CHAPTER - II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Aden is an old port in the south western part of Arabian peninsula and the city has a very long history of 3000 years. The suitable geographical location enabled it to have all trade routes converging on the city and it maintained a high level of trade and commerce as compared to other ports like Muza, Cana and Shihr. The port was practically free from shoal, so it had played its dominant role throughout in history. Its origin, as a city, is shrouded in mystery. Historians have given different statements about its origin.

Nomenclatures:

The author of the book the "Preplus" written by an Egyptian merchant in A.D. 90 called Aden as Eudimon Arabia.


This name was given to Aden by Greek geographers also. According to Philostorrius and Uranius, the town Aden was known by name of Aden in 3rd century A.D. Ptolemv a great geographer called the city as Arabia Emnorion. Different reasons by different historians have been given as to why Aden was called by different names.

Aden was believed to be the son of Adnan, so the city was accordingly called by this name. According to Yakut the above statement is not valid as he had not come across any source regarding Aden as son of Adnan. It is also believed that the city was called Aden after the name of a person Aden Ben Senan Bin Ibrahim. Some believe that Aden was called by the name of Aden bin Saba Bin Yeshjub Bin Yarub Bin Qhtan.

According to Ibn Al-Muṣawer, the name of the city originated from the mineral (Almaaden) meaning iron (Al Haddid.) This view is supported by the fact that at present there is a mountain called (Jabal Haddid). The mineral is taken from this mountain, while in the past the city was rich in iron ore. On linguistic grounds Aden means

---

6. Ibid, p.89
"to settle down" so the name was given accordingly.

There are, however, controversies among the persons who have given different names to the city. Linguistic ground to some extent seems acceptable. Nonetheless the fact remains that Aden is an ancient city.

Origin of Aden:

There is divergent opinion about its origin. It was a part of Yemen ruled by many kingdoms like Maen, Ausan, Kataban and Saba. Manuscripts left by these kingdoms have not identified why the city had been called as Aden. However, the name of Aden is identified for the first time in Ezekail part of Bible (xxvii 23). It was written there as Eden. This part of Bible mentions that the people were dealing with blue clothes, embroidery work, apparel bounded with cards made of cider.

According to Ibn al-Mugawir, Ibn Ad had excavated a tunnel in the mountain range of Aden to reach the city and used the place as prison. So it is believed that he was the founder of Aden. It is surprising that no exact information

about this origin of the city is available from documents. But from the historical point of view Aden seems to be an old port, even older than the Bible.

The City Before Islam:

The strategic location of the city on the artery of commercial routes has attracted the foreigners and peninsular rulers from time immemorial to capture the city. South west corner of the Arabian peninsula was called by Roman historians as 'Arabia Felix' which means "a happy land". This name was given because of the fact that this part of the peninsula which was called Yemen was receiving regular rainfall during summer from south-west winds. Besides the regular monsoon, the area produced precious incense and traded in goods like incense and perfumes like Myrrh Francinese Cinnamon and Cassia; and the sale of these brought handsome prices. These goods were used for ceremonial purposes and for preparation of fragrance, spices and for medical ointments. During the period the city served as an hinterland. There was establishment of a kingdom in the area called Ausanian kingdom. The kingdom was developed as a maritime state having trade links

with eastern coast of Africa, which was also called by the same name as Ausanian coast.

The main port of this Ausanian kingdom was Aden during 400 B.C.\textsuperscript{11} The Ausanian Kingdom had established trade links with far off areas. Internally the country competed with Sabaian Kingdom. This Sabaian Kingdom had created a land traffic towards north. The Ausanian Kingdom was defeated by Sabaian Kingdom. This Kingdom distributed the land to two other kingdoms called Qetaban and Hadhramaut\textsuperscript{12}. In due course of time the interior kingdom called 'Saba Kingdom' ruled the whole country. The Aden port declined with respect to its trade and another port called Muza was established. This port was near the capital of Hamiarat in the northern home land.

