CHAPTER 2

Historical Evolution of a Hinterland:
The Case of North Konkan and Uran
2.1 Introducing the North Konkan Region in Ancient Times

The evolution of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) is closely linked with the history of the wider North Konkan Region of which it is a part. This chapter will outline the evolution of different forms of land use, patterns of exchange and related human settlements that developed in the region as a result of man-environment interaction. The focus will be on the formation of nodal regions and kingdoms that influenced and impacted these interactions. Going by the history, a phase-wise historical analysis looks appropriate. Accordingly four broad phases have been identified: the ancient, medieval, colonial, and post-Independence.

Until the nineteenth century, inland creeks, rivers and the sea provided the chief means of transport for both people and goods, thanks to the paucity of safe and well developed land routes. With a mainland coastline of 5700 km\(^1\) the peninsula of India presented considerable opportunity for trade that led to the establishment of historic points of interaction and exchange where coastal and long-distance sea routes converged. Accounts based on written, oral and archaeological evidence provide some idea of the interaction between people and the ecological resources of the Indian coast from the first millennium BCE to modern times, i.e. covering a span of about 3000 years (Thapar, 2002). The patterns of interaction on the east and west coasts of India however, showed wide differences influenced by the physical landscape, development of technology for navigation and shipping, and the changing purposes of human exchange (Thapar, 2002). While both coasts have mountain ranges running parallel to the coast, the east coast has hills that taper gently towards the plateau and coastal plain with wide deltaic regions. The west coast is characterised by a long narrow strip of coastal plain bound on the west by the Arabian Sea and on the east by the Sahyadri ranges, known as the Western Ghats, which runs parallel to the coast for about 1600 km.

According to legend derived from the epic *Mahabharata*, this strip of coastal plain was formed by the reclamation of land from the sea by Lord Parashurama who lived on top of the Sahyadri Mountains (Charpentier, 1927). While one version of the legend says that

\(^1\) 7500 km including the island territories
Parashurama shot an arrow into the sea, which receded up to the point where the arrow fell, another version says that he shook a *surpa*, or winnowing basket, over the ocean making it recede from the foot of the *ghats*. Various writings (Charpentier, 1927) connect this legend with the formation of the Konkan\(^2\), Kanara and Malabar coasts. The legend points to possible early reclamation efforts and the existence of hunting with the use of arrows and paddy cultivation along the coast since the *surpa* was used to winnow rice. It is estimated (Brockington, 1998) that these legends relate to events that most likely took place in the 8\(^{th}\) or 9\(^{th}\) century BCE. In the Konkan region the town *Surparaka* (modern day Sopara) was built on the reclaimed strip of land and established as the capital of *Aparanta* or *Aparantaka*, another term for North Konkan (GoM, 2009) and southern coastal Gujarat (Naravane, 2001). Archaeological remains found in the town indicate signs of trade with Egypt, Phoenicia and Babylon from 2500 to 500 BCE (Campbell, 2006). Buddhist writings from the 6\(^{th}\) century BCE show that Sopara had considerable importance as a centre of commerce and was the royal base of Gautam Buddha. There is evidence (Thapar, 2002) of the use of sea-routes on the west coast between Broach and Kathiawar to ports further south right up to Ceylon (Sri Lanka from 1972). The *Mahavamsa* (Turnour, 1836) mentions the landing of prince Vijaya who sought refuge at Sopara before sailing to Ceylon where he became the first known king (BCE 543 – 505) in the country’s recorded history. The town of Sopara went on to become one of the most important ports on the west coast with mention of it in Buddhist and other sources relating to trade in the 3\(^{rd}\) century BCE. Similarly, in the Kolaba region the ports of Ceul, Mahad Chodeganv, and Rajpuri in Janjira were among the earliest mentioned centres of trade corresponding to about B.C. 225 (Campbell, 2006).

Thus the west coast had an active maritime economy from the first millennium BCE despite the sharp rise of mountains near the coast with limited access to the interior through difficult mountain passes such as the Bor, Devasthali, Kumbharli and Sevtya (Campbell, 2006). The high rainfall, tropical climate and fertile soil made the coast a considerably productive area. While the coastal strip produced rice, salt, fish/dried fish, sea shells, betel nut, coconuts, coconut fibre and fruit, these in themselves were

\(^2\)The name ‘Konkan’ is said to come from Konkuna, the name of Parashurama’s mother (Naravane, 2001).
inadequate to sustain trade. Timber, including teak, from the dense ghat forests constituted another important item for trade. The various openings in the Sahyadris provided access to parts of the Deccan (Figure 2.1) from where sugarcane, cotton, onions, garlic, turmeric, tobacco and pulses were sourced (Naravane, 2001). In addition, the west coast also served as an interim point for trade in silk and porcelain from China and the Far East to the empires located across the Arabian Sea. Historical records (Thapar, 2002) indicate that trade links were established with Mesopotamia in west Asia during the third century B.C., followed by the eastern Mediterranean provinces of the Roman Empire in the first century B.C., and the east coast of Africa in the century after that.

The above economic exchange led to several cultural and ethnic influences as well as political impacts as trading communities set up settlements at or near trading posts. Persian (Nestorian Christians and Parsis), Arab and Israeli (Jewish) traders were among those who settled on the west coast through their involvement in westward trade and their eagerness to gain a foothold in trade of goods coming from the Far East. The importance and prominence of particular ports underwent changes with change in the control over the coast as well as environmental changes such as sea level rise and siltation. Five nodal regions with considerable continuity in trade involvement can be identified in the west coast viz., (1) the Indus Delta, (2) Gujarat and Saurashtra, (3) Thana, (4) the Konkan and (5) Malabar (Thapar, 2002). The area covering Thana and the erstwhile Kolaba – now Raigad - districts which together constitute North Konkan in the modern state of Maharashtra, are of particular interest as parts of these later evolved into the Mumbai Metropolitan Region where the study area is located.

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3 The Konkan was constituted by the Districts of Thana, Kolaba, Ratnagiri, Bombay City and Island, a section of North Kanara and the Native States of Savantvadi, Janjira and Jawhar in the late 19th century.
In the Konkan region the coastal strip does not exceed 60 km in width at any point and at some places the mountain range has offshoots that extend directly into the sea thereby breaking the continuity of the coast. These do not, however, extend far out to sea and the lack of reefs and shoals allow ships to sail fairly close to the coast (Naravane, 2001). The long, fairly straight coastline also provides high visibility for boats and ships sailing these waters. The upper reaches of the region are characterised by fewer hills and relatively shallower and wider coastal land with mud banks and marsh lands being a fairly common
occurrence. The latter give way to an increasingly rocky coastline with some stretches of sandy beach in the middle and lower parts of the region. Compared to the northern part of the Konkan the middle and lower reaches have shorter rivers with their origins in the Sahyadri ranges, running through deep gorges upstream and ending invariably in a creek. Natural harbours, among which the Mumbai harbour is one of the best and largest, are few on this stretch but the numerous creeks and estuaries are ideal for smaller ships and boats. This led to the establishment of several minor ports and jetties over the years (Naravane, 2001).

The river systems played an extremely important role in coastal trade, and rivers such as the Vaitarna were used to float logs of wood downstream from the forests (Naravane, 2001). The rivers are all rain-fed that run in full spate during the monsoons and become sluggish streams during the dry season. The criss-crossing of numerous rivers and streams make the establishment of road and rail networks an activity of limited scope. There are several rocky islands located at or near the mouths of the rivers opening into the Arabian Sea. These were fortified by different rulers at various points of time to guard ports located at river mouths or further upstream and control access to the interior (Naravane, 2001). In the North Konkan the Vaitarna, Ulhas and Amba rivers were the most associated with trade. The Vaitarna river with two important ports, Sopara (1500 BCE – 1300 AD) and Agashi (1500 – 1700 AD), was guarded by a major fort on Arnala island built in 1516 AD. The trade operating through the Ghodbandar and Vasai (1200 – 1800 AD) ports on the Ulhas River was controlled by the Ghobandar (late 16th century) and Vasai (14th century; rebuilt 1536) forts. The port of Nagothan at the mouth of river Amba was guarded by and controlled by the garrisons of the Karanja (Uran) and Revas forts. A brief idea of the shifts in political control over the North Konkan until the colonial period is given in the following table.
TABLE 2.1
TRANSFER OF POWER IN THE NORTH KONKAN FROM ANCIENT TO MEDIEVAL TIMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>CONTROLLED BY WHOM</th>
<th>AREA CONTROLLED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200 BCE</td>
<td>Maurya Empire</td>
<td>Western coast including Mysore, Berar and Deccan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190 BCE</td>
<td>Parthians of Persia: Kshatrapa dynasty</td>
<td>Konkan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178 BCE</td>
<td>Shatakaranis</td>
<td>Thane coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400 AD</td>
<td>Rashtrakutas</td>
<td>North Konkan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-600</td>
<td>Mauryas and Nalas</td>
<td>Kolaba and North Konkan coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>550 – 760</td>
<td>Chalukayas of Badami</td>
<td>Konkan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>765/810 - 1260</td>
<td>Shilahara dynasty: 20 kings</td>
<td>North Konkan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1280</td>
<td>Yadavas of Devgiri</td>
<td>Konkan with headquarters at Karnala and Bassein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1294</td>
<td>Allauddin Khilji of Delhi</td>
<td>Thane, Mahim, Salsette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1300</td>
<td>Bhimdev of Devgiri</td>
<td>Mahim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1371</td>
<td>Mubarak Shah</td>
<td>Mahim and the Salsette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1430</td>
<td>Gujarat Sultans</td>
<td>West coast: Gujarat to Mahim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1478</td>
<td>Gujarat Sultans</td>
<td>Daman, Agashi, Sopara, Bassein, Bhiwand, Kalyan, Bombay⁴ and Panvel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1497</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Mumbadevi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1517</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Mahim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1535 - 1660</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Bombay islands and nearby mainland areas; Bassein Fort with its territory, islands and salsette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1565 - 1689</td>
<td>Marathas</td>
<td>North Konkan without the Bombay islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1662</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Bombay islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1665</td>
<td>British East India Company</td>
<td>Bombay islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1707 - 1818</td>
<td>Marathas</td>
<td>North Konkan with headquarters at Kolaba, Vijaydurg, Suvanadurg and Khanderi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773 - 1947</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Bassein and Salsette North Konkan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Verma, 1985; Ranade, 2009; Naravane, 2001)

By the second century BCE, most of the interior areas of the region were occupied by Dravidian tribes who did weaving, pottery and metal work (Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1909), while the ‘Koli’ community, engaged primarily in fishing and navigation, were spread along the coastline (Acharya & Shingane, 1889). The Kolis had also started doing

⁴The name ‘Bombay’ is used in the text while discussing events and processes as they occurred up to 1996. Thereafter ‘Mumbai’ is used as the name of the city was officially changed in that year.
some paddy cultivation and date palm plantations after interacting with the more interior tribes of the region. Technological improvements in agriculture were believed to have been made by the Aryans who migrated on a large scale along with other indigenous people into the region in the 5th century BCE. The population then had a mixed composition that included the hunter-gatherer Warlis, Katkaris and Thakurs.

