Eighteenth-century Gujarat : the dynamics of its political economy, 1750-1800

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CHAPTER TWO

MARKET ECONOMY, LABOUR AND WAGES

Introduction

This chapter is an enquiry into the nature and functioning of the market in Gujarat and the structure of the relationship between producers, merchants and the European Companies. In the following pages, I will examine the relative position of intermediate and subaltern groups in the political economy of Gujarat. The former group, comprising of people who filled minor offices, and the subaltern groups including peasants, artisans and the urban poor, played a crucial role in the functioning of the market. They not only produced goods to meet the external demand but also consumed a part of what was imported into the region. My endeavour in this chapter is to explore the socio-economic dynamics of different categories of labour in late pre-colonial Gujarat. Through an analysis of the textile and maritime labour markets and of the role and position of the petty officials in Surat, we will try to understand the supply side of the market in Gujarat.

Scholars have defined the concept of 'market' in different ways in all of which exchange of some kind occupies a central place. Market has been defined as a variety of economic behaviour, a locus of space where the physical processes of exchange take place, and a sociological phenomenon in which social groups perform differentiated functions.[1] Relationships between rulers and merchants, merchants and brokers, and between these groups and producers are considered as sociological phenomena. The following analysis is not confined to economic issues such as income and wages of producers and labourers, but involves aspects of social stratification and structures of power and their impact on production relations. We can further distinguish commodity markets, where most consumer goods are exchanged, money and credit markets, and labour markets. I will concentrate here on the commodity and labour markets at Surat in the second half of the eighteenth century. This analysis seeks to appreciate the structure of the market and the forms of relationship between producers and merchants and their implications for the economy and trade of Gujarat as a whole.

The commodity market involves the interactions between producers and merchants and the various intermediaries between these two groups as well as between merchants and the companies or other buyers. The commodities exchanged were mostly manufactured from agricultural crops. Agricultural operations were seasonal and exposed to the vagaries of nature, which meant that yields were highly variable. The supply potential, and eventually prices, rose and fell depending on the abundance of the harvest. The magnitude of the internal and external demand for commodities also caused variations in

[1] K. N. Chaudhuri, 'Market and Traders in India during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century', in idem and Clive J. Dewey (eds.), *Society and Economy: Essays in Indian Economic and Social History* (Delhi, 1979), 147.

prices. A glimpse into the organisation of textile production in Gujarat will explain some social and political dimensions of the market. The composition of artisans as a class and the dynamics of the relationships among its constituent communities as well as between them and merchants and states are some crucial aspects that will be analysed in the next sections.

Textile Industry of Surat

Unlike in Bengal and Coromandel, where the weaving industry was spread over vast rural areas, in Gujarat weavers manufacturing textiles for the export markets were either urban-based or located close to major cities.[2] There was a concentration of weavers in some major urban centres like Surat, Broach, Ahmadabad, Baroda and Bhuj in Kachh. There were other major textile producing centres such as Navsari, Bardoli and Gandevi which were located very close to Surat. Other centres like Ankleshwar, Dabhoi, Nadiad, and Dholka were all urban and located fairly close to the main caravan route to Delhi and Agra.[3] The textile manufacturers constituted a major segment of the urban population of these cities. Their numerical strength, organisation and their relative position within the hierarchy of power are among the subjects that need to be examined in order to evaluate their role in the political economy of the region. The data presented below pertain almost entirely to Surat which emerged during the early eighteenth century as a major textile production centre.

Textile manufacture comprised of several stages from the field to the loom. Large numbers of people were involved in the production of cotton, from harvesting, cleaning, and spinning, to weaving, dying, bleaching and printing. Raw cotton was cleaned mainly by poor people who bought a small quantity of it and, after cleaning, sold it to those who spun yarn.[4] There were several devices for separating cotton from the seed but c*harkha* was the most common and its use is reported from different parts of the subcontinent.[5] This was a labour-intensive work and must have employed a large

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[2] K. N. Chaudhuri, 'The Structure of Indian Textile Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *IESHR* 11/2-3 (1974), 140-1.

[3] Ibid. 141.

[4] In Surat, cotton cleaners were called *Pinjara* (FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 24 Dec. 1795, p. 793; Subramanian, 'Power and the Weave', 58).

[5] That it was used in cleaning cotton at Broach is testified by Hove who also gives a minute description of the wheel. He says, 'the machine by which they clear the seeds of cotton is about 4.5 feet high and three broad, it consists of two leaden cylinders, ….., about two inches in diameter, which are so closely placed over each other, that only the cotton passes through the fissure, and the seeds remain on the other side. This is [worked?] commonly by three women two of which turn the two cylinders, contrary ways by a plain winch, and the third's business is, to place the cotton to them, and keep it clear of seeds, this is executed with such dexterity and readiness that one of these sets is able to clear four bales of cotton a day' (Home Misc. 374, Extracts from Dr. Hove's Journal, 1787, pp. 647-8. The use of the wheel in Surat is also reported (BCP 49, Proceedings, Bombay, 11 Sept. 1789 (John Griffith's report of cotton, Surat, 22 Aug. 1789), pp. 247-9; FRS 79, Proceedings, Surat, 14 April

number of labourers. The expanding production of cotton and its export to Bengal, China and later on to England meant that a much larger quantity had to be cleaned in the late eighteenth century than ever before.

Spinning was an independent activity and the second occupation in a weaver's family.[6] It was a low-investment enterprise and, in a subsistence-oriented system, some peasant households both bought cotton and spun yarn, which they sold to dealers in thread at a profit that depended on the fineness of the yarn.[7] The city's textile industry gave employment to a wide range of people across caste, community and gender. Cotton yarn was spun mainly by women while weaving was done almost exclusively by the male head of the household. The demand for yarn must have been fairly high as a large quantity of it was required for the looms as well as for export by the Dutch Company and other merchants. A growing external and local demand for yarn kept a substantial labour force occupied through much of the late eighteenth century.

Before weavers could sit to work at the loom, a number of labourers were employed for the preparation of yarn which consisted of warping, sizing and readying the bobbins for the shuttle. These tasks were usually performed by household members and when more people were needed some hired labour was used.[8] Generally speaking, weaving was a caste-based profession. A group of castes of both Muslim and Hindu communities and also some Parsis specialised in manufacturing a variety of textiles. In a report on the textile manufacturing sector of Surat prepared in 1795, various castes and social groups such as the Momin, Tahi, Bohra, Bungar, Bandara, Khatri, Kunbi (both Hindus and Muslims), as well as Parsis, are mentioned as working with looms.[9] Some of them specialised in manufacturing certain types of textiles and at times exerted their exclusive customary rights. The Khatris, for example, were best employed in manufacturing silk and cotton-silk mixed piece-goods, specially *daryai* and *saris*.[10] It was much to their annoyance that, in the 1740s, some weavers of the Kunbi caste secured permission from the governor of Surat to manufacture *saris*. In Surat, there were 3,000 to 4,000 houses of Khatri weavers and the total number of looms operated by them was 3,663.[11] Those worked by the Kunbis amounted to 2,683 looms. The Parsis had a large share of the total capacity and worked with 4,105 looms whereas the other castes taken together had 5,326 looms. From the 1795 report, it appears that 5,451 looms - about a third of the total of 15,777 looms in Surat- were employed in producing

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1800, p. 230). Its widespread use elsewhere is also evident from some contemporary references (*see* Parthasarathi, *Transition to a Colonial Economy*, 55).

[6] Irfan Habib, 'Non-Agricultural Production: Mughal India', in Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), *Cambridge Economic and History of India*, I (Cambridge, 1982), 271.

[7] In 1795, a spinner could earn Rs 7 to 10 per *man* of yarn when sold to the dealers (FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 24 Dec. 1795, p. 792).

[8] *Cf*. Parthasarathi, *Transition to a Colonial Economy*, 13.

