CHAPTER - VIII

THE ARABS AND THE SOLANKI KINGDOM
OF ANHILAWAD PATAN

THE RISE OF CAMBAY AND THE DECLINE OF BROACH:

While the Rashtrakutas and the Gurjara-Pratiharas were rivalling each other to reach out to the sea through the Gujarat coasts and capture the trade of Broach, the Chavotakas (Chavadas) had established a kingdom in North Gujarat with its capital at Panchasar on the Rann of Cutch, drawing its strength from a share in the trade of the West Coast of India with Persia, Arabia and Africa. In 746 A.D. Vanaraja is said to have founded the town of Anhilawad Patan and shifted his capital from the coast to the interior because of Arab pressure from Sind, Multan and Arabian Sea Coast. The menace of the Meds in North Saurashtra had closed the Wadhwan - Gondal - Junagadh route to Somnathan Patan, for the Patan Kingdom. Hemmed in by the Arabs, the Meds (Mehrs) and the Gurjaras, Vanaraja's only alternative was to seek an outlet through the Gulf of Cambay. The drive to the sea of Anhilawad Patan Kingdom began with the forward policy of Vanaraja in the middle of the 8th century but the Chavadas, after Vanaraja's death, could not challenge the might of the Gurjara-Pratiharas or the Rashtrakutas. They
continued as a weak ineffective power in North Gujarat till the period of the Solankis, some two hundred years later. It was left to the Solankis to raise Anhilawad Patan from the status of a small capital of a principality to that of the chief metropolis of the strongest kingdom in Gujarat, with close commercial contact with the port of Cambay.

In 961 A.D., more than 200 years after Vanaraja founded the City of Anhilawad Patan, one Mulraj Solanki made himself ruler of Patan. By this time the continuous wars of the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Malwa and Jodhpur with the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan, for the priced possession of Gujarat and the rich port of Broach, had exhausted both. A prolonged attempt by the Rashtrakuta Viceroy of Gujarat, after the death of Karkka, to establish a dynasty, independent of the main line, had ended in the main branch asserting itself sometime in 888 A.D. But the Rashtrakutas continued to be harassed by the Gurjaras and a revived line of the Jubbulpur Kalachchuris, who emerged as the Kalachchuris of Tripuri. An alliance between the Kalachchuris and the Rashtrakutas did not succeed in strengthening either. The Chalukyas once again became a power to be reckoned with. They defeated the combined armies of the Kalachchuris and Rashtrakutas and occupied most of their territories. After 972 A.D. nothing is heard of the Rashtrakutas in Gujarat. The Solankis of Gujarat are believed to an offshoot of the Chalukyas who
overthrew the Rashtrakutas. Whatever their origin, the history of Gujarat from the last quarter of the 10th century to the middle of the 13th century centres round Anhilwad Patan and the Solankis. The tripartite struggle, between the Gangetic-Malwa, Gujarat and the Deccan regions, a characteristic feature of the History of Western India, now emerged as a struggle between the Sultans of Delhi, the Solankis and the Chalukyas. Mulraj is said to have conquered Broach but his son lost it to the Chalukyas. As during the period of the Rashtrakuta-Gurjara-Pratihara struggle, the fate of Broach twisted and turned with the fortunes of the Solankis and the Chalukyas. But it was left to the Solankis to establish a very powerful kingdom in Gujarat, while the Chalukyas gradually confined themselves to the Deccan. The Solankis, unlike the Gurjara-Pratiharas, however, were friendly with the Arabs and encouraged trade with them. But even at the height of their power, the Solankis never had much control over Broach and its trade. The main port of the Solanki Kingdom was Cambay which was nearer to their capital city, Anhilwad Patan. Some of the more powerful of the Solanki Kings did succeed in extending their sway up to Thana in upper Konkan, including Broach in their territory. But Broach was at best only a frontier town of the Solanki Kingdom where trade was risky. Likewise the Chalukyas also did succeed in occupying Broach and the Narbada outlet intermittently. To them also Broach was in an extended tongue of land subdued militarily
for a time. They had their steady outlets in Saimur (Cheul), Thana and Subara (probably old Sopara or Surat ?). The Arabs cite these ports as Balhara ports. Broach was on the frontiers of their territory over which they had only doubtful control. Malwa, the corridor between Gujarat ports and the rich Gangetic Plain, also remained outside the control of both the Solankis and the Chalukyas. Even Siddhraj Solanki was not able to bring the entire Malwa and the routes to the Gangetic Plain under his control. Malwa, Rajasthan and the Central India routes were subject to thrusts from the Gangetic Plain. Broach was forced to surrender its premier position on the West Coast to Cambay and Saimur.