The introduction of iron ploughs and subsequently the manufacturing of iron tools, chariots for warfare and ox-driven carts for transportation led to food surpluses, increased mobility and the growth of trade and commerce. The caste-based social structure was considerably fluid but had the beginnings of domination by Brahmans over the lesser kshatriya, vaishya and shudra castes (Fernandes, 1928). Semi-nomadic tribal units known as janas had already evolved into small kingdoms called janapadas with the permanent occupation of land, which later evolved into larger kingdoms called mahajanapadas (Ahmad, 1999). All these constituted the basic administrative units.

During the Mauryan period the region came under a kingdom with single political control rather than several small chiefdoms for the first time (Thapar, 2002). This period was significant for the rock edicts that documented history, also for the first time (Naravane, 2001). Those found at Sopara and other places along the coast were used to reconstruct the history of the region. The treatise Arthasasthra (3rd century BCE) of Kautilya, the teacher and mentor of Chandragupta Maurya, is another important source of information on state craft, economic policy and military strategy of that period. It mentions, for example, guidelines for the supervision of boats and ships sailing in the sea and in the rivers, as well as collection of taxes from vessels engaged in trade (Tripati, 2006). The main exports from the region included silk woven at Chaul, velvets made in Thane and textiles produced in Gujarat and locally. Textiles were also sourced from the Deccan in exchange for rice, vegetables, oil and salt that were produced locally. Other exports were black wood, teak and spices that were obtained locally as well as from the Malabar region (Campbell, 1882). The most valued import was horses from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf region, for which sometimes special negotiations were made between merchants and pirates. Instructions were written in the Arthasasthra for the pursuit and destruction of pirate and enemy boats (Tripati, 2006) that provide some idea of the risky conditions of
trade. At this time, long distance trade passed into the hands of the Arabs while Indian traders and mariners restricted themselves to the coastal waters (Naravane, 2001). The land routes ran parallel to the coast and concentrated at Broach and Sopara, which emerged as major collection centres of trade items coming from different parts of Konkan and Deccan and acted as important links in the coastal navigation routes (Karmarkar, 2005). The latter were established at Sopara, Chaul and other minor coastal settlements in the region. All these trade routes together served to sustain the ports and other trading centres.

Due to the establishment of a system of guilds for the development of trade the mercantile community assumed considerable significance economically and politically. This gave impetus to urbanisation in the area. Five types of urban settlements of this period based on size and functions related to commerce are mentioned in Buddhist literature (Sarao, 1990): the Nigama, the small market centre with redistribution functions; the Puta-bhedanam, the large commercial centre based mainly on wholesale trade; the Pattana, the coastal trading town; the Dronamukha, the town located at the river mouth; and the Nagara and Mahanagara which were two levels of big cities that combined the functions of commerce, manufacture and administration. Given the social structure and locational features, Uran and Chirner villages of Uran taluka were likely to have functioned as nigamas while Panvel, being a point of connection with the Deccan through the Bor Ghat is likely to have been a Puta-bhedanam. Buddhism played a significant role in the evolution of several commercial and religious centres along the trade routes in the interior and the coastal plains of the region. Along with a growing Indo-Roman trade, the patronage of Buddhist and Jain traders led to the extension of overseas trade links with Ceylon and Southeast Asia. The region also established direct maritime links with Egypt.

North Konkan attained a new level of economic prosperity under the Mauryan Empire (321 to 185 BCE). Sopara served as a connecting point for various Buddhist settlements and resting places as well as trade and was at its zenith as a commercial and religious centre (Fernandes, 1928). In the vicinity of Sopara lay important villages and places of pilgrimage such as Suvarnarekha and Ramtirtha. Kanheri (ancient Krishnagiri) was the
longest living Buddhist settlement in Western India (Gokhale, 1976). Other important towns in Konkan of this period were Kalyan (Calliana), Chaul (Semulya) and Mangalsthan (Magathana). Kalyan, located on the banks of the River Ulhas, was recognised as one of the five chief marts of western India during this phase (Bombay Government, 1882). Similarly, Chaul was also a place of significance with its trade links that reached up to Persian Gulf, east Africa and China. Being a stronghold of Buddhism, the Konkan had many Buddhist caves at Kanheri, Kondivate, Jogeshwari, Mandapeshwar and Magathana located near the islands of Bombay, Elephanta caves at Gharapuri, Karanja island, Jamburg, Kondane, Chandansar (Thane), Pal, Kuda (Kolaba), Chiplun, Khed, Dabhol, Sangameshwar, Gavhane-Velgaum (Ratnagiri) and Vada-Padel (Sindhudurg) (Nairne, 1894; Gokhale, 1976). These towns served as resting places for Buddhist traders travelling along the coastal route in Konkan as well as important trading towns and ports. Chiplun, for instance, located on river Vashishthi and at the entry point of a trade route connecting Deccan via Kumbharli pass was a chief centre of trade. Cotton, jaggery, butter, oil, grain, turmeric and chillies were traded from Deccan to Konkan, while textiles, metals, stones and other miscellaneous items were sent from Konkan to Deccan via Chiplun (Bombay Government, 1883). Land links with Tagara, the busy trade centre of the Deccan, were also established during this period (Bombay Government, 1882).

The regional economy in the 3rd century BCE was administered by a structure that operated at four levels based on the size of the area administered (Ramachandran, 1989). The centre of control was the Rajadhani, the capital city of the empire; with the Sthaniya nagara, the Janapada capital at the next level administering a group of 800 villages; the Kharvata from where a sub-group of about 200 villages was controlled; and Pura the small town with an administrative cum defence role (Ramachandran, 1989). It would appear that even then urban centres at various levels had to deal with overcrowding as excess populations were shifted out of towns and cities to village sites with the incentive of land grants. Foreigners were also induced to immigrate and occupy village sites with land grant incentives. Greeks and Parthians were prominent among those who were given incentives to settle in the North Konkan region. Mauryan rulers are likely to have
resorted to this strategy to sustain a flourishing trade with Greece at a time when Greece was going through turmoil. The significant in-migration of this group which continued for five hundred years between 250 BCE and 250 AD (GoM, 2009), coincided with the Seleucid-Parthian and Roman-Parthian wars as well as the period of turmoil associated with the establishment of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom (Strabo, 1932). The fact that no known trace of these communities exists today, points to the possibility of the formation of sub-castes arising from inter-marriage with local communities. The Son Kolis, for example, are said (Enthoven, 2008) to be a sub-caste that emerged due to the mixing of tribals with foreign immigrants, who settled along the Konkan coast.

New villages were also created with the takeover of forest lands and communities who had earlier moved from place to place depending on the availability of land and water. These communities were made to clear the forests and cultivate the cleared land. Land grants were made to individuals who rendered special efforts in this direction. It would appear that there was considerable resistance from forest communities as the latter were said to face direct threat of violence from the king in case of failure to cooperate (Thapar, 2002). The Brahmins were given higher importance and the *sudras* – including the children of these families - employed in cultivation and other forms of physical labour. The beginnings of crystallization of social structure in the region are thus attributed to the Mauryan period with a reduction in social mobility that had gone to make a fluid system in Vedic times (Thapar, 2012). Emphasis was on collective effort and self-sufficient settlements. There was increasing centralization of the economy and the State kept the villages unarmed, controlled them and took surplus wealth through taxes in the form of land tribute or rent and tax on the output produced from the land. The amount and form (grain, cattle, gold, raw material) of tax extracted were said to vary (Thapar, 2012) depending on the predominant economy of the area, extent of contribution of free labour, irrigation type, crop variety and level of fertility of the land. Tax exemptions were given to the Brahmins and to the villages that provided soldiers as needed by the king. Brahmins who were given land grants sometimes founded dynasties using the land as the nucleus from where small kingdoms were established. Small-scale individual ownership
of land was however minimal with most of the land categorised as crown (owned by the king) or state lands.

Subsequent to the Mauryan period, a significant development on the west coast in the first century AD was the introduction of the coconut tree (Kosambi, 1965) that had a long lasting economic impact in the region. It is believed to have been an import from Malaysia to the east coast in the previous century that spread to the west coast after a period of one hundred years. The fruit and products from its various parts changed the economy of the region drastically and thus provided the additional resources needed to clear dense forests and establish settlements on the coast. Later in the same century, coconut plantations were among the prized gifts from kings to Brahmins. Coconuts along with salt were carried through the mountain passes to the Deccan plateau where they were exchanged for cloth and metals and upland grains (Kosambi, 1965). The first dynasty connected with Konkan in the post-Mauryan period was the Andhrabhrityas during whose rule Buddhism continued to play a strong role. Large-scale expansion of trade was accomplished and urbanisation encouraged with craft production, long distance trade in valuable goods and the availability of agricultural products from the hinterland (Sharma, 1987). Forced labour, known to have existed in India from the second century AD (Kadam, 1991), was likely to have received an impetus in this region as the opportunities for generation of surplus were realised by rulers and the class of powerful traders and Brahmins that had emerged by this time. The vethbegar system of forced labour in Uran, Panvel (Naik, 17th Century) and other parts of Konkan and Maharashtra (Kadam, 1991), to which documents of the thirteenth century and thereafter refer, are likely to have had its roots in the socio-economic conditions and political ambitions that had developed by the third century AD.

From the second half of the 3rd century AD there is evidence of trade with Arab and Persian ports (Naravane, 2001) and from AD 250 to AD 640 there were seen Persian alliances and Persian settlements in the North Konkan (GoM, 2009). The Beni-Israelis and the Parsis from the Persian Gulf and Persia became important agents for trade and

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5 They were known by various other names – Satavahanas, Andhras, and Satakarnis (Macro Graphics Pvt. Ltd., 2005)
finance and spread into all the provincial towns of the region (Hunter, 1886). The rising importance of other trading centres like Kalyan, Thane and Chaul under the Satavahanas led to the decline of Sopara and the emergence of North Konkan as a significant trading region (Karmarkar, 2005) in its own right. However, Western India started facing a decline especially after the 3rd century AD (Sharma, 1987) that persisted even in the Gupta era when trade with Romans, Chinese and Parthians declined considerably, leading to revenue losses to the state, merchants, artisans and others. Failure to improve agricultural production in the hinterland of the erstwhile historical towns such as Sopara and Panvel led to a social crisis that affected a wide range of people, right from the peasants to the city dwellers and brought in feudalisation (Sharma, 1965/2006). Guilds of artisans and merchants prevailing from the ancient period turned into caste bound institutions. Simultaneously, the State started sharing its own responsibilities of policing with Brahmins and temple and monastery authorities and this facilitated the formation of a Hindu Brahmanical feudal society in the region.