[9] FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 11 Sept. 1795, pp. 453-4; FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 24 Dec. 1795, pp. 792-800.

[10] FRS 79, Proceedings, Surat, 20 March 1800, pp. 180-5.

[11] Ibid., p. 540; BCP 57, Proceedings, Bombay, 2 Jan. 1796, pp. 18-22.

piece goods and that the Khatris were the main providers of textiles to the English Company.[12] The Bungar, Momin and Tahi castes also manufactured piece-goods for the English and other companies and merchants. The remaining two thirds of looms produced a variety of textiles for the South-west and South-east Asian markets as well as for local consumption.[13]

We do not know exactly how many people were required to handle a loom. In his study of Bengal textile industry, Om Prakash has suggested that on an average there were 1.5 to 2 weavers for every loom.[14] Assuming 1.75 weavers per loom, the total number of people employed at this stage of production in Surat must have exceeded 26,000. The production of yarn was quite slow and ordinarily six or seven spinners were needed to produce yarn sufficient to supply a weaver. Contemporary estimates of the average spinning jobs per loom vary between 2.5 and 9.5. At an average ratio of six full-time spinning jobs to a loom, the total number of people employed in spinning yarn comes to about 94,000. Since many people took to spinning as only a part-time job to supplement their income from elsewhere, spinning contributed to the livelihood of a large number of households.

The size of the textile industry in other parts of Gujarat is not known to us. Cities like Ahmadabad, Broach, Bhavanagar, Bhuj, Cambay and some townships like Navsari and Jambusar were great centres of textile manufacture. A large number of weavers, spinners, dyers and other textile workers must have been involved in this sector. Broach, and to a large extent Cambay as well, continued to produce textiles on a substantial scale to cater to the growing demand from European, Asian and African markets. In the early 1750s, there were 4,000 looms in Kachh which gave employment to a considerable number of households. Compared with Kachh, the textile output at Broach was much higher and thus the number of looms and the people involved in various stages of production there must also have been correspondingly larger. The above estimates of the numerical strength of the textile industry of Surat suggest that a considerable portion of the population of Surat and its vicinity was involved in this craft. Their earnings must have contributed to the growth of local demand for a variety of indigenous products and imported goods.

Dying yarn and cloth was yet another important stage in the process of textile production. This was done usually by professional dyers who rendered such services to merchants for money wages. Normally cotton yarn was dyed either blue or red. The locally-produced indigo and sappanwood imported from South-east Asia were used to produce these colours. The colour and brightness, however, much depended on the quality of the water. Broach was renowned for its cloth dying thanks

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[12] FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 24 Dec. 1795, pp. 794-7; BCP 57, Proceedings, Bombay, 2 Jan. 1796, pp. 18-22; Subramanian, 'Capital and Crowd', 221.

[13] FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 24 Dec. 1795, pp. 792-800.

[14] Prakash, *Dutch East India Company*, 241-2. In his recent study on the textile industry of Bengal, he suggests that a weaver required three assistants pushing up the weaver loom ratio to 4:1 (idem, 'From Negotiation to Coercion').

to the water of the Rangmati River.[15] In addition to the dyers, there were people involved in bleaching and painting or printing cloth in different shades and designs. These operations were done by skilled artisans in their workshops concentrated in the suburbs of Surat. Since the European demand for printed textiles was high, the employment opportunities these processes generated were substantial.

Caste, Labour and inter-professional mobility

The notion that the segregated skills and the absence of inter-craft mobility arrested economic development in South Asia does not correspond to the evidence. Irfan Habib asserts that there were certain elements of flexibility in the caste order that allowed some professional mobility.[16] According to the legal framework enforced by the state, everyone was free to employ himself in any profession he chose, but certain caste-specific professional groups guarded their interests and tried to prevent professional fluidity. The caste exclusiveness of a profession was generally asserted by some weaving communities but such conventional professional norms were also sometimes undermined. Market mechanisms induced people to play with such rigidities. In times of an augmented demand for textiles, weavers were forced to employ additional labour, not necessarily from the same caste. This is how the Kunbis learnt the art of weaving fine quality piece-goods from the Khatri weavers who employed them as workmen.[17] Since weaving required some training and skill, which was passed down from one generation to the next within weaving families, some caste groups could maintain their dominant position. Among weavers of a particular caste, therefore, a sense of solidarity prevailed which was invoked whenever their common interests were threatened. Apparently, they had a corporate body consisting of head weavers known as *patels* and *muqaddams*.[18] We lack information about whether there was any supra-local corporate organisation of any caste or group of castes.

There was no class consciousness among weavers transcending all caste or sub-caste solidarities. We have no evidence to suggest that the weavers as a whole ever shared a common platform to project their professional aspirations or to resist oppression and exploitation.[19] In 1742, to express their sense of resentment of Muslim immigrant weavers, some Hindu weavers of Surat went on strike and refused

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[15] Cloth and yarn were dyed in blue and red colours by using indigo and sappanwood. In 1795, the cost of dyeing yarn blue and red was Rs 7 and Rs 10 per *man* respectively (FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 24 Dec. 1795, p. 793; Subramanian, 'Power and the Weave', 58). Dying the stuff red was a privilege of the Khatri caste (FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 24 Dec. 1795, p. 793).

[16] Irfan Habib, 'Labourers and Artisans', in J. S. Grewal (ed.), *The State and Society in Medieval India* (New Delhi, 2004), 171-2. He further says, 'the absence of legal constraints on the change of occupation among Muslims made them responsive to an enhanced demand for a new craft' (ibid.).

[17] FRS 79, Proceedings, Surat, 20 March 1800, p. 182.

[18] In 1795, these *patels* and *muqaddams* were brought to an agreement with the English to work exclusively for the Company (FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 10 Oct. 1795, p. 539).

[19] The weavers in south-eastern India did occasionally develop an occupational solidarity transcending caste barriers to protect their common interest (Parthasarathi, *Transition to a Colonial Economy*, 34).

to produce for the European companies.[20] Although they complained about the imposition of a tax from which the Muslim workmen were exempted, the actual source of irritation was professional jealousy and the threat that the newcomers posed to their business.[21] The Khatri umbrage on Kunbis acquiring the right to manufacture *saris* reveals a similar professional rivalry, this time within the Hindu weaving community. The dispute between the two castes impeded the Company's investments until the English chief persuaded the Nawab in 1800 to withdraw the license that governor of Surat, Safdar Khan had issued the Kunbis.[22]

So far we have no evidence about the earnings of weavers or their living standards. Such textile prices as do survive represent what the companies paid their supplies, not what the weavers themselves earned. The richness of data on weaving in Bengal and south-eastern India has helped scholars illuminate some major aspects of this industry including productivity, wages, social and ethnic composition of weavers and workers involved in different stages of manufacture.[23] In Surat, a spinner, on an average, earned Rs 8.5 for spinning a *man* of yarn.[24] Assuming that a woman working full time spun 0.75 of a *seer* (0.468 pound) per day, it would take about eighty days to spin a *man* of yarn of Surat weight.[25] The wage would then be about 1.7 *annas* a day or Rs 3.18 a month.

In the case of weavers, it is really hard to quantify their earnings since usually they received advances from merchants with which they bought yarn and other ingredients. They sold their produce usually to the same merchants who had advanced them money, at a mutually agreed price. In 1738, the Parsi weavers, who had been persuaded to move to Bombay to work for the English Company, demanded Rs 5 a month as their wage.[26] Even if we accept this as the average standard wage, this is still lower than the wages earned by skilled artisans and even some ordinary workers.[27] What then made weavers continue with their profession at comparatively low wages?

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[20] Chaudhuri, 'Structure of Indian Textile Industry', 172.

[21] This is evident from the statement quoted by Chaudhuri (ibid. 172).

[22] FRS 79, Proceedings, Surat, 18 March 1800, p. 164.