The 11th century Arab travellers however give a clearer picture of Broach than the 9th and 10th century travellers, either because their knowledge of India was improving or because their trade with the east had expanded that they had opportunities to observe the country more closely. The Solankis, as mentioned before, were also friendly towards the Arabs. Al Biruni, writing in 1030 A.D. says that Baruch is 30 farsakh from Debal (?). "After the Gulf of Turan", he says (the coast from Tiz to Debal) "comes the small Munha and the Great Munha and then the Bawrij who are pirates of Kacch and Somnath. They commit robberies on the sea in ships called Bira". The river Narbada, he says, "descends from the mountains and falls into the sea near the
town of Baruh, (Broach) nearly sixty Yojana east of Somnath". He continues, that south of Anhilawara is Lardesh and the two capitals of the country are Bihroj (Broach) and Rihanjur (Rander, opposite Surat) (1) From Al Biruni's observations, it can be gathered that the Saurashtra coast was infested with pirates and was risky for trade, that the traditional sea route existing from pre-Mauryan times from the south Saurashtra Coast, across the Gulf of Cambay, to Broach was still in use and that Somnath Patan had re-emerged as an important port in the 11th century. Al Biruni also gives Broach the importance of a capital town and mentions it along with Rander. Rander really came into prominence about 1225 A.D. when the Arabs of Kufa established a trade depot in that town. It could not have been a very big town in Al Biruni's time. From Al Biruni's account, Broach seems to have been the capital of a small kingdom in South Gujarat (Lardesh = Lata).

Al Biruni must have come to India during the reign of the Solanki ruler Bhimdev I (1022-1064 A.D.). He mentions Cambay as the great port of the Solankis. Both Mulraj (942-996 A.D.) and Siddhraj Solanki (1094-1143 A.D.) are credited with having conquered South Gujarat. Mulraj's son lost Broach to the Chalukyas. During Bhimdev's reign Broach was either a Chalukya port or an independent kingdom. The glory of Broach had actually faded by this time, not only because of the uncertain political situation but also
because of the silting of the navigation channels in the Gulf of Cambay sometime in the 10th century. By the 11th century the navigation channels to the port of Cambay improved and political conditions made it imperative for the Solankis to find an outlet on the Gulf, as near to their capital town as possible. The old route from Broach to Sind and Multan was through Patan. A direct route to Cambay through Asawal (Karnavati or Ahmedabad) became a necessity for Patan. The connection of Cambay with Broach and Patan was maintained. Broach was still a well known market centre from whence came goods to Cambay from Malwa and the Deccan.

By 1100 A.D. the Chalukyas had ceased to be a maritime power and had virtually withdrawn to the Plateau, leaving the vital coast of the upper Deccan Plateau in the hands of local chieftains. Siddhraj must have taken advantage of the power vacuum in the Nerbada-Mahi region and extended his sway right upto Thana. He is said to have conquered Girnar, Malwa, Dhar, Kolhapur etc. He is reported to have ruled Gujarat proper, which he inherited from Mulraj, and surrounded it by a girdle of fortresses. Achalgadh and Chandravati (Mount Abu) were controlled by his Paramara feudatories and they formed the out-works of Anhilwad Patan in the north. Modhera and Jinjhuwada, both on the Somnath Patan route, were in the west and Champaner and Dhaboi in the south. Siddhraj had full control over all the trade routes leading to the Gujarat
plains, the Mount Abu route from Rajasthan and the Punjab, the Viramgam-Wadhwan route from Saurashtra, the Malwa route through Champaner and Godhra and the southern route through the coast.

Idrisi (Idrisi 1090-1153 A.D.) must have come to the Solanki Kingdom in Siddhraj's time. He says that many merchants of Cambay were Arabs who had their own mosques and were treated well by the King. He says that the Arabs were harassed by the Jats, Meds, Barias and Kurks who operated as far as Socotra, but that in Cambay and the Kingdom of the Solankis there was peace. That Siddhraj paid great attention to the welfare of the Arab traders is revealed in the reports which state that when a Musalman merchant complained to him of harassment by Parsi merchants in Cambay, Siddhraj disguised himself and went on a camel to gather information. When he was satisfied that the Arab merchant's complaint was genuine he gave the Musalmans money to rebuild their mosques and towers. Although Cambay was the leading port, Broach is also mentioned by Idrisi. "Baruh", he says "is a large and handsome town, well built of bricks and plaster. The inhabitants are rich and engaged in trade and they freely enter upon speculations and distant expeditions. It is a port for the vessels coming from China as it is also for those of Sind". (2) Broach also seems to have had close links with Saimur at this time because Idrisi
says that it is two days journey from Saimur. (3) The mode of travelling on land, he says, is by chariots drawn by oxen which are used for carrying goods. The trade of Broach with Sind which was broken during the Gurjara-Pratihara period was re-established under the Solankis. Mansurah, the Arab centre, says Idrisi, "is great, populous, rich and commercial, its environs fertile. The buildings are constructed of bricks, tiles and plaster. It is a place of recreation and pleasure. Trade flourishes, the bazars are filled with people and well stocked with goods. The money is silver and copper. The weight of drachmas (dinar) is 5 times that of the ordinary drachma. Fish is plentiful, meat is cheap and foreign and native fruits abound. (4) Ankalawad Patan was between Sind (Mansurah) and the Broach - Kambaya region. Broach, according to Idrisi, traded with Mansurah.