During the sixth century Kolaba along with the Northern Konkan coast was ruled by the Mauryas of Puri and Nala Chiefs such as Kirtivarman (550-567 AD), while south Konkan was under the Kadambas of Vanavasi (Campbell, 2006). The subsequent conquest of the west coast areas by the Chalukyas (567 to 750 AD) was presumed to be an attempt to gain control over the traders from across the Arabian Sea who had established settlements there (Thapar, 2002). Contacts were established with Iran sometime between 611 AD and 640 AD. It was the beginning of a new economy with urban contraction and agrarian expansion, that marked the beginning of the early medieval period (Karmarkar, 2005). It resulted in large-scale migration of Brahmins and craftsmen from declining urban centres to the countryside where production of crafts and agriculture picked up (Sharma, 1987). This could be the origin of the compulsion reported in the study area (Thakur, 2010) for every village to ensure a place for at least one Brahmin and one Sonar (goldsmith) family. The dominant caste establishments are likely to have facilitated the survival of their members from declining urban centres in areas like Uran where the harsh environmental conditions necessitated considerable investment and resources to expand production and even sustain existing levels of
production. Therefore such areas perhaps provided relatively easy opportunities for the relocation of Brahmins and craftsmen with some resources at their disposal. Since the predominant source of revenue for rulers was either agriculture or/and trade, much of the conflict between them was to gain control over fertile tracts of land and coastal areas along with their inland networks (Thapar, 2002).

The traders’ settlements which had been temporary in nature earlier, changed into permanent settlements from 8th century onwards when trade with the eastern Roman Empire declined and trade with Europe in pepper and spices flourished (Thapar, 2002). They were given land for trading stations, allowed to follow their own customs of worship and were said to have blended in with the local society from whom they absorbed some customary laws (e.g. relating to inheritance) and some forms of worship. More Persians came to settle in the region from the early 8th century to further their stake in trade and some to escape forcible conversion to Islam by the Arabs who had invaded Persia in the 7th century AD (Thapar, 2002). Elephanta Island in Uran taluka was listed (Karmarkar, 2005) among the thirty Arab settlements of significance in the Konkan. The Rashtrakutas came to power later in the same century (Thapar, 2012) and during their reign controlled a large part of the western sea coast and therefore the trade with west Asia, particularly with the Arabs. They referred to the Arabs as Tajiks and several Arab settlers became officers and governors of coastal districts in the administration. According to an inscription from that period some Arab governors had the authority to issue land grants and the responsibility of controlling many of the harbour offices on behalf of the Rashtrakutas (Thapar, 2002). The fillip to trade and the related urban renewal (Karmarkar, 2005) facilitated by the Arabs in turn caused agriculture to flourish.

The expansion of political power in the Konkan was thus largely based on increased revenue from the introduction of agriculture in areas previously treated as wasteland, and was often achieved by land or village grants to Brahmins and to temples (Thapar, 2002). The process also involved the conversion of local societies to peasant cultivators in areas where such cultivators had not existed before, and the Brahmins brought them into the caste system by allocating the sudra caste status to the cultivators. A system of village artisans evolved to serve village needs that crystallised into a group of twelve artisans
called the *bara balutedar* (Kosambi, 1965), thereby reducing the need for a cash economy and making the village a fairly insular entity. Regional variations of this system naturally emerged as a consequence of the peculiarities of the differing local resource conditions. This is seen in the instance of Uran *taluka* where the service castes served groups of low-lying villages from their location in upland villages such as Uran, Jasai and Chirner where water, fuel wood and other material resources needed for their respective trades were available in adequate supply. From 8th century onwards the frequency of land grants increased, changing property relations and creating a class of landed intermediaries. Some rulers adopted administrative divisions where groups of ten or twelve villages were formed into larger units. By the 9th and 10th centuries AD the core areas of regional kingdoms became relatively consistent while dynasties changed (Thapar, 2002). Despite the dominance of Brahmins and a Sanskritic culture supported by the ruling elite, patterns of change relating to land grants, the diffusion of ideas through philosophical debate and popular teaching laid the foundations for the evolution of regional cultures too (Thapar, 2002). This may be seen in the rich tradition of poetry and songs depicting their relationships and way of life, that continue to the current time albeit in a more formal way with the formation of poet associations and the availability of audiovisual media.

The subsequent rulers, the Shilaharas ruled over 1400 North Konkan villages for more than 400 years (GoM, 2009). Their liberal patronage of art and culture resulted in several copper plates, stone inscriptions and architectural remains that provide considerable information about their reign. An inscription (Thapar, 2002) from the Shilahara period describes their commercial hinterland as extending up to Rajasthan. They took control over trade with west Asia (Thapar, 2002) and operated from their base in Thana their capital (GoM, 2009). Their monopoly over trade included the removal of Arabs from positions of governance in higher administration (Thapar, 2002) but they were otherwise hospitable to them. The sailors were mostly Indians, Arabs and Chinese and they had to confront risky conditions at sea (Campbell, 1882). Marco Polo described Bombay harbour as haunted by sea-robbers in the thirteenth century. The nature and extent of trade during this period presented in Table 2.2 gives some idea of the complex trade links.
and associated influences that existed at that time. Gift and barter exchange had evolved into some form of monetization with cowries, dirhams, dinars, gold-dust, gold and silver used as money (Campbell, 1882). The relationships established through trade also led to new Muslim settlements of Persians and Arabians in the region from A.D. 700 to A.D. 1200 (GoM, 2009). Similarly, Indian traders, both Brahmans and Buddhists, also migrated to settle in trading posts in the Persian Gulf and Arabia. Trade was carried out by (Campbell, 1882) Hindu, Muslim and Parsi merchants from Thane itself as well as Hindu and Muslim merchants from Gujarat and the Malabar Coast. Foreign traders from Arabia, Persia, Europe and China were also said to carry on trade from Thane during the Shilahara rule. The other important places in this period were Sanjan in Dahanu, Sopara, Chaul, Lonad and Uran (Campbell, 1882).

**TABLE 2.2**
**PATTERN OF TRADE IN THE SHILAHARA PERIOD (810 - 1260 AD)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOODS TRADED</th>
<th>ORIGIN OF GOODS</th>
<th>DESTINATION OF GOODS: COUNTRY/LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Konkan coast</td>
<td>Arabia, Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>Thane creeks</td>
<td>Inland Deccan (Devgiri)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coconuts, mangoes, lemons, betel nuts and leaves</td>
<td>Thane</td>
<td>Sindh, Persian Gulf, Arabian coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>Thane</td>
<td>Inland Deccan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Shehr, Arabia, Persian Gulf</td>
<td>Thane, Inland Deccan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>Arabia, Persia</td>
<td>Thane</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spices, pepper, ginger, turbit, cinnamon, cloves</td>
<td>Java, Ceylon (in Chinese ships), Malabar coast</td>
<td>Thane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>Khandesh, Deccan</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good quality cotton cloth</td>
<td>Konkan, Deccan</td>
<td>Ceylon, Malacca Straits, China</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muslin</td>
<td>Burhanpur, Paithan</td>
<td>Calicat, Persia, Arabia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silks</td>
<td>Thane, Persia</td>
<td>Thane</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Source 1</td>
<td>Source 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laced shoes/leather</td>
<td>Sopara</td>
<td>Arabia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sanjan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pearls</td>
<td>Creeks near Sopara</td>
<td>Thane</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Travancore</td>
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<td>Ceylon</td>
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<td>Sofala, Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emeralds</td>
<td>Exported from Sanjan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coral</td>
<td>Red Sea</td>
<td>Thane</td>
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<td>Ivory</td>
<td>Sofala</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>Persian Gulf</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tabashir</em> (drug made from bamboo)</td>
<td>Thane</td>
<td>All marts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown incense made from forest resins</td>
<td>Thane forests</td>
<td>Arabia, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White incense</td>
<td>Arabian coast</td>
<td>Thane</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandalwood and ambergris</td>
<td>Socotra</td>
<td>Thane</td>
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<td></td>
<td>African coast</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aloes, camphor, sandal, brazil wood, eaglewood, spikenard</td>
<td>Siam</td>
<td>Thane</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Java</td>
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<td>Sumatra</td>
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<td>Borneo</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Brought direct or through Ceylon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Porcelain</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Thane</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swords</td>
<td>West (through Persia)</td>
<td>Deccan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metals: Iron</td>
<td>Sofala</td>
<td>Thane</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persia, China</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Malacca</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead and tin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timber, teak, bamboo</td>
<td>Konkan</td>
<td>Persian Gulf</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>Persian Gulf</td>
<td>Thane</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Arabia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaves: women, eunuchs, boys</td>
<td>Persian Gulf</td>
<td>Thane</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Sofala in Africa</td>
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Source: (Bombay Government, 1883)

Uran, then a village on Karanja Island, seems to have gained importance as the head of an administrative division during Shilahara rule. There is mention of an Uran (Oorun, Oorane) division on stone inscriptions found at Ranwad and Chanje villages dated 1259 and 1260 AD respectively (Patil, 2007). The administration during this reign appears (Nairne, 1896) to have been carried on by the king assisted by a great councillor or
minister, a great minister for war and peace, two treasury lords, and sometimes a chief secretary. The subordinate structure consisted of heads of districts (rashtras), heads of sub-divisions (vishayas), heads of towns and heads of villages. Two king’s high roads were known to exist, one following nearly the same line as the present road from Bombay to Thana and the second near Uran. Under the Shilaharas many villages and gardens were established on Karanja Island and the area appears to have experienced a period of prosperity.

A distinctive feature of Uran that is shared with the neighbouring Alibag and Pen talukas in Kolaba District, is the large area of salt marsh and mangrove swamps reclaimed for the growth of rice (Bombay State, 1908) and the production of salt. Thus each of these divisions constituted a resource for the other divisions from where additional cultivators and labourers could be obtained whose skill and knowledge of such lands could be tapped for rapid expansion of cultivation. One of the earliest references (Thakur, 2007) to reclamation and cultivation of such kharapat or ‘saline land’ located along the banks of tidal creeks in the Konkan was found in a rock edict dated 1367 A.D. near the village Nagav, three kilometers south of the town of Alibag. The edict referred to a land grant made in favour of the local Agarias who built embankments or shilotris, cultivated salt paddy fields and worked in salt pans. The term ‘shilotri lands’, used with reference to the reclaimed lands, has been traced to the Kanarese term shilotar (Campbell, 1882).

In the debate over the origins of the Shilaharas who had ruled till the late 12th century, this linguistic influence perhaps lends credence to the view that the Shilaharas were of southern rather than northern (or of Afghan) origin. From the description of the subsequent arrival from Paithan of a king called Bimba in Thane in the late thirteenth century, who settled and made Mahim⁶ (Mahikavati) his capital, one may infer that the reign of Bimba also constituted a period of expansion of paddy cultivation and salt production in the region that required an influx of migrants who could undertake the work. The chronicle provides further evidence of reclaimed land, its cultivation, maintenance and a system of revenue collection associated with it.