From the third century B.C., the Sabaian kingdom which had occupied the southern part of Yemen and reached the sea in the west and south had become famous for its power in the Mediterranean world. The kingdom monopolised the trade in the coast of Africa, India and the western world.

\textsuperscript{11} Ali Gwad, Al Mofasal Fi Tarikh Al Arab Oabel Al Islam, Vol., 1, Beirut, 1980, p.502
\textsuperscript{12} Bafaqieh, M., Tarikh Al Yemen Alqudem, Beirut, p.30
The port of Aden which was called Eudemon Arabia by Preplus was famous for the export of Arabian goods to Egypt, Syria and India and for the import of Indian goods which were brought by Arabian and Indian merchants which were shipped goods to Egypt and Syria. During that period the utility of monsoons was known to Arabian traders before Hepalus had discovered these monsoons. This situation tempted the Romans to occupy Yemen and they sent an expedition under the control of Allius Gallis in 24 and 25 B.C. to make Yemen a protectorate or subject state and bring its trade under their control, but they could hardly succeed. There is no information even in Roman literature about their capturing of Aden and evidence fails to show the success of the Roman empire in Aden. During the time mostly the trade had been in the hands of Arabs although Egypt had a share in Red Sea traffic.

The control of Romans over Aden and Socotra island led naturally to the opening of direct contact between Egypt and India through the Red Sea and Indian ocean. The time of their occupying the port is not known and even their time of withdrawal is also not traceable.

Ptolemy called the city as Arabian Emporium during second century A.D., as the city during the period enjoyed good trade and commerce. During fourth century, a church was established in Aden as a result of which a large number of Christian people began to reside. The church was built in 342 A.D. Aden became an entrepot between the provinces of Roman Empire and the East. The Persian traders had extended their trading activities from South Arabian peninsula to north peninsula and Aden was the terminus of north-south route. Even during pre-Islamic period, Aden was one of the oldest and important markets. The Arabs give a vivid description of trade routes of merchants from northern Arabia through the Arabian Gulf and Oman to Aden and from there to the Hejaz for the famous fair of Uqaz. Now the city came under the rule of Abyssinians in 525 A.D. and Persians in 575-600. Persians had connected the city to mainland with a bridge. Besides they established a cistern to collect the rain water.

Islamic Rule:

During the period of Islamic government in the Arabian

17. Ibid, p. 208
18. The Al Muhajar, On Cit. p.110,111
peninsula, Yemen was still occupied by Persians. When the Persian ruler in Yemen heard about the new Islamic movement in Medina, he declared himself a Muslim. Prophet Mohammad recognised him as the ruler of Yemen. Thus in the early years of Islam, Aden was ruled by Banu-man, who was a descendant of Man Ibn Zaidh. Later on, Banu Ziyad came to power in Yemen and Ibn Ziyad became master of Hadhramaut Diyar Kindah, Shihir, Mirbet Ibyan, Lehaj, Aden and Maritime provinces on the Red Sea. Banu Man in Aden refused to give power to Banu Ziyad and the latter asked him for coinage and Khutbah. At that time a mosque was built by a Khalifah Omar ibn Abdul Aziz, which was subsequently rebuilt by Hussain ibn Salamah when he became the ruler of Yemen. The ruins of a minar like structure in Crater has given rise to two schools of thought regarding its utility. According to some it is a minar of the mosque while other believe it to be a lighthouse of the old harbour.

