monarchial polities such as the Sultanates of Ahmednagar, Vijapur, the local Koli chiefs (i.e. the Koli kings of Ramnagar and Jawhar) and the formidable most, the Marathas. In the 17th century Portuguese faced long war campaigns first of Chhatrapati Shivaji and later of Chhatrapati Sambhaji. In 1662 A.D. as per the treaty of marriage between the Portuguese and British crown, Portuguese handed over the Bombay group of islands which were seven in numbers to the English monarchy who in turn leased them to the East India Company in 1668 A.D. In the 18th century, first it was Kanhoji Aangrey who challenged the might of Portuguese in the Arabian sea and forced Portuguese to carry his permit for sailing in the coastal region of North Konkan (Pissurlekar 1967: 140). After Kanhoji Aangrey, it was Peshwa Bajirao I who with the assistance of his younger brother Chimaji Ballal (referred hereafter as Chimaji Appa) led successful offensive against Portuguese in the Province of the North. Besides these regional powers, existence of the Estado da India was under danger from the maneuvers of the Dutch, English etc.