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⁶ The story is narrated in a chronicle titled Mahikavatichi bakhar which locates Karanja Island in a division called Sashti meaning “sixty-six (sahasashta) villages” which the British subsequently called Salsette (Thakur, 2007).
The majority of the salt-makers and cultivators in Uran taluka were Agris, while the Kolis living on the coast were sailors and fishermen (SSIC, 1908). The Kolis are presently the only non-cultivating community with a numerical dominance in this region. They settled along the coast in settlements called koliwadas. The Karadis who are also found in the region were fisher-folk like the Kolis and also cultivators of salt paddy fields like the Agris (Thakur, 2007). Some coastal villages were exclusively inhabited by Karadis (the Kolis refer to such settlements also as koliwadas) whereas in some villages like Moti Jui there were other castes as well. Although the caste status of the Karadis has been disputed (Thakur, 2007), they themselves claim to be a separate caste originating from Karad Province rather than a sub-caste of either the Agris or Kolis (Shinde, 2007). This community is found only in Raigad District. The chief palm-tapping caste was the Bhandari. The caste society of this region was and still is peculiar to the Northern Konkan region, particularly in the Pen, Alibag, Uran and Panvel talukas, where Agris are the highest in number and proportion. Occupational differentiation appears to be based on the ecology of the region and the inhabitants’ evolving material conditions rather than Brahmanical dominance.

2.2 Medieval History of the North Konkan

Thus the ancient history of the North Konkan saw the evolution of well-defined revenue systems and social structures to facilitate the extraction of surplus for the establishment of regional kingdoms. The initial symbiotic relationship between trade, religion and agriculture changed into a more feudal structure with the decline of trade in the 3rd century. The mutually conducive relationship between trade and production in the hinterland revived considerably from 8th to 15th century. The period from 1500 to 1800 AD saw a reorganisation of the economy of the region with the rise of strong maritime and continental power groups. When the Portuguese arrived in the 15th century the western coast was under the control of four main powers with the North Konkan region divided between two of them (Naravane, 2001). Bombay and the coast north of it were under the rule of the Gujarat Sultans while the area south of Bombay extending almost to
Dabhol was under the Nizamshahis. The North Konkan ports were dominated by Surat and served only as supply points for the Gujarat ports (Campbell, 2006). The region had been considerably neglected by its rulers in the previous two centuries, thereby giving space to local chiefs to dominate the countryside. The state of conflict between the petty chiefs and kings and the inadequately equipped navies of these kingdoms made Portuguese occupation of ports such as Chaul (1507) and Dabhol (1508) fairly easy. Bassein and its dependencies (Salsette, Bombay, Parel, Wadala, Sion, Worli, Mazgaon, Thana, Bandra, Mahim, and Karanja) comprised one of the most attractive areas for occupation by the invaders. The revenue sources of Bassein in the 16th century included horse trade, fishing, salt, timber, a stone quarry (basalt, granite), and shipyards (Ramerini, 1998). Revenues were also extracted from the surrounding agricultural area where rice, betel, cotton, and sugar-cane were cultivated. In 1532, when the Portuguese attacked and destroyed Bassein fort, the towns of Thana, Bandora, Mahim and Bombaim were offered in place of Bassein and put under tribute to Portugal. However, the Sultan of Gujarat could not retain his hold on the area when the threat of Muslim invasion compelled him to cede Bassein two years later along with all its dependencies to Portugal in perpetuity (Ramerini, 1998) in exchange for their protection. The Portuguese were simultaneously able to negotiate the purchase of the Nizamshah’s fort of Asheri for an estimated 10,000 rupees (Naravane, 2001).

The Portuguese soon controlled a stretch of about 100 km from Bassein (Vasai) to Daman called the Northern or Bassein Province which lasted for a period of almost 200 years (Ramerini, 1998). Their capital was established at Bassein and apart from a manor on the main island, Bombay was relatively uninhabited (Naravane, 2001). New crops such as tobacco, pineapple, and cashew were introduced that became important sources of revenue (Campbell, 1882) in the province. Although none of these crops appear to have constituted significant sources of revenue in Uran taluka, cashew trees were seen in the two villages of Panje and Sheva during field work. Enterprising villagers had planted some of the cashew nuts casually gifted to them by traders for their services as sailors (Patil, 2012). This indicates the important role that informal exchange can also play in the introduction of new varieties with the potential for income generation in regions with
similar climatic conditions. This perhaps also explains how two varieties of grafted mangoes, *alphonso* and *pairi*, whose origin was traced (Campbell, 1882) to Goa were introduced in the study area during Portuguese rule. Of the numerous such interactions that must take place every day, some develop tremendous significance due to a combination of indirect and direct factors such as the development of new communication lines and market value. This was seen later in the case of the grafted mango during colonial rule.

The Portuguese built a number of forts for the defence of this province and to ensure that their control over the spice trade was retained. One of these was built on Dronagiri hill (Patil, 2007) of Karanja Island that formed a part of Bassein Province under the Portuguese from 1530 to 1740 (SSIC, 1908). Karanja (Caranja) served as an important port and one of the main Custom Houses that were known locally as *mandovis* (Danvers, 1892). Portuguese control over trade was accompanied by their efforts to control the local population through the imposition of their religion with forced conversions to Christianity. There was extensive destruction of Hindu and Muslim places of worship along with construction of churches (Naravane, 2001). The ruins of Portuguese hermitages and churches are still found at several places on Karanja Island. The remains of one such church at Sheva Village are also reported in the gazetteers (Hunter, 1886) although there is no trace of any Christian population in this village today. Currently, the Christian community of Uran taluka is mostly concentrated in Chanje Village which is located next to Karanja port. Such concentration of Christian populations near important Portuguese bases or trading centres is also found in other coastal areas that were occupied by the Portuguese and indicative of the area over which they were able to exercise direct control. Unlike Goa, where the Portuguese influence caused local converts to sever their connections with the land by taking up jobs in Portuguese households or the government (SSIC, 1908) in large numbers, in Uran the Christians took great pride in earning their living from cultivation, fishing, and toddy-drawing. Very few took up employment as clerks and shopkeepers in Bombay, perhaps due to the presence of a strong regional culture rooted in their relationship with the environment.
The Portuguese dominated the region in the 16th century when they established partnerships with indigenous merchants (Das Gupta, 2001). These partnerships continued in the 17th century even after the arrival of the Dutch and the British, but the repeated use of violence disturbed the equilibrium of relationships between traders (Pearson, 2003). The Portuguese and the Dutch frequently burned and destroyed towns and villages thereby creating conditions of severe oppression and hardship for cultivators. Judging by official correspondence relating to the Ceul region of Kolaba (Kadam, 1991), several tracts in the Konkan must have experienced decline in agricultural productivity as cultivators abandoned their fields to avoid capture if not death during the attacks. The threat of violent attacks was combined with the unjust burden of increased extraction by government officials. The latter insisted on cash payments and forced labour to meet the local ruler’s need to strengthen his defences. This led to depopulation of many areas in the Konkan, following which special incentives such as exemption from forced labour were offered to bring people back. Despite the insecure conditions, it appears that the Portuguese attempted to sustain and even expand rice cultivation in their territories with the construction of embankments to keep back the sea. The embankments were funded partly by the Government and partly by the European settlers to whom the Government granted large estates (SSIC, 1908). Village grants were also made to headmen who had been converted to Christianity. The land grants and inam villages in the name of Mr. Manuel D’souza in Uran taluka seen in British records (Bombay Government, 1868) are likely to have been an example of such interventions by the Portuguese. The inam villages include Panje that is part of the study region of the present study. However, the levels of oppression through revenue extraction and religious repression must have been severe as a significant large-scale riot was reported (Hunter, 1886) to have taken place on Karanja Island in 1613.

The growing strength of Dutch forces between 1595 and 1663 AD resulted in losses to Portuguese trade and territory. A strategic alliance was therefore formed with England - also a competitor until then - in 1662 with the marriage of Princess Catherine of Braganza to King Charles II. A marriage treaty was signed in which the British agreed to mediate with and/or provide defence against the Dutch, while the Portuguese offered a
dowry that comprised the city of Tangier, two million ‘Portuguese crusados’, and the port and island of Bombay (Danvers, 1894). Despite having a natural harbour, the seven Bombay islands did not have enough space for port related activities such as dockyards and warehouses. The islands were separated at high tide and connected by mud flats at low tide. With their prior knowledge of the region, the Portuguese retained control over nearby areas that were necessary for survival on the Bombay islands. Salsette was the most fertile and productive area of north Konkan and was the supply base of Bombay as well as Goa. Control over Karanja and Vasai were critical for the defence of Bombay, with Vasai also being an important source of timber for the Bombay dockyards. When the British officially took over the Bombay islands from the Portuguese in 1664 there were estimated to be around ten thousand people, comprising mainly the fisher folk (kolis) with a few salt pan workers (agris), toddy tappers (bhandaris), some Pathare Prabhus, Konkani Muslims and the Portuguese fazendors and Jesuit priests (Dossal, 2010). Rice cultivation was undertaken on the islands on both well-drained lands where better quality rice could be grown and reclaimed lands where coarse rice was grown. However, the area under cultivation on the islands was inadequate to support the entire population. Shipments by sea were not always reliable considering the rampant piracy, while on the other, there was the constant threat of internal conflict or rebellion and attack by one or more of their neighbours.

The islands were relatively isolated and peripheral at that time with four different forces – the Portuguese, Marathas, Angrias and Sidis - wrestling for territory in the Konkan region (Figure 2.2)\(^7\). Each ruler attempted to expand the area over which they could exercise total political, administrative and military control. The circle of control (Naravane, 2001) over land and sea was determined by a combination of factors such as the physical terrain, the cooperation provided by the locals settled in the area, the strength and extent of fortification, troops at their command, and the ruler’s individual capability. The Sidis who established a base in Janjira, for example, are known to have originated from African pirates shipwrecked on the west coast. Active piracy existed along the entire

\(^7\) The Atlas maps (Plates 27 and 28) showing territorial control in India over the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries (Meyer, Burn, Cotton, & Risley, 1909) appear to indicate that the success of the British in spreading their territorial control over the hinterland has gone hand in hand with the gradual takeover of coastal areas starting from Bengal, moving down the East coast and then up the West.
western coast from Gujarat to Kerala. The nearby Salsette island and neighbouring areas were under Maratha, Mughal and Portuguese control, making the British dependent on the latter or shipments by sea for sustenance and basic necessities. The insecurity of their location in terms of attack from the sea or land led to the conversion of the existing Portuguese manor on Bombay Island into a castle that was later enlarged, strengthened and fortified and developed into a walled settlement called the ‘Fort’. This became the central business district from where eventually control over the hinterland was exercised (Dossal, 2010).