During the period of Banu Omayyad (660-749 A.D.) Aban ibn Affan bin Alhakam built a mosque in Aden which is still at present known by his name. After the Banu Omayyad

21. Ibid, p.9
period, Abbasian Islamic Dynasty came to power. At that time Abi al Abbas was the ruler in Baghdad. He had appointed his uncle Daood bin Ali as the Governor of Yemen. He stayed in the capital Sanaa of Yemen. After the death of Daood bin Ali, another ruler came to power in Yemen who appointed subsequently another Governor in Aden. After the death of Al Abbas in Baghdad, his brother came to power who appointed Man bin Zaidah as Governor of Yemen. While the brother of Man bin Zaidah became Governor of Hadhramaut. During the Islamic period in Baghdad at the time of Al-Mamon bin Haroon al Rashid, there was unrest in Yemen. The ruler of Baghdad sent an army under the control of Mohammad bin Abdullah bin Ziyad to Yemen in order to control the country. He failed to create a stable situation in Yemen especially in Tihama, Aden and Hadhramaut. These parts of the country became independent under the leadership of Banu Al-Ullah. The Abbasid ruler in Baghdad sent an army under the leadership of Jafar Mullah ibn Ziyad who controlled the entire country and made Yemen part of the Abbasid dynasty.

During the Abbasid period the port of Aden to some

22. Luqman, H., Tarikh Aden and Jenoob Al-Gazeerah, Cairo, 1959, p.35
extent lost its trading function, as the trade route was shifted from the Red Sea to the Arabian Gulf via Baghdad to Mediterranean sea. The new trade route passed through the Arabian Gulf to Baghdad and then to the Mediterranean sea. This situation however, soon changed as Ibn Ziyad was interested to make Aden port a commercially strong one. This resulted in the accumulation of more wealth and as a result of this he announced himself as the independent ruler of Yemen, and separated himself from the Abbasid rule of Baghdad.

The Banu Ziyad period lasted for about 200 years. Another dynasty namely Banu Majah came to power in 1060. During this period the power was established in Zabied which was the capital of Yemen during the dynasty of Banu Ziyad. Another dynasty called Sulayhite was trying to establish Fatimi and Ismaili ideas and brought Yemen under Al-Daeł Ali Al-Sulayhi. By the end of 1062 A.D. he defeated the Yemen governors and united the whole country under his rule. During this period Aden was conquered by Sulayhite dynasty. The city and surrounding areas including Lahej, Abyan, Shihr and Hadramaut was occupied by Banu Man. He allowed the governors to continue in their posts but under his leadership. The son of Sulayh named Al ' Mukurram married a lady named Sayiddah. Her father gave her the
income from Aden and its neighbourhood areas as dowry. The governors of Aden continued paying the income as per Sulayhi's orders. Salayhi was killed and after his death the governor refused to pay the income to the lady and declared himself as independent. But Al Hukarram, the king of Yemen, marched against the governor of Aden and conquered Aden. He appointed two governors there, one of them had to control the interior area, starting from the gate of Aden city called Taakar Aden towards the interior, his name was Al Abbas. Another person named Masood was responsible for the castle of Al Khadra with authority over the coast, shipping rights and command over the city. During that period revenues were constantly sent to the lady and her share amounted to 1,00,000 Dinar per year. During Zurayite Dynasty's rule the city had been in a prosperous condition as the city had contact with India, China and Egypt. During the period the Islamic Government shifted from Baghdad to Cairo and trade was going on through the Red Sea. This resulted in the prosperity of the port. The prince of this dynasty built houses and

25. One dinar equal $ in 11th century.
walled the city from the sea-side by reeds. But the waves of the sea destroyed the reed wall. The prince of Aden built Al-Khadra palace for which building material was brought from Abyan a place 60 kms. away from Aden. The houses of the rich people were also made of stones brought from the same place. The remaining houses were built from reed26. This dynasty continued their rule for about 90 years from 1083 to 1173.

During this period the volume of commerce shifted from Arabian Gulf to Red Sea. This resulted in the decline of Arabian Gulf ports especially Kish. The ruler of that port marched to destroy the port of Aden in 1135 A.D.27 The Fatimite dynasty also tried to build up the port of Aydhab in the Red Sea in order to divert trade away from Abasid. By the beginning of 14th century Aden became a flourishing port and by the middle of the century Aden secured a large share of eastern commerce. For more than 100 years there was a keen competition between Aden and the Arabian Gulf ports for supremacy. Spices and pepper which were the most valuable commodities in those days passed through the port of Aden to Europe. During 12th century heavy tax was imposed on pepper and spices amounting

to one third of its value. The city became a commercial centre covering the area towards north and south. The merchants established their trading centres in Aden and from that they started developing their trade towards, north by land and by sea to Zabied, Jeddah and Aydhab\(^\text{28}\).