Saimur also, which had trade links with Broach was, according to Idrisi, "a large well built town. Cocoanut trees grow here in abundance, henna grows here and the mountains produce many aromatic plants which are exported". Saimur he says belonged to the Balhara whose kingdom "is vast well peopled, commercial and fertile. Many aromatics and perfumes are produced in the Balhara Kingdom". (5) Idrisi also says that "The Indians are naturally inclined to justice and never depart from it in their actions. Their good faith honesty and fidelity to their engagements are well known and they are so
famous for these qualities that people flock to their country from every side". (6)

Opposite the seaport town of Baruh, according to Idrisi, "is the island of Mullan which produces pepper in large quantities and is two days journey from Sindan, a large populous town with extensive commerce. Sindabur is 4 days journey from Baruh along the coast. Here ships anchor and it is a commercial town with rich Bazars. From Sindabur to Bana (Thana) is 4 days journey, (7) says Idrisi.

The Solanki Kingdom under Siddhraj extended upto Thana and it can be concluded that the products of all the rich coastal ports came to Broach to be transported to Cambay or for direct export.

The development of Cambay under the Solankis eclipsed Broach but Broach still had certain locational advantages with regard to some land routes and sea routes.

The major land routes serving Broach and the major port, Cambay, during this period were the Anhilawad-Cambay route, the Anhilawad-Somnath route, the Broach-Malwa route, the Broach-Delhi route, and the Broach-Khandesh route. Broach was connected to Cambay, the major outlet of the Solankis.

The Anhilawad - Cambay route was the life line of the Solanki Kingdom. The Solanki Kings, from Mulraj to Siddhraj,
had to fight the Kolis of Asawal (Ahmedabad) to gain control of this route. Karnadeva built the town of Karnavati on the site of Asawal, after he subdued the Kolis. But the Kolis still harassed traders. The route ran through Kadi, Asawal and Dholuka. It extended northwards to Abu. Commodities like indigo from Asawal, cotton from Dholka, leather goods from Cambay, hides and skins etc. moved on this route. Broach being connected to Cambay received these goods. But the major movement was to Cambay.

The Anhilawad - Somnath Patan route was through Jinjhuwada, Viramgam, Wadhwan, Gondal and Junagadh. With the harassment of Meds, Bawrij and others, Anhilawad Patan had lost control of this route till Siddhraj re-established himself in Saurashtra. Teak from Junagadh, swords and daggers from Somnath and the Patolas of Patan moved on this route. Somnath was a major port of the Solankis till it was destroyed by Muhammad Ghazini in 1024 A.D. Somnath had close trade links with Broach since the pre-Mauryan times.

The Broach-Malwa route ran through Champaner and Dohad. The route was unsafe because the forested area of the Panchmahals was inhabited by Kolis who were plunderers. But forest products like gum, lac, timber, honey, skins of wild animals, agricultural products like wheat, cotton, sugar and cotton fabrics from Malwa, were commodities that moved to Broach on this route and from thence partly to Cambay. The commercial
links of Malwa with Broach was also as ancient as the pre-Mauryan times when the Ujjain route from the Gangetic Plain to Gujarat was one of the most important trade routes. Siddhraj Solanki had succeeded in subduing parts of Malwa and Broach was able to draw the products of that region. It had the advantage of being located on the Malwa route to Cambay and Saimur.

The Broach-Khandesh route was again one of the ancient natural routes which connected Malwa to the Deccan. It ran through the important gap of Nandurbar (Burhanpur) to Deogiri (Doulatabad) and from thence to Manyakhet, the market town of the Chalukyas in the Deccan. Cotton and cotton cloth formed the major commodities moving on this route.