Development of the Bombay islands, however, only began after the islands were leased out to the British East India Company in 1668 for £10 per annum. Unlike other colonial cities such as Delhi which had a pre-colonial history as an urban centre, the Mumbai islands had no established business or trading class with whom they had to negotiate (Farooqui, 1996). An official proclamation was issued stating that all acquisition of land by individuals prior to 1661 ‘proceeded from imperfect right’ (Farooqui, 1996). The natives were moved out of their villages into the outskirts while the British occupied the best areas on the islands like the Esplanade and Girgaum district (Sonapur to Malabar Hill) which had the only fresh water bearing strata in the islands (Dossal, 1988). A few years later, in 1674, the development of land as private property began with official recognition of all the land then occupied, subject to the condition that occupants were liable to military service (Farooqui, 1996). At that time the East India Company had to create special incentives including the settlement of land revenue, establishment of law courts, and ensuring freedom of trade and worship for the in-migration of skilled artisans for construction, ship-building and other activities. There was a dramatic increase in population from ten to fifty thousand in the 1670s. Of the initial settlers, the traders from Gujarat, the Armenians and Parsis played a critical role as financiers and were considered extremely important in carrying forward the efforts of the British East India Company. This created the foundation for development of a class of indigenous entrepreneurs and businessmen in the city.
Simultaneously, the region experienced the consolidation of Mughal powers and the rise of the Marathas under the leadership of Shivaji. The earliest evidence (Choksey, 1960) of a land settlement in the Konkan was found during this period and was attributed to the efforts of Malik Ambar, the Abyssinian chief minister of the Nizamshah from 1616 to 1626. Land was divided into four classes and the rent levied in kind. The system was introduced by Shahaji, a noble in the Nizamshah’s court, on his lands and was later used as a foundation for revenue arrangements by his son Shivaji in Maratha territories. The region experienced some peace till the mid-17th century as Portuguese-Maratha relations
were fairly harmonious. Shivaji regularly used to procure ships and hand bombs from the Portuguese at Agashi (D'silva, 1993). However, with the Portuguese turning hostile to Hinduism and adhering to forced conversion, especially in many areas of north Konkan, the relationship got strained and invasions began. Conquering the countryside and disconnecting its link with the city in the initial stage of the attack was the major part of the Maratha strategy. In conquest, therefore, Marathas took the countryside first, the smaller towns in the hinterland second and the city, by then cut off from the hinterland and weakened, much later (Karmarkar, 2005).

After the death of Shivaji in 1680 followed by the death of his son, Sambhaji in 1689, the Konkan coast from Bombay to Vijaydurg was intensely contested by the Angres of Kolaba, the Portuguese and the British. The naval strength and piracy of the Angres presented a formidable challenge to the European traders, especially the British. Similarly, the Angres posed a major problem to the Portuguese for whom a smooth sea route was necessary to maintain the connectivity between Vasai, capital of their ‘Province of the North’ and Goa that had strategic significance for them. Hence, sustained efforts were made by the Europeans to bring down the Angres. Alliances of convenience were established between the European groups and some native merchants and financiers, which gave way to an unequal relationship in which the dominant power was held by the Europeans. They began monopolising trade. On the maritime front, the Portuguese still held important strategic locations, such as, Diu, Vasai and Chaul while the British established their factories in Surat and Rajapur in south Konkan.

The Mughals who subsequently controlled most of Khandesh and the forts of northern Maharashtra captured North Konkan when Shivaji’s fleet was destroyed (Gordon, 1993). The growing competition for political power among the warring factions of the Marathas and the Mughals led to a fairly complex situation in the early 18th century. The decline of the Mughals and the rise of the Peshwas in the first half of the 18th century altered the socio-economic dynamics in the region. The English saw the decline as a justification of their Empire, while the Dutch related it with the decline of their Company. Along with the disintegration of the Mughals, the fragmentation of the Marathas began and at the same time, the Safavid and the Ottoman Empires collapsed. Due to the latter, the 17th
century domination of Surat over the entire region reduced (Das Gupta, 2001). The
decline was deepened by the silting of the river Tapi, plundering by the Marathas in the
late 17th century, pirate activities in the city, and finally the rise of Bombay.

These processes altered the status of the hinterland that fed the port cities of Surat, Diu,
Vasai, Dabholl and Vengurla, which underwent considerable change in their function and
linkage (Karmarkar, 2005). To monopolise their major factory locations and the
associated local production areas the British entered into the politics of the land and
started supporting and/or opposing the dominant local Maratha families that were feuding
with each other. The weakened Mughal cities became the prime targets of the Marathas
for resolving their financial deficiency that had resulted out of the huge expenses of their
wars. Similarly, the elite merchants in the port towns became insecure and were targeted
by the Maratha invaders. There was raiding or looting of prosperous cities and regions.
Simultaneously there was a spate of agrarian-based revolts led by local wealthy landlords
or zamindars (Sarkar, 1971) capitalizing on opportunities to develop independent control.
In this context, the peripheral areas came under the control of regionally based powers
and their economy started getting controlled by local bankers and traders. New groups of
independent rulers holding limited land emerged in the region, for example, the Angres
of Kolaba and the Savants of Sawantwadi. The period of the Angres, who controlled the
naval power of the Marathas, lasted for nearly 150 years from 1690 to 1840. The family
was a part of Shivaji’s fleet and Kanjohi Angre was the ‘Sarkhel’ or the admiral of the
Maratha fleet in 1698, which controlled the Konkan coast from Bombay to Malabar
(Meyer, Burn, Cotton, & Risley, 1909). They occupied Karanja Island in 1737.

Till the 18th century the island, eight miles long from north to south and four miles wide
from east to west, was cut off from the mainland by the Bendkhal creek which at high
tide was filled through its whole length (Hunter, 1886). The creek to the east was earlier
broken up into several salt-pans. The erstwhile island consisted of two rocky hills in
between which there were grass and rice lands, wooded with mango trees and palms.
Other than Uran, the villages that were part of Karanja Island included the following
nineteen: Sheve, Jaskhar, Sonari, Savarkhar, Karal, Panje, Dongri, Pagote, Funde,
Navghar, Bori, Kegaon, Mhatavli, Kala Dhonda, Bokadvira, Bhendkhal, Ranwad,
Nagaon, and Chanje. Although in the initial phase of Maratha rule (SSIC, 1908) no changes were made in the revenue system, fresh surveys were later undertaken and new cesses levied. Revenue farming gradually became the norm in their territories. In the rice-growing tracts of the Konkan the four classes of rice lands created by Malik Ambar based on the yield, was further divided into twelve classes (Campbell, 1882). Most of the *shilotris* or embankments in Uran are said to have been built between 1755 and 1780 under the Angrias by wealthy men of high status or rank, who undertook to make the embankments and maintain them on special terms. Peasants who provided labour for land reclamation could rarely claim or get the benefits of ownership.

Thus, a class of landed gentry constituted by *khots*, *landlords*, *savkars* and *pandharpeshe* emerged due to the requirement of investment for making lands cultivable in this region (Thakur, 2007). The town of Uran became a centre with several wealthy Muslim and Marwari traders and businessmen. Many of them had grown rich through the trade of salt, liquor and paddy and owned vast tracts of land in villages of Uran taluka. The dominant class of rent-receivers within the Agri peasantry was a minority category of better-off landholders who received rent from tenants. One of the study villages of the present researcher, Khopta, located in Uran taluka had one such Agri *savkar* who had accumulated 300 acres of land. Unlike their counterparts in the southern Konkan districts, the land-owning peasants who were recognized as permanent cultivators termed *mirasis* (Thakur, 2007), could not be easily ousted by the government or by the *savkar* even when they failed to pay their debts. The relatively new cultivators or *uparis* however had cultivation rights subject to a contract between them and the government. Extreme poverty characterised the peasantry and oral agreements regarding the selling of land between cultivators were found to be very common (Bombay Government, 1892) when particular individuals required money for a marriage ceremony or emergencies with the understanding that the land would be returned on repayment of the price. For the lands that were leased out most rents were paid in kind and varied little from year to year.

Territorial expansion and attempts to consolidate Maratha power and monarchy in the 1720s were undertaken with the support of older Maratha families and the newly independent ones. The factionalisation of the Maratha kingdom in this post-Shivaji phase
introduced a politics of land in which the relationship between the grant holding families and the king received prime importance. The Marathas also started settling in towns, especially the towns that had not been very important under the Mughals. This perhaps accounts for the few Maratha families found in Uran town with a tradition of administrative service. The state administration was based mainly on agricultural taxes collected from *paragana* (an administrative subdivision) towns that amounted to considerably more than that generated in the cities (Gordon, 1993). The ruling elements of the Peshwa polity that originated from the class of *zamindars*, i.e. the Brahmins of Konkan, influenced the administrative structure comprised of an internal taxation system within the region, supplemented by a zone of tribute-extraction outside it (Habib, 1998). Simultaneously, there was a strong tendency to institute hereditary fiefs (*saranjams*) and offices. Thus the question of competition for political power was directly connected to the grant holding Maratha families. These families received the rights to collect revenue, maintain a certain amount of military troops and at times hold a local fort from the rulers as a token of their loyalties.

This system of granting rights called ‘*deshmukhi*’ or village headmanship and ‘*sardeshmukhi*’ which gives more rights over the *deshmukhs* and an additional privilege to retain 1/10th of the total revenue collected by them and right to *chauth* (1/4th of the government revenue) existed in the independent kingdoms of Ahmednagar and Bijapur and were practised by the Mughals and the Marathas (Gordon, 1993). Details of these practices in the region can be seen in the private correspondence of such officials that includes instructions for collection of revenues from the cultivators, salt pan workers, *kolis* and service castes. The Naik Anjur Daftar (17th Century) preserved in the Maharashtra State archives makes specific mention of collections and payments to be made in Uran, Belapur and several other places. Decrees granting rights to parcels of land and villages were issued to people who had been useful to the Peshwa government in battle or governance. Families of men who had died in battle were also accorded such privileges or provided exemptions related to revenue payments or in the contribution of forced labour under the *vethbegari* system.
Records of the Peshwa government also show how such privileges can be misused by officials in positions of power. For example, in 1759 the Peshwa’s office intervened when two officials of the Kalyan Bhiwandi prant attempted to extract forced labour compulsorily in Uran and Kharepat talukas for up to fifteen days a year from all men without any exception (Kadam, 1991). The approved vethbegari practice consisted of a choice to be made by peasants between providing fifteen days of forced labour or paying the government a rupee and a half as compensation for not doing so. It is not clear how providing such a choice constituted an improvement in the condition of the peasants as most of them existed in conditions of abject poverty and were unable to pay even their rents in cash. It is possible that payments to be made in lieu of actual participation added to mounting arrears in Maratha revenues and the peasants were able to benefit from not having to disrupt their cultivation due to compulsory travel out of their villages to perform forced labour duties. The latter was apparently the reason for frequent complaint and pleas for exemption by peasants particularly in coastal villages located near forts. This is apparent from records pertaining to such negotiations in the 17th and 18th centuries in the Ceul region. The villages located near Karanja fort must have faced similar exploitation during Maratha occupation.