[23] *See* for instance, Hossain, 'Alienation of Weavers'; Parthasarathi, *Transition to a Colonial Economy*; Prakash, 'From Negotiation to Coercion'.

[24] The 1795 report records that a spinner earned from Rs 7 to 10 a *man* (FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 24 Dec. 1795, pp. 792-3). We do not know how long a person took to spin that much yarn. In south India, it took two months to spin a *man* (of approximately 25 pounds) of yarn. The Surat *man* was counted at 34 ½ Dutch ponds which is 37.6 pounds (1 pond = 1.09 pounds avoirdupois).

[25] Calculated at 37.6 (*man*) divided by 0.468 (a day's produce).

[26] Chaudhuri, 'Structure of Indian Textile Industry', 159.

[27] *See* the comparative average daily wages of different types of artisans and workers in Appendix 2. The income estimates of the weavers in the Mysore region, when employed by a master weaver, were paid 20 *fanam* or Rs 6-9 a month (Nikhiles Guha, *Pre-British State System in South India: Mysore 1761-1799* (Calcutta, 1985), 42). In Bengal the wage of a weaver, employed by a master weaver, varied from Rs 2.5 to 3.5 a month which was lower than the wages paid in Gujarat or Coromandel (Chaudhury, *From Prosperity to Decline*, 161-8). As Prasannan Parthasarathi suggests, the weavers of the southern India received higher real wages compared to weavers in England even though the money income was low (Parthasarathi, 'Rethinking Wages'; idem, *Transition to a Colonial Economy,* 43).

Certainly, there were some social restrictions as the caste-profession nexus rendered transgression a difficult proposition. The English authorities at Surat noted in 1792 that 'each branch of manufacture of this place is confined to one set of people, who by ancient, as well as religious custom, can never be persuaded to change their occupation'.[28] The fact that weavers stuck to their profession could be attributed to their sophistication and skill in weaving textiles. This was because there was a huge demand for their labour which gave them a great deal of job security. Practically also, it was difficult for them to shift to some other job that required an altogether different skill and expertise. It kept people busy with work for a large part of the year and especially in the peak seasons. The lure of advances and assured saleability of the product gave them professional security as well. More importantly, this profession required no large capital investment in tools and implements or a workshop as a carpenter would need to have. The cotton carder's bow, cleaner's and spinner's *charkha* or weaver's loom did not cost large fortunes.[29] They also did not have to worry about the running capital as they usually got advances from prospective textile dealers. For those who worked with their own capital, and there were certainly many, the chances of a high price and large earnings on account of a fiercely competitive market served as a major incentive. At leisure, they were free to do whatever they wanted. Some of them joined others in agricultural chores especially in those households that combined growing cotton with manufacturing textiles.

Weaver, merchants and the English Company

In the European sources, weavers have been represented as an impoverished lot always indebted to the local money merchant. This does not seem to be universally true. There was certainly a hierarchy among weavers, some of whom were rich enough to produce on their own account and sell on their own terms to merchants. There were of course others who were less fortunate and burdened by merchant capital. Accepting advances from merchants did not necessarily mean that weavers were utterly poor, as Subramanian presumed in discussing the Muslim weavers of Surat.[30] Advancing money to weavers was a merchants' device to ensure the delivery of textiles of a desired quality and quantity on time. To weavers, this guaranteed employment and income and it also implied a sharing of risk. The structure of the market and the nature of consumer demand in fact made it desirable for both parties to enter into a contract regarding the delivery of textiles. As K. N. Chaudhuri writes:

> the high cost of the fine luxury products, especially in the case of silk piece-goods, made it a highly speculative venture on the part of producers to undertake the weaving of those types at their own risk. A commercial

[28] FRS 70, Proceedings, Surat, 15 April 1792, pp. 150-1.

[29] In 1820, a *charkha* was sold at Rs 5.25 in southern India (Parthasarathi, *Transition to a Colonial Economy*, 55)

[30] Subramanian writes, 'Muslim weavers lived in poverty and were deep in debt to the Bania contractors and moneylenders' (Subramanian, 'Capital and Crowd', 223).

> agreement between wholesale merchants in touch with the consuming markets and weavers reduced the element of risk on both sides. The merchant was assured of receiving supplies on time, before the seasonal sailing dates of his ships, and the producers knew in advance that they would not be left with costly unsold stock on their hands. The whole system of marketing cotton or silk textiles in pre-modern exchange economies incorporated a most important element of capitalism, that of advance finance.[31]

The usual large demand on the one hand and the unpredictability of crop and textile output on the other rendered it imperative that merchants engage weavers well ahead of the actual sailing season. Fierce competition among buyers often made the market favourable to the seller.[32] Undoubtedly, merchants were the major beneficiaries but weavers were not completely denied its advantages. Even under the system of advances, weavers were not at a loss because they usually contracted to supply cloth at the market price.[33] There are references to weavers who sold their products to the merchants paying a higher price than the one who had advanced money. This was so rampant that the suppliers of textiles to the companies were sometimes unable to deliver textiles as stipulated in the contract. The merchants' desperation to force weavers to comply with the terms of the contract and the latter's assertion of freedom to take advantage of competitive buying were characteristic features of the market in Gujarat. K. N. Chaudhuri has argued that, contrary to their alleged poverty, weavers were quite often in a strong bargaining position.[34] Contemporary reports suggest that weavers sometimes deliberately produced cloth of a poorer sort than stipulated in the contract so that they were rejected by the Companies and could be sold to other buyers who were ready to pay a higher price.[35] Talking about south-eastern India, Prasannan Parthasarathi has suggested that in the given legal institutional framework of South Asian societies in early modern times, the relationship between weavers and merchant moneylenders was far from that of bondage.[36] Migration was the weaver's weapon to evade misfortune caused by natural calamities or by exploitative measures of merchants or states. When a grave political crisis befell Ahmadabad in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, artisans and manufacturers moved to Surat.[37] In the 1790s, the English officials ascribed the migration of weavers

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[31] Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*, 200-1.

[32] In the eighteenth century, on account of the disparity between the rate of growth in demand and that in production the market turned out to be a seller's market (Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise*, 343).

[33] Irfan Habib, 'Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India', in idem, *Essays in Indian History,* 231.

[34] Chaudhuri, 'Structure of Indian Textile Industry', 155.

[35] VOC 3122, Copia Resolutie pro Patria (Copy of Proceedings of Gentlemen XVII in Amsterdam), 1762, p. 23. FRS 68, Proceedings, Surat, 14 April 1790, pp. 216-19; FRS 70, Proceedings, Surat, 15 April 1792, pp. 149-51; BCP 61, Proceedings, Bombay, 1 May 1798, pp. 406-8.

[36] Parthasarathi, *Transition to a Colonial Economy,* 22-9.

[37] K. N. Chaudhuri, 'Some Reflections on the Town and Country in Mughal India', *MAS* 12/1 (1978).

from Cambay to Surat, Bombay and other places to a dreadful famine and the exploitative nature of the local officials.[38]

On account of competitive buying, the weavers of Gujarat were quite often in a strong bargaining position. The nature of the textile market made it unavoidable for all merchants and companies to have recourse to forward buying through their brokers. Since local merchants served as brokers to almost all potential buyers of textiles, none of the companies or groups of merchants could exert any monopsonistic control over textiles produced in Gujarat. The fierce competition among merchants and brokers to secure textiles left producers in a strong position. In their attempt to secure textiles, the English and the Dutch adopted measures which further served the weaver's interests. In 1795, when the English contemplated securing the labour of some weaving communities of Surat, they used economic means to achieve this instead of force or coercion. The English instructed the contractors to place orders for ten *corgis* of each sort that the Portuguese bought from Surat, just to keep weavers occupied and prevent them from taking employment from others.[39] Likewise, the Company persuaded the Khatri weavers of Surat to work exclusively for the English on the promise that they would have the protection of the Company against any molestation and oppression and that after first meeting the Company's requirements, they would be completely free to produce whatever and for whomsoever they would like.[40] The weavers consented to work for the Company only if their right to manufacture *saris* was restored to them.[41] In a letter to the president and the council at Bombay, the English chief and the council at Surat described the deal in the following words:

> They [Khatris] could be persuaded only on the assurance of the Company's protection against any molestation and oppression should be offered them by any person that after proportioning amongst them a certain quantity of the investment according to their numbers and so as not materially to impede their profit in the silk business, no further demand would be made on them for their labour and they might throughout the rest of the year employ their industry as they pleased. As a precondition they requested the restoration of their right to make saries which the Coombi [Kunbi] weavers have got from Safdar Khan by means of a gift to him….
>
> Similar endeavours were made to secure Moslem weavers who make goods for the Company and also for the Portuguese, Dutch and French, and which could be achieved by means of securing their employment at the time when they need to be engaged without giving complaints to the others against this monopoly. The contractors were further advised to put in hand ten corgis of each of the assortments of Portuguese goods not included in the Company's investment because being thus provided with employment for the present the workmen would have no pretence to take other employ.[42]

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[38] BCP 55, Proceedings, Bombay, 27 March 1795, pp. 200-3; BCP 55, Proceedings, Bombay, 23 June 1795, pp. 459-65; FRS 73, Proceedings, Surat, 14 March 1795, pp. 181-21; FRS 77, Proceedings, Surat, 18 Jan. 1798, pp. 41-5.

[39] BCP 56, Proceedings, Bombay, 27 Oct. 1795 (Surat to Bombay, 15 Oct. 1795), pp. 809-10.

[40] Ibid., pp. 807-9.

[41] Ibid., pp. 808-9, 813.

[42] Ibid., pp. 807-9.

A striking feature of the textile industry of Gujarat is the degree of continuity in the weavers' position throughout the eighteenth century. Unlike their counterparts in Bengal and on the Coromandel Coast who had been tamed, in the second half of the century, to serve the requirements of the emerging colonial state, the weavers of Gujarat kept up their professional freedom until the early nineteenth century when the English Industrial Revolution began to affect the colonial economy of South Asia. The close interplay of artisanal labour and merchant capital seems to have contributed to the distinctive course of Gujarat's textile industry. The intense economic relationship between artisans and merchants on the one hand and the dyarchic nature of Gujarat's political state on the other, eliminated the possibility of anything like state mercantilism and the consequent subordination of either artisans and producers or of merchants. What follows now is an analysis of the labour market of Surat and its unique features which again tied different strands of society into a web of intersecting relationships.

Labour market

The term labour denotes the workmen who sold their labour in return for wages. Unlike peasants and craftsmen, labourers had no control over their produce. Their services were crucial for the performance of economic activities. They were involved in various capacities at various stages in the production and carriage of goods. Even some weavers, employed by a master weaver or a merchant entrepreneur to work for wages, were labourers. This group played a significant role in production and exchange activities. Through the sheer number of wage earners, a large amount of money was kept in circulation. This in turn added to their purchasing power and eventually to the local demand for a variety of consumer goods. It is in this context that the subaltern groups assumed considerable economic significance. They were nevertheless vulnerable to any changes in the balance of power and were at times subordinated by the dominant groups in the economy.

For the sake of convenience, we explore the dynamics of two major categories of labour primarily on the basis of the Dutch and English records. Urban labourers included carpenters, bricklayers, smiths, *calvaters*, sailmakers, and all those ordinary labourers who assisted the head artisans. The second category was the maritime proletariat, especially sailors, employed on sailing ships. The most detailed information on the so-called 'Muslim sailors' is available in the archives of the VOC. This material has been tapped here to illuminate some aspects of this labour force in Gujarat. The organisational features of this labour market need to be underscored in order to understand the way these labourers articulated their power and asserted their position vis-à-vis their employers.

i) Carpenters and bricklayers

Carpenters and bricklayers were the two major groups servicing the residents of Surat. The large-scale use of wood in the construction of houses and in shipbuilding created an enormous demand for their labour. Houses in the city usually had wooden roofs covered with baked earthen tiles. During the monsoon and heavy rains, houses would get damaged easily and most required a major repair at least after every couple of years. Flooding of the river Tapti was another major source of destruction. We have a few references to inundations and ensuing devastations in late eighteenth-century Surat.[43] The presence of a large section of people employed in carpentry, masonry and other activities in Surat, it seems, contributed to the demand for local and imported consumer goods.

The figures in the records of the Dutch Company on the employment of these workmen provide the total number of labour days spent in building houses and their wages paid for the work. The Dutch and the English companies needed these services on quite a regular basis. Their large establishments spread over several living quarters and storehouses that had to be mended and renovated almost every other year or so.[44] The Dutch Company's *modi* looked after the Company's logistics and took care of the physical maintenance of its establishments. The English Company also employed, on a long-term basis, a master carpenter and a chief bricklayer to take care of all building and repairs.[45] At a modest scale, such services were also required for repairing ships. The ship-building industry at Surat offered large employment opportunities to carpenters, sailmakers and many other workmen who assisted in various ways in equipping ships (*calvaters*).[46] It should be noted that in our period of study the Dutch Company was left with only a few ships at Surat. At the same time, the number of English Company and private ships arriving at Surat in this period was much larger than ever before. The requirement of labour must have gone up quite substantially because of the English Company's demand. Above all, the local merchants' ships and vessels continued to offer employment to a variety of workmen on a large scale.[47] The rise of Bombay as a major commercial centre in the eighteenth century and the growth of a shipbuilding industry there caused migration of skilled carpenters and other workers from Surat to that place.

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[43] A heavy storm and flooding of the river damaged more than a hundred ships in 1776 (VOC 3462, Resoluties, Surat, 12 June 1776, f. 372^{v}). In September 1797, a severe inundation of the Tapti River caused great damage to houses and especially those of the poor people and subjected them to a 'ruinous expenses in refitting their houses and looms' (BCP 61, Proceedings, Bombay, 1 May 1798, pp. 405-6).

[44] In 1749, for instance, the total employment of labour by the Dutch Company in the construction and repair of houses alone amounted to 60,492 working days. Shortly after, in 1751, it was 81,582 working days. In 1772, the Company employed an exceptionally large number of workmen amounting to 111,594 working days. These figures have been calculated from the day-wages (*daglonen*) noted in various statements of expenditure on the construction and repair of the Company's houses and ships in Surat.

[45] FRS 74, Proceedings, Surat, 10 May 1796, pp. 549-50.

[46] In 1750, 1772 and 1774, the total labour employed by the Dutch Company on its ships amounted to 3,310, 4,135 and 11,130 work-days respectively.

[47] In the late eighteenth century, the merchant fleet of Surat consisted of more than two dozens large ocean going ships. Taking into account a large number of smaller vessels and boats plying the western Indian Ocean (more than 200 in number), it may be argued that the size of Surat's merchant fleet continued to be large even at the close of the eighteenth century.

ii) Maritime proletariat: the sailors

Sailors constituted a significant group of labourers in Surat whose services were most sought after by shipowners. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the Surat fleet comprised more than a hundred ocean-going ships, the demand for such labour must have been large. The companies and the private European shipowners employed them to man their ships. The Portuguese recruited many ordinary Indian sailors from the time of their arrival in India. The Dutch and the English companies recruited European sailors to man their ships in Asia until the mid-eighteenth century when as a shortage of crew due to large-scale conscription by European navies as well as high mortality in Asia, particularly at Batavia, compelled the companies to recruit sailors within Asia. The Dutch needed indigenous sailors in large numbers to man their ships plying the intra-Asian circuit. Many were available in Bengal and Gujarat. The 'Muslim sailors' (*moorse zeevarende*, as the Dutch called them, or lascars as they were called by the English) of Surat were recruited by the Dutch for three years during which time they were to serve on the Company's ships sailing from Batavia to different destinations within Asia. The English Company also recruited them for fairly longer periods and many of them served on board ships bound for England.