Ayyubid Dynasty:

At the end of Zurayite dynasty Ayyubid dynasty came to power in 1175 in Egypt and they started strengthening Aden with the result that the city became prosperous. According to Ibn Al Mugawer the ruler of the city, Othman Omer bin Othman bin Ali al Zanjabi\(\text{Altakrete}\) walled the city in different ways. The first wall was started from Mandher Hill up to Ur Mountain. This mountain range today is called Shamsan Mountain Range. He arranged a gate in this wall near Halkat Bay towards south called Halkat Gate which later on came to be known as south gate. He also made another wall which started from the end of Al Khadra Mountain range in the north-east to Taakar range in the northwest. Then he combined the wall towards the coast in the west up to Halkat mountain in the south. In the coastal wall, he arranged 6 gates called as Industry gate, Huma gate, Silla gate, Furdha gate, Mashreq gate and

---

Secret gate. The second and third gates served as outlet for flood water. The fourth gate was meant for export, import and for custom purposes. The fifth gate was known as Meshreq gate or coastal gate. The last gate was a secret gate.

He had made these gates with plaster stones. One of the gates called as Furdha gate was always crowded with people as the gate was famous for various commercial activities. Besides, the ruler made numerous markets and shops meant for trade and other commercial purposes. A large number of people settled in the city. The city on the whole was flourishing.

Bani Russul Dynasty:

The Bani Russul period started from 1232 to 1454. Prosperity of Aden was associated with this dynasty. During this period Aden became an entrepôt and most of the trade was centred around Aden, as another port Dafar was also conquered by Russulid ruler. India and China had used the route for trade purposes with the result Aden had become commercially a strong port*. Trade ships from China, Ceylon and south-

---


* According to Ibn al Mugawer, the number of ships anchored under Jabel Serah was 10-80 per annum. During Russulid period out of a total sum of 22,40,000 dinars 14,70,000 dinars was furnished by Aden, where as Dhafar contributed 42,000 Shihr 2,00,000, Jeddah 1,00,000 and Zabied 50,000 Dinars.
east Asia were linked with Aden. During Bani Russul period Taiz was the capital of Yemen, but the taxes were realized at Aden\(^\text{30}\). The political stability during Russulid period was frequently shaken as they had to face many rivals, who attacked Aden a number of times. During Russulid period the administrative set-up in general was strong with the cooperation of the merchants. But in the middle of the fifteenth century there was a setback in the prosperity of the city. The Russulid dynasty declined, during this period some ports of Arabia became more important as most of the trade was carried out through these ports. In the Red Sea, Egyptians also monopolised the trade. Most of the trade went directly through Babel Mandeb to the ports in the Red Sea. So the port in the city of Aden faced lot of difficulties.

Taherid Dynasty:

By the decline of Russulid dynasty Taheried dynasty came to power in 1450. They brought back prosperity to the city and port of Aden. During Taheried dynasty the ruler of Aden had to control some parts especially Dhaffar Shihr falling under Katheri sultan in 1460. During 15th century Indian, Chinese, Ceylonese and Egyptian embassies were established\(^\text{31}\). The increase in the population of

---

the city created the problem of drinking water. The ruler in this period built an aqueduct to bring water from an interior place called Birr Hamid to the city. This became the source of water for the city. Besides an aqueduct, walls and cisterns were also used. The population during this period was estimated at about 50,000 to 60,000. This population was larger than the population of 1939\(^{32}\). During the period different racial groups like Indians, Jewish, Egyptian, Syrian and Magrabi had come and settled.