The system of forced labour in the 16th century had been related to religious and non-religious grants where workers were needed for gardens, households (collection of fuel wood, water, etc.), community establishments such as markets and temples, and some civil works such as tree plantations. It was used in the 17th and 18th centuries to meet the escalating requirement of recruits for the cavalry, navy, artillery and forts. The regular Maratha raids in the early 18th century resulted in large-scale insecurity along the major trade routes. At the same time, the political support and military security that had been provided to the Indian merchants was also lost leading to total insecurity along the caravan trade routes going to the heartland of India. Regions were conquered, lost and reconquered in this period, putting in severe constraints on the process of production in the hinterland and growth of their associated urban centres. The Maratha families also did not show any concerted intent or effort towards the development of the Konkan. Thus, after Portuguese power ended in 1739 and Thane went into the hands of Marathas, trade
and manufacturing activities got reduced with Thane losing its earlier significant position. Chaul and Dabhol had already declined in the previous century. The port towns of Bassein (Vasai) and Rajapur declined in early 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Thane, Kalyan and Panvel were also losing their importance. Similarly, Daman, Dahanu, Tarapur, Kelve-Mahim became economically insignificant (Campbell, 1882).

All these provided a space for the ascendance of the British. They benefited from the instability created by competing claims of Maratha factions and the Mughals on the loyalty of the Maratha families. While the British had encouraged weavers and small traders in particular to settle in the port city of Bombay with monetary loans and settlements, the construction of the fort wall (1670-1720), improved security measures and the availability of grain that came from the Konkan and Bengal drew settlers from war-torn and drought-affected areas in Gujarat, the Konkan and the mainland (Farooqui, 1996). Difficulty lay in finding gainful employment for so many and also adequate food supplies. To defend the Bombay coast, counter increased piracy in the Konkan (Khobrekar, 2002) and facilitate the growth of trade as well as settlements the East India Company built its own navy, known as the ‘Bombay Marine’, in the 1730s. The British along with the Portuguese helped the Siddi of Janjira against the Marathas. They were benefitted in this conflict by getting control over the island fort of Underi, located very close to Bombay harbour. Although the acquisition of Bankot and its dependent villages in 1756 gave them the first territorial possessions on the Konkan coast (Nairne, 1894), they were aiming at the islands of Bombay to tap the natural harbour and its commercial contacts with the vast hinterland (David, 1973). It was becoming clear to them that Bombay and its immediate surrounding was the only region that showed some possibilities of growth in the latter half of 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Bagchi (1982), Habib (1998) and Marshall (1998) point out that this period was essentially the preparatory stage for the establishment and growth of British colonialism.
2.3 Impact of Colonial Rule in North Konkan

The opening of new sea-routes during the medieval period thus led to an increase in the competition for control over territories to facilitate processes of accumulation and related political expansion of empires. There was a shift from conflict between regionally based kingdoms to that of continental kingdoms with distantly located centres of control. The ensuing mêlée led to heightened processes of exploitation and devastation of the countryside. The impoverishment and disruption of the productive base of the region created conditions that made its colonization perhaps easier. Thus the subsequent period from 1757 to 1857 was a different stage in Indian history as it experienced a newer mode of production and the establishment of a colonial power (Karmarkar, 2005). There were economic reasons for seeking some degree of territorial expansion that became more urgent in the mid-18th century. The loss of the American colonies following the 1775-1783 war led to not only the loss of important imports but also the market for their goods. Additionally, the enormous costs of war and expansion in India and other colonies further compelled Britian to look for options to increase their revenue (Fisher, 1993).

Until 1788 Bombay was supported by cash inflows from other provinces as Bombay had neither a trade network nor an established relationship with the hinterland (Farooqui, 1996). Some success in territorial expansion in North Konkan began with the takeover of Thane in 1774 followed by Salsette in 1775, Vasai in 1779, Arnala in 1781 and finally the annexation of Belapur, Kalyan and Karanja in 1781 (Campbell, 1882). However, renegotiations with the Marathas led to the treaty of Salbai in 1782 by which all these conquered territories except Salsette, Elephanta, Karanja and Hog Island were returned to the Marathas. Efforts to intensify cultivation on Salsette Island in the initial phase were only partially successful as the input costs were far higher than the returns given the nature of soil. The island had better success as a source of income from land speculation. In Salsette Island at that time nomadic tribes had got settled. Their primary occupation was fishing with rice cultivation done only for subsistence (Hunter, 1886). Although Bengal and South Kanara served as hinterland for better quality rice, the more immediate areas for coarser rice, and districts of Gujarat for wheat, these were inadequate in years of severe drought and special measures had to be taken that led to dependence of the British
on the local merchants. The English East India Company supported indigenous merchants against regional states that had emerged when the Mughals declined, thereby facilitating their transition to colonial rule (Bose & Jalal, 1998). Simultaneously, the involvement of the Company in India’s internal trade grew to establish a relationship of extraction with the hinterland.

Between the years 1803 and 1827 the framework of the Bombay Presidency took shape. At its greatest extent, the Bombay Presidency comprised (Dupont, 2000) the present-day state of Gujarat, the western two-thirds of Maharashtra state, including the regions of Konkan, Desh, and Khandesh, and northwestern Karnataka state of India; it also included Pakistan's Sindh province (1843-1935) and the British territory of Aden in Yemen (1839-1939). It consisted of districts which were directly under British rule and did not include the native or princely states, but was responsible for managing the defence of many of them. The Konkan formed one of the five territorial Divisions of the Bombay Presidency, the others being the Deccan, the Karnatak, Gujarat, and Sind. In 1817 Thana was made the headquarters of North Konkan, probably due to its location being strategic for access to the Deccan. In 1833 the region was divided into the two collectorates of Thana and Ratnagiri. Kolaba was added at the end of the Angres hold in 1840, made a sub-collectorate of Thana in 1863, and an independent Collectorate in 1869 (Choksey, 1960). The Konkan Division finally included the town and island of Bombay, the four districts of Thana, Kolaba, Kanara, Ratnagiri and the three Native States of Jawhar, Janjira, and Sawantwadi.

The diverse ethno-lingual regions of the province that had evolved over several centuries were treated as a single entity (Ahmad, 1999). The rational logic of revenue surveys (Scott, 1998) and cartographic representations (Barrow, 2003) were used to overshadow and homogenise the existing social, cultural, physical, and political diversities with the British imagination of a unified territory. At the same time, detailed information was collected about the people, lands and their histories that was used to prepare a comprehensive plan of revenue assessment in 1812 (Phillimore, 1950) and create a base to build their empire. During the initial phase of British rule the Portuguese and Maratha petty taxes were abolished and a new system was introduced (SSIC, 1908). The
Government demand was fixed at one-third\(^8\) of the average produce of all lands except *shilotri* lands, which were charged one-fifth. By the early nineteenth century the influence of the French Physiocrats, Adam Smith and David Ricardo led to the promotion of economic individualism and the creation of a self-regulating, competitive market in British India (Dossal, 1999). These ideas were formalised in two important policy documents\(^9\) that saw agriculture as the source of all wealth, made possible by the creation of a class of rural capitalists.

The promotion of private property and the evolution of the revenue system were based on the dualistic categorisation (Whitehead, 2010) of lands into productive and unproductive waste (*varkas*) arising from a conceptual disjuncture created between field and forest, caste and tribe. The ensuing destruction of community structures and relations can be seen in the course of British revenue history in the region. Revenue interventions are divided (Choksey, 1945) into three periods: the substitution of a system of village accounts for one of revenue farmers from 1817-35 when rates were revised; a period of further reduction in rates from 1835-52; and the revenue survey period thereafter. Land-revenue assessments were undertaken in the Bombay province immediately after the addition of the Peshwa’s Deccan and Karnatak territories in 1818 and again in 1825 and 1835. A key British policy was to substitute private property for the complex and overlapping patterns of landholding in the hinterland through their settlement surveys, thereby reducing many of the local elite to middlemen who served merely as tax collection agents. Several indigenous forms of land tenure\(^10\) in North Konkan were eliminated with the introduction of the British survey (Choksey, 1960) and the greater part of the Bombay Presidency was held on the *ryotwari* system, in which landowners could sell or buy land (Thakur, 2007).

\(^8\) In Maratha times it was 1/4\(^{th}\) and in Vedic times 1/6\(^{th}\) (Thapar, 2010)
\(^10\) These included the *dhep* or lump, the *kas* or estate, the *nangarbandi* or plough system, the *suti* or special remission settlement, and the *pandharpesha* or high-class villager’s settlement (Choksey, 1960). The *suti* tenure was common and the most important in the North Konkan and was similar to the *mirasi*, a term used to indicate any kind of hereditary right (Baden-Powell, 1892).
In the *ryotwari* system land was occupied by cultivators who paid their revenues directly to the government (Hunter, 1908). This was generally held to be more equitable than the *zamindari* system used in other provinces such as Bengal. However, Uran, Alibag and Pen talukas had an extremely skewed distribution of land ownership as they had mostly *shilotri* (embankment) lands\(^\text{11}\). Given the time and labour required to reclaim the salt marsh and make it fit for paddy cultivation the reclaimers were usually wealthy investors. They had a superior status and were permitted to let out the lands and levy a charge to meet the costs of maintaining the embankment (Baden-Powell, 1892). Other than *inam* lands that were held either rent-free or on the payment of a quit-rent, the North Konkan region had two other types of local land tenures – the *izafat* or special service and *khoti* or leasehold tenures. The *izafatdar* was a grantee or assignee who was permitted to take the revenue as a personal benefit on varying terms of payment as a fixed sum or receipt of an allowance as a percentage of revenue from the land. The *khots* were peculiar to the Konkan, though more commonly in south Konkan, where the rulers had considerable problems in collecting revenue due to the difficult terrain. Under the Peshwas their role had been to encourage cultivation, collect rent and pay it to the government (Choksey, 1960). In Uran taluka, as seen earlier, these *khots* were mainly Muslims or Agris who had accumulated land using their profits from trade.

Beside its rice crop, which was of considerable value, the two special exports of Karanja Island were salt, mahua and date liquor (Hunter, 1886). Export of dried fish, especially to Karjat taluka was another important source of income. The supply of fresh fish for the market of Bombay and of dried fish for the Deccan mainly supported the Koli and Karadi population (SSIC, 1908). The extraction of oil from sesamum, coconut, and groundnut, and the preparation of coconut fibre, also supported many families. There were 19 *mahua* distilleries on the island, all owned by Parsis, that relied on flowers brought through Bombay from the Panch Mahals. The chief imports through Karanja, Mora and Sheve were firewood, *mowra* (*mahua*) flowers and dates, which were used in the manufacture of country liquor. Uran also had six cotton looms, three hand ginning machines and some oil-presses.