Unlike the local shipowners who recruited crews for a single season or a particular voyage, the Europeans, especially the Dutch, employed sailors for several years at a time. Our sources do not help us specify the nature of the tasks they performed on board ships. Like any casual labour, the sailors were required to perform hard physical labour, as porters in loading and unloading the cargo, pumping out water and similar duties. As young men, they had plenty of opportunities to acquire some technical skill from some experienced persons in the course of service. It was thus not difficult for at least some of them to learn how to repair sails if damaged or to help other crew members in carrying out their responsibilities.

The generic term *matroos* used in Dutch sources meant a sailor, but it was used for all such labourers who worked as coolies on ships transporting goods. Similarly, the *zeevarende* although essentially meant for manning ships on high seas, were also deployed as ordinary labourers. A number of sailors were thus casually recruited for carrying out different tasks within Gujarat. Although they could perform any work, they were mainly employed for bringing building materials in boats from outside Surat. Since the term of their service was rather short, they were remunerated on a daily basis like other labourers. The English Company also employed a number of sailors to serve on its vessels and boats. The private English shipowners too seem to have availed themselves of sailors' services.

As the English Company began to consolidate its political power in western India in the eighteenth century, it began to recruit soldiers from all over Gujarat to serve under its Bombay presidency.[48] A

[48] A large number of soldiers were recruited in Cambay (SFD 13 (1756-57), Cambay to Surat, 20 Sept. 1757, pp. 188-9).

part of the professional soldiers formerly under the Nawab of Cambay but later demobilised was absorbed by the English who were then on a drive to build up their military power in Gujarat. The Dutch also employed a number of soldiers (*soldaten*) to guard the Company's properties. The strength of soldiers in the service of the Company increased as the danger of insecurity loomed larger in the city. The warehouses, stores and all other buildings had to be protected from assaults either from the local administration or from the Marathas.

Organisation of labour market and methods of recruitment

While the organisation of the military labour market in pre-colonial South Asia is fairly well understood thanks to the works of Dirk Kolff and, more recently, Jos Gommans, our knowledge of the social and economic dimensions of non-military labour market is quite limited.[49] In this section we shall try to reconstruct at least some of the organizational aspects of labour in Surat. Beyond some conventional caste or ethnic influences or restrictions on mobility, the labour market was free and any employer could find workers if he wanted to. The market had no central location as such and most labour was casual in character. Port towns like Surat had a concentration of labour. It is true, however, that non-agricultural labour flocked to the cities in search of jobs from nearby and far-away villages and thus supplemented the total labour force of the city. In Surat, a majority of sailors was recruited within the city but many of them came from the surrounding rural areas. In times of shortage of labour, as happened in 1778, brokers had to recruit sailors in the interior (*hooger landwards*) of Surat.[50] Since the job market was circumscribed by seasons, many labourers, after having been employed, returned to their villages to work in agricultural operations. In harvesting seasons, villages required a large number of labourers, both men and women. The notion that in Europe the maritime and more inland labour markets were integrated at local levels matches quite well with the structure of such markets in Asia.[51]

The hierarchy of tasks was mirrored by the hierarchy of labour. Every kind of work as carpentery, bricklaying or sailmaking, employed two classes of workers bosses (*bazen*) and ordinary (*gemeen*) workers. Most often, the latter were further divided into servants (*knegts*) and boys (*jongen*).[52] The *bazen* were skilled artisans who were assisted by unskilled workers in carrying out their tasks. Each artisan

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[49] D. H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: the Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge, 1990); Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare* (London, 2002), 67-97.

[50] VOC 3549, Resoluties (Proceedings of the Dutch Council), Surat, 2 Dec. 1778, ff. 148^{v}-149^{r}.

[51] Yijo Kaukiainen, 'The Maritime Labour Market: Skill and Experience as Factors of Demand and Supply', in *Sail and Steam: Selected Maritime Writing of Yijo Kaukiainen*, comp. Lars U. Scholl and Merja Liisa Hinkkanen, *Research in Maritime History* No. 27 (Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic Association, 2004).

[52] In most of the statements of expenditure on the construction and renovation of houses and ships belonging to the Dutch Company, the categories are distinguished and their respective wages are shown (*see* for instance, several such statements for the years 1760 and 1764 respectively, VOC 3026, Resoluties, Surat, diverse dates, pp. 236, 258, 337-8; VOC 3155, Resoluties, Surat, diverse dates, 296, 527, 529).

was accompanied by several assistants. Normally, it was the main artisan who was contacted by the employer, the assistants simply followed him. This was by and large true of carpenters, bricklayers, sailmakers, stonecutters, and so on. Unskilled labourers who were required in much larger number than the specialised artisans, could be employed directly.

The services of intermediaries or brokers were indispensable in recruiting labour especially when large numbers of workers were required at a time. The *modi* of the Dutch Company was instrumental in assembling all sorts of material required for repairing a ship or a house and putting the artisans and labourers to work. Being in contact with several local dealers in labour, he could mobilise the required number of artisans and workmen relatively easily. This was possible largely because of interpersonal social bonds that tied a variety of workers together. The English Company employed on a long-term basis a master carpenter, a chief bricklayer and several other men to facilitate any construction work.[53] Each had a designated task to perform which included mustering workmen and putting them to work. These men exercised great influence among their fellow workers and stood surety for them for the payment of wages. The Company also employed an overseer responsible for preparing daily reports and ensuring that the workers performed their duties.[54] That some intermediaries were instrumental in the employment and management of the large labour force required by the European companies in Surat is analogous to the crucial role of *zielverkopers*[55] in the organisation of the labour market for sailors. In the following pages, I have tried to reconstruct the dynamics of the maritime labour market in Surat. Fortunately, a good deal of information on various aspects of maritime labour is available in the archives of the Dutch Company. In fact, this is the only segment of the labour market on which such a detailed documentation is found in any of the European records for this part of the world.

One of the characteristics of early-modern societies in both Asia and Europe was the large economic disparity among the people inhabiting a particular city or region. Despite- or perhaps because of its- being one of the richest cities in the world, Surat offers the best example of these extremes of material affluence and poverty. While it was home to several groups of very affluent merchants, bankers and shipowners, there were also people who were miserably poor. Surat, being a major commercial mart and an oceanic terminus, generated ample job opportunities for its people. Quite a number of families subsisted on working as coolies, weighers, packers, and in a number of

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[53] FRS 74, Proceedings, Surat, 10 May 1796, pp. 549-50.

[54] Ibid.

[55] This term has been interpreted by scholars in different ways. In the Dutch labour market there were *volkhouders* (dealers in personnel) who on supplying sailors to the Company received '*ceel*' or '*transportbrief*' which they usually sold to speculative entrepreneurs (*ceelkoper*) hence they came to be called *ceelverkoper* or zielverkoper (J. R. Bruijn and E. S. van Eyck van Heslinga, 'De Scheepvaart van de Oost-Indische Compagnie en het Verschijnsel Muiterij', in idem (eds.), *Muiterij, Oproer en Berechting op de Schepen van de VOC* (Haarlem, 1980), 17). Some have simply translated the terms as 'soulseller', 'grossiers in personeel' (P. Marsden, *The Wreck of the Amsterdam* (London, 1974), 38; J. R. Bruijn, *Het Gelag der Zeelieden* (Leiden, 1978), 8; Frank Lequin, 'Het Personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Azië in de Achttiende Eeuw, meer in het bijzonder in de Vestiging Bengalen' (University of Leiden: Diss., 1982), 45).

other capacities at the port. Such activities were, however, trade-oriented and employment opportunities depended on the magnitude of maritime commercial traffic.