During 16th century the city had suffered a decreasing trend in trade owing to the following reasons:

i) Discovery of Cape route of South Africa through which trade of south-east reached Europe without entering the Red Sea and

ii) The military strength of Othman government.

During 16th century only 17-20 ships were put in Mocha, while in Aden (according to Ibn Al Mugawer) only 2 ships were there. During 1513 A.D., Portugese and Egyptians tried to attack Aden, but failed to capture it.

---

because of the defensive arrangement made by Taheried government. Aden was most prosperous during Taheried government.

In 1535, the Turks conquered Tehama and after three years they occupied Aden and hanged its ruler Amir bin Abdul Wahab. During Turkish rule the city military base and commercial activities declined. This lent to the inhabitants of Aden being victims of starvation as the trade shifted to Mocha. However, people, on the whole, were not satisfied with the Turkish government with the result that there was a strong revolt against the Turkish ruler, ultimately the Turkish Government, came to an end after 100 years.

After the Turks, the Imam in Sanaa (Capital of North Yemen) came to power. The central government in Sanna was not able to control all parts of Yemen, with the result that rulers of the different areas of Yemen announced their independence. One of the rulers of these peripheral areas in Lahej, controlled Aden with the help of Yafei tribes. The ruler had promised to pay the Yafei tribes some money, but later on he refused. After sometime, the ruler got rid of the Yafei tribes and ruled Aden independently. During this period another tribe from the surrounding area attacked Aden in 1836 and the city continued to decline.
Another port Mocha in North Yemen was prosperous due to the export of coffee which was the main cash crop during 18th century. During the last three decades of 16th century there was a decline in the commercial set up of Aden as a result of shifting of trade through Cape route. The British in India started looking towards Aden, while Egypt was occupied by France. The British started planning to capture Aden. In 1618 British established their trading posts at Mocha. In 1620 and 1709 Dutch and French established their trading posts respectively at Mocha. In 1785 Americans also started competing with British and by 1800 they were the main exporters of Yemen's coffee.

Occupation Period:

The British in 1799 occupied Preim island which lies mid way between Aden and Egypt in the Red Sea in order to prevent any French invasion on India. The French rule in Egypt was short lived and Mohammad Ali came to power in Egypt. The ruler occupied some parts like Hejaz Najed and Tehama of Yemen. There was change in the sailing pattern of ships due to discovery of coal and they were in need of coal in ports; and for this purpose Aden became a centre of great interest.

During 1833-35 Americans were also in search of ports in Africa, Arabia as well as in the Red Sea. They also desired the possession of the port of Aden.
However, Hains captured the city of Aden by force on 19th January, 1839 and became the first political agent of British rule in Aden. The British rule started in 1839 and continued till 1967. During this period Aden was ruled from the Bombay Presidency till 1932, thereafter the power was shifted to Central Government of India. In 1935 the Government of India announced an Act about the transfer of administration of Aden to the Colonial Office. In 1937, the Act was finalised and the power was given to the Governor who was also made Commander-in-chief assisted by an executive council. Great Britain adopted the policy of divide and rule and divided the southern homeland by making different sultanates and sheikhdoms. In 1963, Aden entered the federation and the British Government erected a capital for these federations in Madinat Al-Shaab. Not all parts of southern homeland entered the federation. This federation continued upto 1967. Ultimately Britain pulled out of Aden and Aden became the capital of People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

The city morphology and structure is the result of successive historical periods when the various dynasties added salient buildings, gates, roads and walls to the

* A Britisher who was the captain of the Indian Navy.
already existing structure. A careful study of the city with the help of the architectural characteristics, shows the progressive history of the city and the neighbouring areas. The city has survived the onslaught of the dynastic rules and it could maintain its primate character, as it continued to dominate the region and its particular culture. It is rather difficult to ignore the city's influence in the socio-cultural and economic life of Yemen. History reveals its true character and helps in its further analysis and understanding the process of urbanisation of this south-western port of the peninsula of Arabia.