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\(^{11}\) These are also called khars or kharlands which are plots reclaimed from the sea.
In the period 1818-1835 there were hardly any changes in production and the status of the farmers, with the threat of gang robberies, poverty and many stretches of uncultivated arable land being common (Choksey, 1960). However, from 1835-54 rentals were reduced and there was considerable expansion in agriculture. The broad soil categories listed by the British (Hunter, 1908) in the Konkan were rice, garden or varkas (the light and poor soil of the uplands). Given the conditions in the area and the lack of irrigation facilities, the region had very few double-cropped lands. The predominant crop in the region was rice grown on the lowlands along the coast and in terraced rice lands further inland, with millets – mostly *ragi, nachni, or nagli* - grown on higher ground. Coconut, mango, areca-nut and betel leaf were grown on the garden lands. Thus during the second phase, the local communities were able to re-establish the harmonious relationships between uplands and lowlands and stabilise the rhythm of their livelihoods that were based on the ebb and flow of tides and seasons. In Panvel taluka (including Uran *mahal*) the best kinds of rice were grown in 50 per cent, and the medium and inferior in 25 per cent each of the total sweet rice area (Bombay Government, 1892). The three chief varieties of rice were the early (*halwar*), the medium (*nimgarva*), and the late rice (*garva*). The last was considered the most valuable crop but required the best soil and good late rains. Sweet rice land was always ploughed and the seedlings grown in a plot or seed-bed that had undergone “rab” treatment which consisted of burning cow-dung, leaves, branches and grass, that had been spread over the plot and dried during the summer. This is a practice that is seen in the region even today, necessitating a close relationship between rice lands, meadow and forest. Salt rice lands (*kharapat*) were neither “rabed” nor ploughed, but the rice grown on saline land did not fetch as high a price or yield as much as the sweet rice (Bombay Government, 1925).

The salt rice lands (*kharapat*) were rarely surveyed as they were more susceptible to the vagaries of rainfall. The rice sown in salt lands was also divided into two varieties, the late white (*choka*) and the early red (*rhata*). These varieties are still seen in a few areas of Uran taluka, but are on the verge of disappearing as they are rapidly replaced by improved and hybrid varieties in current times. The local sweet rice varieties have entirely disappeared. The late white or *choka* rice could only be grown in soils which
received fresh water in sufficient quantity to mitigate the effects of the salt of kharapat lands. Pulse grains (val, urid, mug and gram) were generally grown as second crops after rice in lands with sufficient natural moisture. The crops - nachni, vari, til, urid, tur, kurasi and harik - grown in the warkas lands were only grown for home consumption. The salt rice villages of Uran petha listed in the first survey settlement of 1891 were Gharapuri (Elephanta island), Bokadvira, Sonari, Kaljighubad, Patachamoho, Borichakotha, Muthekhar, Waltikhar, and Shemtikhar (Bombay Government, 1892), with several showing soil deteriorations due to inundations of the sea or due to their proximity to salt works.

The second revised revenue settlement was done almost thirty years later in 1924, but very little change was found in the crops grown or in the methods of cultivation in the thirty years between the two revenue settlements. The first revenue settlement survey in 1891 found ten different rates of assessment for sweet and salt rice lands that did not seem to have a logical basis. Villages that were next to each other with very similar conditions had very different rates (Bombay Government, 1892). The land revenue guidelines proposed different rates to be fixed for villages with favourable conditions of communication, climate and hill drainage; poor communication with market town(s); difficult communications with the market, unhealthy climate, and thinly populated settlements. The arbitrary interpretation of rates vis a vis these factors was apparent when Uran Petha villages, which had been settled with the Salsette Taluka, were transferred to Panvel taluka. The first settlement therefore replaced the extant ten classes with four classifications of sweet rice lands and four categories of salt rice lands, which were earlier not assessed separately.

Prices appear to have risen immediately after settlement (Table 2.3), and to have remained fairly constant since. An exceptional price rise was noted in 1864-65 to 1866-67 and in 1875-76 to 1878-79 that was attributed to the corresponding scarcity and famine in the Deccan in those years. However, the inability to generalize about the well-being of farmers due to price rise was seen in the case of a group of farmers from the salt rice villages of Karanja Petha who filed a petition in 1867 (Mahatra & others, 1867) complaining that the Surveyor had increased the rate of assessment of land too much.
They pointed out that the earlier system of taxing them based on the output from the land, in which the Government took one-third, had been replaced by a fixed rate per bigha irrespective of the output or cases of failure of crops.

**TABLE 2.3**

**AVERAGE PRICE OF UNHUSKED RICE IN PANVEL TALUKA (1846-1891)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Price, seers per rupee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ten years before settlement</td>
<td>34 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st decade from 1856-57 to 1865-66</td>
<td>22 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd decade from 1866-67 to 1875-76</td>
<td>20 ¾</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd period from 1876-77 to 1890-91, 15 years</td>
<td>20 ¾</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Bombay Government, 1892) [The average price of unhusked rice is calculated in seers of 80 tolas for the ten years preceding the original settlement and during the period of the lease as recorded in the first survey settlement undertaken in 1891.]

The farmers were further vexed that the British Government had withdrawn their support of repairing the embankments at Government expense and the maintenance of two watchmen at each village to give early warning of any breach in the embankments. They termed their condition an ‘unbearable burden’, made more so by the lack of any alternative source of freshwater other than the rain, their inability to grow any other crops, the lack of any trees in these villages that would provide some fuel wood, and the strain of constant vigil during the high tides. They complained that the latter had been made more difficult by the Government ban that had been introduced on the age-old community practice of confiscating assets of and fining members who did not contribute to the repair of damaged embankments. They therefore petitioned for the lifting of this ban. The petitioners observed that annual Government revenues had in the meantime risen from 3/4th of one lakh rupees in earlier times to 9 lakhs after introduction of increased taxes on salt and liquor, and at the time of putting forward their petition, the annual revenues amounted to Rs. 20 lakhs. The fragility and difficulty of maintaining intra and intercommunity support systems that evolved over decades - if not centuries - are seen repeatedly in situations where external agents such as the government or savkars replace the role of the community and then subsequently withdraw their support with no warning or preparation. The disruption of relations was particularly produced by the
categorisation and treatment of land aimed at tapping the commercial potential of the colony to the fullest. The concept of wasteland was thus introduced that referred to any land put to ‘unproductive use’, held in common or left idle (Whitehead, 2010).

Proximity to the growing city of Bombay also led to restructuring and reorientation of the periphery to become entirely subservient to the needs of the city. A growing demand for grass from the grasslands of Uran as well as other uplands in the periphery of the city led to drastic changes in land use. Grass could be shipped from almost every point on the creeks or near the coast where it could be carted and several smaller ports came into existence to support this trade. In Uran taluka, Sheva evolved as a minor port solely for the sale of grass (Table 2.4). Shipments of grass from Panvel had command of the Bombay market largely due to the difficulties created for boats on Bassein creek by the bridge and water-duct built by the British from Thana to Bombay. Profits from this activity were considerable as no inputs in terms of labour or investment were required and the output was not taxed. The British revenue system had been founded on Locke’s theory (Whitehead, 2010) that “land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste; and we shall find the benefit of it amount to little more than nothing.”12 The peasants obviously disagreed with – or to use the popular explanation for peasant behaviour – were too uneducated to follow British logic for they began converting rice land into meadow. This practice, first noticed by the British in 1861, was found to continue at the time of the first revenue settlement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2.4</th>
<th>EXPORTS FROM THE PORTS OF PANVEL TALUKA (1880 – 89)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Value in Rs. for the port from which the item is shipped (1880-89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Panvel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>1,01519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice unhusked</td>
<td>2,82,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice straw</td>
<td>33,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass</td>
<td>1,36,931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>8,42,873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Bombay Government, 1892)

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12 Locke 1971:13 quoted in Whitehead, 2010
Naturally, the consequence of this development was that grasslands constituted a new target for appropriation. The profits of the grass trade attracted the attention of entrepreneurs and traders from Bombay who bought up most of the land from the original land holders to whom it had been leased at especially low rates for rice cultivation. The land thus passed into the hands of absentee landlords, who used the land for speculation and as a means of trade. The expansion of the city and escalating land prices created opportunities for speculation and investment that many of the businessmen used to expand their base for capital accumulation from fairly early in the city’s evolution. Local businessmen who were willing to give up their property in prime areas in the inner city were compensated with the grant of title to the lands of several villages that continued to rise in value as the city expanded in area and function. The impoverished hinterlands – mostly grass and orchard uplands – were thus taken over by wealthy traders and businessmen in Bombay who formed a class of absentee landlords whose rights were protected by the new British legal system. The opportunities created in this trading hub for the merchants, financiers and businessmen to amass huge fortunes created a symbiotic relationship between this group and the British for the creation of infrastructure such as causeways, roads and water reservoirs (TIFR, 1995) that was instrumental in strengthening the city as a centre of control and domination.

The evolution of legal tenets and systems to aid in the development of land as private property has been an integral part of this process of ensuring an expanding base for capital accumulation by the elite. The 1718 quit-rent rule and the 1731 discriminatory tax policy that differentiated between the English and the black inhabitants were followed by the right of tenants to inherit and alienate land in 1814. The Bombay Land Revenue Act, passed in 1879, determined the land rights of the citizens. According to this act the revenue was to be paid in cash directly to the government. The land could be confiscated by the government or the usurer if the situation so demanded. Land could be sold or leased out and the new system led to an increase in the rents for leased lands with landlords increasing their share of the produce and also demanding the addition of straw bundles with the grain given as payments in kind (Bombay Government, 1892). A series of measures to restrict or oust the indigenous populations from core areas of the city
(Farooqui, 1996) relating to construction of buildings, occupation of foras lands, etc culminated in the Land Acquisition Act of 1894.

There was also some administrative reorganisation of the talukas in the Presidency to meet the shifting demands from changes in trade. Karanja Island initially constituted an administrative sub-division of Salsette taluka and a customs division of Thana District in the Bombay Presidency that contained the three ports of Mora, Karanja, and Sheva (Hunter, 1886). It was also a source of entertainment for sportsmen from Bombay who visited the island almost every day for the snipe and duck that were found in plenty in the area. The island was separated from Salsette in 1861 and the original revenue settlement was undertaken in 1865 prior to the transfer of Uran sub-division to Panvel. It was placed under Panvel vide Government Resolution 456 dated 3rd February 1865 (Bombay Government, 1882) and constituted a sub-division (petha) of 22 villages and one town, inclusive of three ports. The importance of Panvel\(^{13}\) arose first from its position as a receiving and forwarding port from Bombay to the Deccan and vice versa, and dates from a very long time back. Though the opening of the railway in 1856 lessened its importance, it continued to play a fairly important role even later. The division was officially named Uran in 1881-82 by the British. Panvel and Uran mahal were a part of Thane district till 1883 when they were transferred to Kolaba district.

Other important sources of income in the region in the 19\(^{th}\) century were sand, stone quarrying and salt making. Soil, weather and other conditions being ideal in coastal North Konkan for the production of salt, this activity also flourished. Salt production through evaporation provided considerable employment in the post-monsoon season, when many of the cultivators were not engaged in agriculture. It was produced in large quantities in the Pen and Panvel talukas with the Karanja division constituting about 3000 acres\(^{14}\). The officers who oversaw the salt works were stationed at the village of Uran. (Bombay State, 1908) In several cases the lands which were to have lapsed to the Government due to unfulfilled agreements by the Angrias remained in the possession of the original grantees.

\(^{13}\) The most important trade in Panvel then was that of cart-building and wheel-making, which was done by Kutchi wheel-wrights. The wheels were taken inland as return loads.

