

ASHIN DAS GUPTA: *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, c.1700-1750.* (Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung, Vol.40). Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979. 305 pages, DM 44.-

It is very rare that a book is able to convey to its reader that sense of immediacy and complexity which is the everyday stuff of lived history. A.D. Gupta's book is one of these rare examples. It not only succeeds in reconstructing the bewildering complexity of Indian trade, technology and intrigue, but at the same time is able to integrate this mass of sources in meaningful models and in the broader context of Mughal and colonial history. His book is the product of a long and patient research on the Dutch and British factory records of Surat, but besides these sources he has worked on a mass of additional Persian and Gujarati documents.

The scene is Surat, the great Mogul port near the Gulf of Cambay, at the turn of the 18th century, and in five excellent chapters he follows the inexorable decline of its wealth and trading networks over the following half century.

In 1700 Surat was still the major outlet for the North Indian, particularly Gujarati, textile, indigo and cotton production. A medley of trading communities, Banians, Indian Moors, and resident Persians, Arab and Turkish traders controlled a vast trading network that linked with varying emphasis the Yemen/Aden markets, the annual Hajj in Mecca and the Persian Gulf, but also Malacca, Manila and China. It is with the interaction between these traditional traders and the English and Dutch Trading Companies that the book is mainly concerned. And in this ever changing scenery of different, mutually inclusive and exclusive interests of a mercantile, political and military nature the slow erosion of Surat's control over maritime trade and its own hinterland unfolds itself.

While the Europeans can militarily dominate the seas and, when driven to extremes, may capture competing Indian trading vessels, it is the local Mughal official that can confiscate their wares and it is the local merchant that can corner the money markets or obstruct the foreigner's access to the vital indigo growing or cotton weaving hinterland.

The local big merchants are the ones that can force the Mughal officials into retaliatory action against the Europeans, but it is the same official, who by rule of escheat or brute force can pressurize the local traders, although or even because he may be heavily indebted to them. But these big traders can enforce sanctions only by threatening to abstain from trade, in which case the Mughal official can remit no customs-revenue to Delhi. This strategy of boycott may be self-defeating for the smaller merchants who, after two lost seasons, will be bankrupt. It will be the British and Dutch "lodge" that will point out these consequences and will try to split up this formidable opposition by allowing some of them store room in their own ships.

But there are still the local Sheiks to be taken care of. By declaring a Jihad they can rally a mob of Moor merchants against the Europeans or a Mughal official suspected of too much leniency towards Europeans. Europeans he might incidentally favour in order to stabilise his precarious position vis-à-vis some

of the bigger local merchants to whom he might owe his own appointment. But the rousing of a Muslim mob will antagonise the Jaina traders who control the mint and the money markets not only in Surat but in Yeman and Jedda as well ...

It is an ever recurring game that with an incredible speed tends to return full circle to some basic insoluble antagonisms.

Ashin Das Gupta's book admirably succeeds in connecting this narrow context of faction and intrigue with the broader one of Surat's decline. With the death of Aurangzeb, the rise of the Marathas and the weakening of Ottoman control over the Hedjaj and Yemen areas, new partners enter the game at a time of general restriction of the trading networks. The plot cannot tolerate too many villains.

Surat slowly loses control even over its own immediate hinterland Gujarat. By controlling the Jagir of the Surat officials the Marathas force them into the path of increased taxation and oppression. The Sidis, a semi-piratical force from the vicinity of Bombay, begin to stir. Hitherto paid as "the Mughal marine" they enforce additional "protection money" from the impoverished Surat government and even capture part of its merchant fleet. It is in this context that the British who control the rival station, Bombay and a more extensive trading system, gradually monopolize the important position of "honest broker". While Surat's trade gradually dwindles to 1/4 of its former size, the British not only increase their share, but their legal and economic standing as well.

While the Indian traders are too weak to explore new markets in Eastern Asia, the British begin to penetrate the immediate surroundings of Surat in order to compensate for the recession in the Red Sea area. By 1750 it becomes quite common for weavers and indigo planters to have hypothecated their looms or crops to the British. "Put differently what was being undermined was the autonomy of the traditional man." (p.19)

In his brilliant description of only five decades of Surat's mercantile microcosmos A.D. Gupta succeeds in conveying the impact of the great changes that were soon to transform India into a colony and at the same time a trading company into a major territorial power.

Jakob Rösel

HERMANN KULKE: Jagannātha-Kult und Gajapati-Königtum. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte religiöser Legitimation hinduistischer Herrscher. (Schriftenreihe des Südasien-Instituts der Universität Heidelberg, Vol. 23). Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979. XII + 263 pages, 27 illustr., 2 maps, DM 88.-

Hermann Kulke deals in this exhaustive study with the process of state formation in Orissa, India. The scope and method of his study are remarkable be-