The coastal route from Cambay to Sopara, which passed through Broach, was another route which helped Broach to maintain its contacts with the Deccan. In fact the Solanki Kingdom, even during the reign of Siddhraj, did not have much control over the Deccan, beyond the upper Konkan coast. The coastal route was therefore probably more in use than the Burhanpur (Khandesh) route, when Broach was included in the Kingdom of the Solankis. On the other hand, the Chalukyas were more firmly established on the Burhanpur route so that when they extended their sway to Broach, it was the Burhanpur route that linked Broach to the Deccan.
Besides the routes that linked Broach with the Kingdoms of the Solankis and the Chalukyas, the trade routes extended from Anhilawad Patan to the Sind port of Daibal (Debal on the mouth of the Indus) and the frontier market town of Multan. This route linked Anhilawad Patan, the capital and the major market town of the Solankis, with Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf by land. Broach, Cambay and Dholka were all connected to Anhilawad Patan and benefited by the extended road to the Persian Gulf. These routes were not new but were in operation since long. But after the Arabs established the Kingdoms of Mansurah and Multan they became the most frequented land routes from India to Persia. The Arabs had very little control over the Gangetic Plain and the Taxila route to the Oxus. Traffic on the Hindustan-Taxila route declined with the unsettled political situation in Northern India while the Arab market towns and ports of Sind such as Mansurah, Thatta, Baniya, Debal, Multan etc. thrived on the east-west trade. Spices, silken and cotton cloth, perfumes, precious stones etc. moved on this route on camel caravans.

The Somnath Patan - Anhilawad Patan route through Jinjhuwada, Modhera and Dilwara was also extended, beyond Multan, to Persia. From Multan, it went to Kandahar and Persia. It was a difficult route but the camel proved a useful animal along this route as well.
The links of Broach with the Gangetic Plain was also as ancient as the pre-Mauryan times. Malwa was always the strategic corridor which connected the Gujarat plains and coast with the Gangetic Plain. One branch passed through Ujjain, Bhilsa, Narwar and Gwalior to Agra, while the other branched off from Ujjain to Mathura and from thence to Agra.

Besides land routes, the Arabs whose major commercial centres were on the Persian Gulf, used also the well known sea routes along the Makran coast to the Gujarat ports. The Arabs, even before they embraced Islam, were great traders. They operated, on the whole, between the coasts of East Africa, the Arabian coasts of the Red sea and Hadramaut. They had also trade centres on the Persian Gulf. But with the establishment of Baghdad as their capital, the major part of their trade swung to the Persian Gulf ports of Hormuz, Basra, Baghdad, Muscat etc. The Arabs were great sea farers, but their ships were small. Marco Polo says that these ships never used iron fastenings but that the planks were fixed together by ropes made of Indian husk. It withstood the damages of salt water and could also resist storms. The ships had no cover except one made of hides and skin with which they covered the articles of sale. On this covering they generally loaded horses which had a good market in India. But with these sailing ships, the Arabs came to dominate the trade of the Indian Ocean.
The Arabs were excellent sailors and took perilous journeys to distant lands. They carried goods from Africa and Arabia to India and the Far East. They purchased goods at Cambay, Broach and other ports of India and took them to Hormuz, Basra and Baghdad, Muscat, Aden, Jeddah, Socotra, Sofala, Zanzibar etc. They created markets in these areas for Indian lac, cotton fabrics, and leather goods. Broach also supplied them with goods she received from other regions such as spices, camphor, aloe wood, sandalwood, pearls, ivory, emerald, sapphires, wheat, sugar, saffron, woollen clothes, musk etc. Broach imported from Basra and Baghdad dates, silk, carpets, copper, coined money, pearls, horses and slaves. From Hormuz came mostly pearls and dates.

The Arabs on the whole knew less of India than the earlier people who came from West Asia. The whole of upper India was unknown to them. The early Arab travellers visited Multan, Mansurah, Alor, and other important places in the Indus Basin. They also visited the ports along the coast particularly those on the Gulf of Cambay. All beyond these territories remained vague and the early travellers knew them only from hearsay. The reports of Suleiman, Masudi, Ishtakhri, Ibn Hawkal are more or less the same. Al Biruni gives evidence of a wider knowledge of India but very often the identification of places mentioned by him is difficult. Idrisi makes use of Al Biruni's writings and a large part of
his work is lost. All mention the Balharas, a corruption of Vallabha, a title used by the Rashtrakutas and the Chalukyas. But even the 11th and 12th century Arab travellers refer to the Balharas as the most powerful kings when there was not a trace of the Rashtrakutas after the 10th century. Probably the Chalukyas who also assumed the title Vallabha (Prithvi-Vallabh = Lord of the Earth) were known to the Arabs as the Balharas or the later travellers were only repeating what the earlier ones had reported. The Arabs do not mention the Solankis even though they were the most powerful kings in Western India from the 10th to the 13th century and despite the fact that they were quite friendly with the Arabs. Al Biruni and Idrisi, who came to India after the Solanki Kingdom was firmly established in Gujarat, still refer to the Balharas as the most powerful King. The fact that they mention Broach only in passing is not surprising because Cambay had already eclipsed Broach by the 11th century.
References:

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   b. Elliot and Dowson, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

(2) Elliot and Dowson, op. cit., p. 87.

(3) Elliot and Dowson, op. cit., p. 87.

(4) Elliot and Dowson, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

(5) Elliot and Dowson, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

(6) Elliot and Dowson, op. cit., p. 88.

(7) Elliot and Dowson, op. cit., p. 89.