For some enterprising young men, sailing as a profession offered opportunities for material prosperity. Since serving on board a ship ensured a monthly salary for a couple of years, some of them readily took up this profession. There were families in Surat and its vicinity whose members willingly worked as sailors and had the freedom to prefer one employer over the other. Several Dutch reports indicate a certain preference for the Dutch Company among some such families at Surat.[56] Other young men were, however, forced into this profession by economic circumstance. Struck by acute poverty and driven by need, this section of Surat's youth turned into a marketable commodity. Some entrepreneurs got hold of these poor young men, kept them as bonded labourers and put them to work as sailors in order to reap material benefits from their labour. As owners of these slaves, the entrepreneurs were the actual recipients of their wages.

These entrepreneurs were predominantly Banias who invested in this enterprise by either purchasing young boys or by extending funds and provisions to the needy families. Indebtedness compelled young men to work as sailors. Three Bania entrepreneurs worked almost permanently for the Dutch Company in this manner: Nathu Ratanji, Kalyan Nanabhai (sometimes substituted by Kalyan Govindji) and Biju Bhaidas.[57] There were many others in Surat who specialised in servicing European Companies and other shipowner employers. Their names are not recorded in our sources but we certainly know that they rendered this service to the employers of maritime labour. We have at least one reference from the year 1780 when the Dutch authorities at Surat recruited sailors through the mediation of entrepreneurs (*wervers*) other than the three mentioned above.[58]

This was a sensitive enterprise and the entrepreneurs had to solicit support and the goodwill of the local administration, especially the *Bakhshi* of Surat. As the head of the military recruitment and maintenance, the *Bakhshi* was supposedly responsible for the welfare of the workmen inhabiting Surat. His consent was needed for the recruitment of sailors and for sending them to Batavia. It appears that the brokers solicited the support of the local administration in cases of disputes arising out of non-compliance with the terms of contract. The intensity of intervention from the *Bakhshi*, the *Qazi* or even the Nawab of Surat in disputes concerning the settlement of accounts of the sailors who died at Batavia or had gone missing or deserted the Company, suggests that the local administration had some material interest in it as well. This may well have been because of the authorities' personal involvement and participation in what appears to be a form of slavery or on account of sharing the perquisites that accrued to the labour dealers. However the involvement of the administration could also be interpreted as an expression of paternalistic care and its perception of being accountable to affected families. More

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[56] VOC 3438, Resoluties, Surat, 28 Aug. 1764, pp. 263-4.

[57] They were also called as '*makelaars der zeevarende*' (VOC 3728, Resoluties, Surat, 7 July 1786, pp. 342-4; VOC 3854, Resoluties, Surat, 20 Nov. 1789, pp. 166-70.

[58] VOC 3576, Van Bijland, *soldijboekhouder* to Director and Council at Surat, 1 Oct. 1780, f. 339r-v.

plausibly, it was because the Mughal system of escheat entitled them to the property- in this case wages- of those who died without leaving a legal heir.[59]

There were different ways in which sailors were recruited by shipowners and the companies. The local Muslim shipowners could possibly recruit sailors from their own community from whose ranks a majority of them in fact came. The *sarangs* and *tandels* had contacts with people who were willing to serve as sailors. It was easier for them to make their own group (*ploeg*) which in numerical strength varied between twenty and fifty sailors, and enter into the service of shipowners.[60] There are indications in our sources that in Surat thousands of sailors were recruited directly without the mediation of local administration or brokers.[61] Alternatively, there were professional brokers in Surat and elsewhere who could be entrusted with the task of supplying ordinary sailors whenever required.

As in Europe where the role of *volkhouders* was important in the recruitment of sailors, though they were quite often bypassed, in Asia too intermediaries were crucial but could at times be evaded. All shipowners could, at least legally, employ any number of sailors without recourse to a broker.[62] It was only in the case of the Dutch Company that we find that the role of brokers was indispensable in the recruitment of sailors. Possibly the long period of service entailed this kind of arrangement.

Since the sailors recruited by the Dutch Company were to return to their families only after a couple of years, the contracting brokers had to maintain a proper account of all those delivered to the Company. It is not clear whether a written contract laying down the terms of employment was made with the brokers on the delivery of each group of sailors. On demand from some individual families, however, the *soldijboekhouder* gave a written assurance that the sailors would return to their families after serving three years at Batavia.

We have no definitive data about the total number of sailors recruited by the shipowners at Surat in a given year. Even for the Dutch Company, the information is quite limited. The scattered figures suggest that on an average about one hundred sailors were sent on each ship returning to Batavia. Since each group was meant to stay for three years and as many of them did not return to Surat in that time, the total at Batavia at a given point in time was quite high. In 1776-7, there were about one thousand Surat sailors in the service of the Company (see the table below).

Table 2.1 'Moorse zeevarende' from Surat

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[59] VOC 3670, Resoluties, Surat, 26 Nov. 1784, f. 22^{r}.

[60] There was no uniformity in the size of group under a *sarang* and *tandel*. A standard group consisted of 50 sailors, but those in the service of the Dutch Company were divided into smaller groups of about 20 each. Thus 46 sarangs, 51 tandels and 921 sailors were divided into 53 groups for the convenience in bookkeeping (VOC 3490, Directeur en Raad van Surat aan GG&R, 5 April 1777, ff. 31^{r}-32^{v}).

[61] VOC 3576, Van Bijland, to Director and Council at Surat, 8 Dec. 1779, f. 106^{v}.

[62] It has been reported by Van Bijland in his letter to the Director at Surat that thousands of sailors were recruited by local shipowners and all other 'nations' without the permission of local administration and without the help of brokers (VOC 3576, Resoluties, Surat, 9 Dec. 1779, f. 106^{v}).

Year	Number of sailors sent from Surat	Number of Surat sailors at Batavia
1763	83	
1768	395	
1769	214	
1772	349	
1773	275	
1774	200	
1775	200	
1777		1018
1777	110 (on one ship)	
1780		605
1785		200

Note: The figures are randomly mentioned in the records and are in no way definitive. The absence of figures in some years, however, does not imply that sailors were not recruited and sent to Batavia.
Source: VOC 3268, f. 49^{v}; 3381, f. 26^{v}; 3408, f. 21^{v}; 3462, ff. 463^{r-v}; 3490, ff. 265^{r}-266^{v}

The English Company and private Englishmen having a large number of ships were naturally major employers of maritime labour in Surat. In the present state of our knowledge we cannot quantify this important labour force but, keeping in mind that each ship had to have at least a few dozens of lascars on board, the total number of sailors in service was presumably substantial.

Wages and remuneration

All labourers employed on a long-term basis, such as sailors, soldiers, and sometimes even peons and guards, were paid a monthly salary. Casual labourers were usually remunerated on a daily or monthly basis.[63] It appears from the data on wages (Appendix 2) that in some categories wages remained stable whereas in others, they increased over time. The increase in wages of the master artisans is rather obvious, but the ordinary workers continued to get the standard wage. The difference in wages of a master artisan and an unskilled workman or even a *knegt* in that category was not big- about 20 to 25 per cent- although the difference was more in the case of master sailmakers and ordinary sailmakers. Similarly, the difference in wages for men and women employed as ordinary labourers. The latter usually received three quarters or sometimes even only 60 per cent of what their male counterparts received. The wages of sailors, coolies, porters, limemakers, and women labourers remained rather stable throughout this period. Only the wages of artisans involved in sailmaking show a consistent growth. The daily wage of a master sailmaker rose from 7.5 stivers a day in 1760 to 12 or occasionally even 15 stivers by the end of the century. For ordinary sailmakers as well, wages registered a sharp rise,

[63] Roelof van Gelder, *Naporra's Omweg: Het Leven van een VOC- Matroos (1731-1793)* (Amsterdam, 2003), 357.

from 5 stivers a day in 1766 to 10 stivers a decade later, representing an increase of 100 per cent. With the exception of a slump in the early 1780s sailmakers' wages remained rather stable in the last quarter of the century.