\(^{14}\) In 1820 they produced 20,000 tons of salt. (SSIC, 1908)
For many years these reclamations were divided into rice-fields and salt-pans but the salt-pans were gradually closed between 1858 and 1872 to ensure a market for salt produced in Britain. About two-thirds of the area formerly devoted to salt-making in the district was brought under paddy cultivation.

More than 14,000 acres in Kolaba District were reclaimed in this way (Bombay State, 1908), leading to the in-migration of many Agri and some Brahman families in the middle of the nineteenth century. The reclamation of saline land was encouraged by no revenue being levied for the first ten years, and full revenue only after thirty years. Advances were also made to cultivators under the Land Improvement and Agriculturists’ Loan Acts. The British government however soon established a complete monopoly over all salt production and brought in repressive salt laws. Older respondents who had worked on salt pans in the study area recall how supervisors ensured that the baskets used to carry salt were washed out at the end of the day so that the labourers could not carry away a single grain for personal use or private gain. With a land revenue collection of 1.86 million pounds at the beginning of the 19th century from the Presidency, Bombay became the conduit to transfer surplus from the surrounding hinterland to the metropolis of London. By 1842 collections from various sources (Table 2.5) had reached 2 million pounds. The magnitude and form of collections was totally unjust considering the continuous decline in the prices of the staple food crops of the Bombay Presidency Region from 1820 to 1855 (Habib, 1995).

### TABLE 2.5
BRITISH REVENUE SOURCES IN COMPANY AND CROWN ERAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue Source</th>
<th>Percentage of Total State Revenues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fiscal Year 1831-32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes on land</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt monopoly</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opium monopoly</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customs</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excise, income tax (estab.1886), stamps, etc.</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Dupont, 2000)
Thus, the areas in the immediate periphery of Bombay – Salsette, Uran, Thane, Bhiwandi, Kalyan and Vasai - were converted into a source region for food and other necessary supplies that included water, fodder, fuel, timber, sand, and bricks. The areas beyond this were transformed into a supply region (Figure 2.3) for raw materials such as cotton, indigo, timber, hemp, coconuts and labour.

![Figure 2.3: Hinterland as a Source Region of Bombay City (18th Century)](image)

Source: Karmarkar, 2005
In order to meet revenue demands, land owners were forced to prioritise exportable cash crops due to which areas that had previously been used to cultivate food grains were also converted to cash crops. The upland dry crops disappeared in many villages in Uran and other areas in the immediate periphery. Their place as food grains was taken by the coarser kinds of rice grown in salt lands in favour of forage and the cultivation of the mango, for which there was increasing demand in the city (Bombay Government, 1892). Apart from reducing the nutritional base of the local communities, their supportive web of relationships was also broken. The tribals (adivasis) came close to starvation in the post-monsoon season as lands that were traditionally leased to them for the cultivation of grains, pulses and millets were converted to grasslands and orchards (Sinclair, 1865). This was in large part influenced by the extension of railways that had made the rest of the country customers for the fruit. Mango also began to replace the coconut, as they brought higher returns and could be grown on either warkas or rabi lands, which had some exposure to the sea breeze. Thus, the symbiotic relationship between urban centres and the hinterland that led to livelihood generation in the periphery was broken and widespread impoverishment and exploitation was seen.

After the deliberate creation of a region subservient to their insatiable hunger for raw materials and simultaneously their need for a market to sell goods produced in Britain, the colonial rulers justified the logic of this process by presenting a picture of increasing prosperity in the colony. Provincial gazetteers (Bombay Government, 1892) proclaimed a betterment in status of the area citing increase in trade, steady rise in land and water traffic and increase in assets (Table 2.6). Education, particularly among the women, was said to be increasing along with better housing, food intake, clothing and the ability to afford “imported luxuries”. The amount spent on country liquor, estimated at nearly double the land-revenue, was also taken as evidence of the fairness of the revenue system in place. Water-supply was good in Uran mahal according to the Imperial Gazetteer (Hunter, 1886). Water could be derived from reservoirs - one on the road-side half-way between Alora and Uran, a second between Uran and Karanja villages, and the third which was the largest, measuring about a quarter of a mile round, in Uran - and from many ponds and wells which could hold water for several months after the rains. The
drinking water was obtained from springs. There is a passing reference to ‘frequent reports of guinea-worm infestation’ (Bombay Government, 1925) attributed to the people’s poor standards of hygiene and pronouncement that the condition of the inhabitants of the taluka was ‘considered to be fairly good’.

### TABLE 2.6
**POPULATION AND ASSETS STATEMENT FOR URAN PETHA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Category</th>
<th>Percentage Change 1865 – 91</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiled</td>
<td>143.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thatched</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural cattle</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cows, buffaloes and their young</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep and goats</td>
<td>303.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses and ponies</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carts</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ploughs</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Bombay Government, 1892)

These statements are in stark contrast to the people’s horrific narratives of naaru (guinea-worm) infestation due to the lack of alternative water sources after the monsoons, particularly in the low-lying areas of Uran. Fever, immobility and sometimes death accompanied these infestations, with many tales of innovative attempts to extract the worm that could grow to two feet in length and travel anywhere within the body. Water scarcity in the hinterland is a recurrent theme from colonial times until today while the city of Bombay continues to extract increasing amounts of water from the same area with the construction of dams and reservoirs to supply the city. The impact of disappearance of rabi crops is seen in the narrations of days of hunger when entire families survived on black tea and one meal or fermented rice water that could fill more stomachs than the single bhakri (local bread) made from the same amount of rice. Women labourers recount how the one “butter”\textsuperscript{15} given with their tea on the fields of better-off farmers was

\textsuperscript{15} A locally popular baked biscuit produced in the area
wrapped in the folds of their sari and divided between their children in five or six small pieces when they returned after work. Men often resorted to toddy as their source of nutrition and to fill their stomachs, leaving the little grain left at home for the children.

2.4 The Final Phase of Colonial Rule: Setting the Foundations for Post-Independence Transformation in Uran and the Study Region

Extraction of raw materials and revenues from the hinterland was rapidly intensified in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through British investment in the development of communication systems (TIFR, 1995) directed towards the port and the related business district in Bombay. The significance of Bombay changed dramatically with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which facilitated the development of foreign shipping that exploited its newfound proximity to Europe (Patel, 2006). Investment of profits from trade in cotton and opium led to the establishment and expansion of the cotton textile industry in the city (Farooqui, 1996) by the Indian traders and businessmen who had partnered the British. The setting up of the mills led to another wave of migration and by the end of the nineteenth century Bombay had grown to a population of almost 8,00,000 (Patel, 2006). The high population density and insanitary conditions that caused several plague epidemics in the city and in the already impoverished hinterland led to skewed sex-ratios in the villages. At the turn of the century the proportion of widowed females to 1000 widowed males was 5,862 in Ratnagiri and 3,794 in Kolaba (Hunter, 1908), showing the relative importance of the immediate hinterland as a source region for food rather than labour. The development of international communication lines (TIFR, 1995) and internal infrastructure only added to the growth in prominence of Bombay. The city was thus spatially organized around the port and functioned as the central node between the hinterland and England by strategically linking rail-lines and shipping routes with areas demarcated to serve the functions of trade, storage and distribution (Grant & Nijman, 2002).
As the hinterland became organized and connected, the further development of towns and cities ensued, albeit in an unequal manner (Patel & Deb, 1995). Railway stations became significant points and the role of river ports such as Thane, Kalyan, Vasai, Bhayandar and Agashi lost their importance (Phadke, 1982). Konkan ports such as Ulwa, Mora, and Karanja continued to be important as ports subsidiary to Bombay since the road and railway facilities could not be adequately developed there. New jetties such as Dharamtar, Mandva and Rewas came up in the 1860s to meet the demand for supplies to Bombay (Phadke, 1982). Bombay’s domination over the hinterland increased as the existing ports, towns and cities became mere supply and revenue collection centres, losing their independent social, economic and diversified resource base. The functioning of Bombay exemplified the transformation of port cities during the colonial period from centres based on productive hinterlands to centres of extraction that served as entry points for industrial products from the West and exit points for raw materials from the East. The port city served British interests at the cost of the associated hinterlands, indigenous inland cities and oceanic networks (Das Gupta, 1987).

By 1920 Uran was no longer quite an island, the upper part of Karanja creek having been filled up, and the road now running from Uran to Panvel without any need for the wooden bridge by which it formerly crossed the creek at Jasai (Bombay Government, 1925). The peasant struggle against tenancy that began in 1920 brought realisation that conditions were not happy for the villagers of the region (Thakur, 2007). The Agri peasants’ discontent against the excesses of the landlords (the savkars, pandharpeshes, and khots) began to be seen with the demand of first claim on the land as tillers. The landlords had been pressing their claims to the rent and had used several coercive means to extract as much as they could of the share of the crops. The peasants went on strike in Vashi of Pentaluka (1922-1925), in Chari of Alibag taluka (1932-1937), and in Bhendkhal of Uran taluka (1939-1943).

During 1929-30 the British was announced and attempted to implement a law preventing peasants from accessing forests, cutting trees and extracting natural resources. The consequences of this led to a movement of Chirner peasants – that included the local tribals, adivasi thakurs, Brahmins, Agris, Kolis, Kumbhars (potter), Sonars (goldsmith),
and other service castes – dependent on the forest for their livelihoods and survival. The struggle intensified until a confrontation took place between the British police and peasants in September 1930 when 13 people were killed in firing and lathi charge by the police. Forty seven people were arrested. The depression of the 1930s added to the plight of the peasants due to a fall in the prices of agricultural products and created further grounds for peasants’ and workers’ agitations in the years to follow. In some villages such as Bhendkal and Chirner struggles against oppression by savkars also intensified leading to inter and intra-village clashes between peasants employed by the savkar and those opposing them. In Chirner, Barku Chirlekar formed a gang of peasants - subsequently declared as ‘outlaws’ by the British government - who fought against the oppressive landlords. The severe discontent that was simmering among the tenant farmers in the Konkan peaked sharply with the active involvement of Ambedkar and several other leaders. The struggle continued until Independence when the struggle for land reforms took shape.

The following chapter discusses the interventions and transformations in the post-Independence phase that also saw the formation of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and the making of New Mumbai, a special planning region within it. These had enormous impact on the local communities and the ecological environment in the study area. The chapter focuses on the resulting evolution of various socio-economic activities and livelihoods in response to the ecological transformation of the larger sub-region and the associated political formations. The related interventions in the form of policy prescriptions that have impacted people’s changing relation to their livelihood and environment have been identified. The impact has been varied in different parts of the taluka for which study villages have been chosen from different locations to see how people have negotiated the conditions created by their specific historical evolution and the subsequent changes to which they were drawn. The evolution of Bombay city and much later, New Bombay in the 1970s that came to occupy the eastern part of the taluka became a site of ‘development’ initiatives of the regional state. Impact of all these processes on the western part of the taluka which today constitutes the site for several current planning projects have simultaneously traced.
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