Among all labourers, the master carpenters and bricklayers received the highest wages which averaged more than Rs 16 and 15 a month respectively.[64] The others, like master *calvaters*, sailmakers, ordinary carpenters and bricklayers, borders, iron smiths and those who equipped ships were paid Rs 10 to 12 a month. Women who worked only as ordinary labourers were paid the lowest Rs 3.7 a month. Although the presence of women among the labourers has been noted earlier, in the last two decades of the eighteenth century a strikingly large number of them were employed by the Dutch Company. The line that divides compulsion and industriousness involved in people's motivation to work is often indistinguishable. No matter where the initial stimulation came from, the women's large presence in the labour market and in the textile industry was a conscious effort to contribute to their families' income so as to improve their standard of living. It is, however, not surprising that women received lower wages than their men counterparts in the same category of labour.

The figures in the Appendix represent wages that the Dutch Company paid to artisans and labourers. We do not know if these were paid directly to them or through intermediaries. In the latter case, the actual wage received by the worker would have been less than that in the table. We certainly know that the sailors recruited by the Dutch Company at Surat were paid a monthly gross salary of Rs 6 (6 stivers or one-fifth of a rupee per day). The mode of payment, as practised in Surat, was as follows. At the time of recruitment and upon arrival on board a ship, five months' salary plus a bequest (*vermaking*) to the value of Rs 12 (salary for two months) was paid in advance. Thus of Rs 42 paid, the *soldijboekhouder* kept Rs 2 as his perk and Rs 8 was the commission of the brokers (*zielverkopers*). Thus, the sailors actually received a little more than three quarters of the gross salary.[65] The remaining five months' salary was paid at Batavia. In the second year again, the salary for a maximum of eight months was paid at Batavia. The two-month bequest, as in the first year, was paid to the families of those who were alive and in the service of the Company. The salary for the remaining two months was withheld by the Company and was due on the return of sailors to Surat. In the third year too the sailors were entitled to not more than eight months' salary at Batavia and on their return they were paid for the remaining four months plus two months' salary of the second year. At Batavia, only two-thirds of the salary per month was paid and the remaining was due at Surat on their return after the completion of

[64] *See* Table of comparative wages in Appendix 2.

[65] Out of Rs 42 paid in advance, Rs 10 (about 25 per cent) were pocketed by jobbers and *sodijboekhouders* and only Rs 32 actually went to the sailors (VOC 3576, Resoluties, Surat, 9 Dec. 1779, f. 107r).

service.[66] This unique practice of part payment here and part there gave rise to disputes at the final settlement of accounts at Surat.[67] In case of desertion the salary would be forfeited to the Company.

The *sarangs* were paid a monthly salary of Rs 15 and *tandels* got Rs 12 a month. It is not clear if brokers had a share in the salaries of these two as well. Possibly, these were experienced sailors and being locally influential could on their own recruit sailors on their own to form groups. In such cases, they assumed the functions of a contact person for both sailors and brokers or even the actual employers. Individual sailors who were directly recruited could be assigned to any *sarang* and *tandel* by the brokers in consultation with the *soldijboekhouder*. Whereas in Surat the brokers were the recipients of salaries from the Company, at Batavia payments were made to their *sarangs* and *tandels* who were then responsible for distributing the money among sailors or their families. This mode of indirect payment sometimes gave rise to abuses. There are allusions in our sources to the rapacious behaviour of some *sarangs* and *tandels* who sometimes deprived the sailors of their actual salaries.[68]

Our knowledge of the living standard of the sailors is limited. A comparison with European sailors' salaries and contracts is nevertheless useful. As in Europe, sailors in Asia were recruited by the Dutch Company for a term of three years. In the case of European sailors this period was exclusive of the time spent during the voyage to Asia. The salary that the Company paid to sailors in Asia corresponded on the whole to the salary paid to the European sailors serving in Asia. Whereas the former were paid Rs 6 per month the latter got about eight to ten guilders (roughly Rs 5 ½ to 6 2/3).[69] The young European sailors (*jongens*) in the service of the Dutch Company in Asia were paid even less whereas soldiers (*soldaten*) received a monthly salary of Rs 6.[70] The major difference between Asian and European sailors was the absence of upward mobility in rank for the former whereas many European sailors in Asia could sooner or later move upward in the hierarchy.[71]

In terms of money wages, the artisans and workers in other sectors were fairly well paid. The skill premium is well reflected in the wage disparity and the master artisans were well-remunerated. We do not know how skills were acquired. It was more a matter of heredity and convention that certain families excelled in certain crafts. The skill, such as the familiarity with various types and qualities of

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[66] VOC 3490, Directeur en Raad van Surat aan GG&R, 5 April 1777, f. 32r; VOC 3576, Directeur en Raad van Surat aan GG&R, 31 Dec. 1780, f. 61r-v.

[67] In Bengal and other places the mode of remuneration was rather simple. The brokers received only two months salaries and for the remaining months sailors were paid their full salaries in Batavia (VOC 3670, Resoluties, Surat, 26 Nov. 1784, ff. 20r-v, 21v; VOC 3727, Directeur en Raad van Surat aan GG&R, 5 Jan. 1787, ff. 92v-93r)

[68] They sometimes did not pay what was due to sailors and cheated them instead by simply providing some clothing and a turban (VOC 3576, Resoluties, Surat, 9 Dec. 1779, f. 107r).

[69] Lequin, 'Personeel van de VOC', Bijlage 7, 425-539.

[70] '*Jongens'* and '*soldaten'* were usually paid a monthly salary of 5 and 9 florins respectively (ibid.).

[71] J. R. Bruijn, 'Career Patterns', in *"Those Emblems of Hell"?*, 31-33. This is evident from the career overview of a large number of VOC personnel in Asia (Lequin, 'Personeel van de VOC', Bijlage 7, 423-539). It is possible, however, that some of them rose to the position of *tandel* and *sarang* in due course during their maritime career.

wood,[72] measurements, designing the frame and shape of the intended product, as well as the ability to lead a team of assistants towards finishing the tasks, could be acquired through a training and apprenticeship with a master carpenter. The artisan's expertise in producing fine quality goods determined, to a large extent, his reputation and consequently, the demand for his services. He also had to invest some capital in obtaining tools to work with. Ordinary labourers simply rendered physical labour and usually worked with tools provided by the master artisan or the employer.

The labourers subsisted on ordinary grain produced in abundance in Gujarat and the wages or salaries they received were sufficient for their households' requirements. The money wages of many categories of workers went up in the second half of the century (see Appendix 2). Since the prices of grain and other consumer goods remained by and large stable, any rise in money income meant a higher real income and greater purchasing power. It is not possible to determine what proportion of earnings was spent on the consumption of miscellaneous goods from the market. A rare insight into a worker's household in Bengal and its monthly expenditure indicates that a family of three women, one child and two working men with an average earning of Rs 9, had a good living that enabled them to purchase in addition to staple food items, some clothes and shoes, betel nuts, tobacco, spices, *ghee* (clarified butter) and sweetmeats.[73] By analogy it can be inferred that with the households' comparatively higher earnings, a labourer's family in Surat must have lived relatively comfortably. It might be argued from the large-scale import and sale of sugar and other commodities that their earnings helped spur demand for these commodities. The greatest anxiety, however, was that they had to save a part of their earnings for unforeseen expenses and for times when there was no work especially in the rainy season. A majority could not save and had to have recourse to borrowing from local moneylenders. As for many peasants, the artisan's indebtedness was a bane and many of them, as in the case of sailors, descended to servitude losing thereby their freedom to enjoy their earnings.

The ethnic and gender composition of the labour force in Surat is quite interesting. Although we have no firm evidence of an exclusive identification of any profession with people of a particular caste or sub-caste, there were nevertheless professions in which a certain caste or sub-caste was dominant. Carpenters and smiths were predominantly Hindus and Parsis whereas those involved in house building, sailmaking and sailing were largely Muslims. If the appointment of some master artisans was made out of the consideration that they would have great influence among their fellow professionals of possibly the same social background as their own, it might be construed that these professions were dominated by the people belonging to a particular caste or sub-caste.[74] This was not, however, to the total exclusion of others. This is evident from numerous lists of people in the service of the English

[72] Surat, being a major centre of shipbuilding, had a wide range of variety in wood and also a well developed and sophisticated carpentry trade. For a detailed report on Surat's wood *see* (HRB 826, Berigt wegens de Souratse Hout-Werken (Report on Surat's wooden-work, written for Jan Schreuder), C. L. Senff, Surat, 1750, pp. 1-43).

[73] Home Misc. 420, First Statistical Report on Judicial System and Police, Fort William, Calcutta, 1798, pp. 326-7.

[74] Thus Rahiman, a Muslim, served the Company at Surat for more than 20 years as the head bricklayer, whereas Kirparam, a Hindu, served as the master carpenter (FRS 74, Proceedings, Surat, p. 549).

and the Dutch companies at Surat.[75] The labourers were pragmatic in their approach to work. They showed no inhibition about responding to any job opportunity. This is most clearly exemplified in the case of sailors. Since the sailors recruited by the companies were known as 'Muslim sailors', the brokers were misled by this term and thought that only Muslims could be recruited for this job. As there were many non-Muslims in Surat who were willing to be recruited as sailors, they were given a fake Muslim name and brought to serve the Dutch Company's ships.[76]

Local navies and maritime proletariat

The local merchant fleet of Surat and the several armed navies of Gujarat also generated enormous employment opportunities. The growing numbers of so-called pirates in the Gulf of Cambay as well as at Bassein, and further to the south of Bombay, gave employment to a large number of people of the littoral. The Maratha fleet at Bassein had a good number of ships and small vessels that required the services of a large group of people both skilled and unskilled to carry on naval activities. The fleet that attacked the Dutch ship the *Huijgewaard* in 1746 consisted of a three-masted ship, three two-masted *grabs* and nine *galbets* manned by a total of 2,400 sailors.[77] The other groups involved in maritime violence in the Gulf of Cambay, such as the Sultanpuris, Kolis, and Ballimoras also maintained fleets consisting of a variety of different kinds of vessels.

A large part of coastal Kathiawar and Kachh was infested with groups of predators. The Nawab of Junagarh and the Sidis of Jaffarabad maintained fleets that cruised in the Gulf of Cambay where they captured several small merchant vessels sailing under English protection. In 1800, the fleet of the Nawab took over a boat under English colours laden with 143 bales of cotton (worth Rs 10,000) while the Sidis captured eighteen horses belonging to the English Company.[78] These small fleets seem to have offered some job opportunities to the people of that region. Their survival depended on the fortunes they accumulated either from either forcibly extracting tribute from merchant ships for allowing them to sail within their territory or simply plundering them. They not only maintained themselves but also offered a part of the swag to the local chiefs. They especially had to guard their interests in view of the fluid political situation in which control of the tiny ports and localities kept shifting from one chief to another. These predatory fleets were also a defence mechanism and a weapon available to protect the chief's interests. In 1790, the Bania *mahajans* of Bhavanagar protested against the English Company's agent and brokers buying bullocks/cattle for the Surat market. When

[75] Ibid., pp. 521-3, 541-2 , 545, 549-50.

[76] VOC 3670, Resoluties, Surat, 14 Dec. 1784, ff. 30^{v}-32^{r}; VOC 3670, Directeur en Raad van Surat aan GG&R, 16 Jan. 1785, ff. 81^{r}-90^{r}.

[77] VOC 2679, Directeur en Raad van Surat aan GG&R, 30 Jan. 1746, pp. 7-21.

[78] FRS 79, Proceedings, Surat, 3 March 1800, p. 108.

the *mahajans* failed to prevail upon the latter, they allegedly persuaded the Kolis to attack the Company's returning fleet.[79]

Although characterised as pirates, these mariners' activities were not simply acts of violence or lawless piracy, but deep-rooted in economic and political processes articulated and expressed through maritime violence. The huge investment in building and maintaining ships, recruiting people and obtaining legitimacy from their nearby chiefs by periodically paying them tribute could be sustained only through a large flow of income that predation ensured. These predators had a network of markets where they sold the ships and merchandise they captured.[80] The economic dimension thus assumes considerable significance.[81] A majority of subaltern groups that toiled on these ships came from a poor families and the lure of earning a livelihood in this way was strong. We do not know how exactly the crews were remunerated. They may have been paid a salary like any other maritime worker, but it may not be totally out of the question that they shared in the spoils of the vessels they took. From the profiles of some of the seamen captured by the English towards the end of the century, it appears that they were employed by shipowners to man the vessels and were possibly paid a salary. In many respects their use of violence to further their ends puts them in the same category as the European companies that depended, to a large degree, on the combination of commerce and military power.

Service sector

The Maratha policy of farming out its share of land revenue to potential entrepreneurs increased the number of intermediaries in Gujarat. This was so because the leaseholders or revenue farmers, being travelling merchants or otherwise unable to be present on the location, delegated their responsibilities to their subordinates. Many enterprising merchants ventured into this field and conducted most of this business through their representatives. When the English took control of the revenue of the interior and worked out the mechanism of collection, Dhanjishah Manjishah showed his keenness to be appointed as the head of the revenue.[82] A large number of people got involved as intermediaries in this process of revenue collection.

How the mid-century political configurations in Gujarat expanded the service sector is best illustrated by the example of Surat. When the English and Marathas claimed a part of the revenue of

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[79] FRS 79, Proceedings, surat, 21 June 1800, pp. 421-3.

[80] One of the more effective weapons for the English to suppress this 'evil' was to get the Maratha chief to order his port authorities to prohibit the sale of captured goods at their ports (FRS 78, Consultations at Surat, 26 July 1799, pp. 419-36).

[81] This dimension is fairly well explored in the study of piracy in the Atlantic world. *See*, David J. Starkey, 'Pirates and Markets', in Lewis R. Fischer (ed.), *Research in Maritime History, no., 7, The Market for Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Newfoundland, 1994); J. L. Anderson, 'Piracy and World History: An Economic Perspective on Maritime Predation', *Journal of World History*, 6/2 (1995); Anderson, 'Piracy in the Eastern Sea', 1-3.

[82] FRS 59, Proceedings, Surat, 31 July 1781, pp. 201-2.

Surat, they had to reorganise the system. They did not trust the local Mughal administration which had been solely responsible for the management of customs at Surat and so they placed their representatives with their respective administrative staffs at the customhouse to ensure they received their share of the customs. The *furza* under the control of the Nawab was managed by a large staff consisting of officers, accountants, clerks, peons and a large number of ordinary labourers employed to carry out numerous miscellaneous tasks such as opening and weighing the bales and guarding the stores and the city gates. The *darogha-i furza* (superintendent of imperial customs), the *darogha-i khushki* (superintendent of excise), the *munshi* (accountant), and the *jamadar* (leader of a band of soldiers) were assisted by a large administrative staff of varying designations. They all received a monthly salary in rupees which varied from person to person in accordance with their position in the hierarchy.

All merchandise belonging to the English merchants or to other merchants under the Company's protection was valued and duties were charged at the *latty*. This meant that the staff that managed the *furza* had to be replicated at the *latty*. In 1796, the total number of local employees of the English Company at the latter place was thirty-two with a total monthly salary of Rs 353.[83] In addition, they had to place a number of employees at the *furza* because the Company was entitled to receive a third of the customs proceeds. In the same year, the number of local employees of the Company at the *furza* was forty-one with a total monthly salary amounting to Rs 258, 2 anna and 66 paisa.[84] Among the employees were some fairly well-paid clerks and officers such as *parvu* and inspectors. At the *latty*, for example, there was a head *parvu*, Hari Chand, with a monthly salary of Rs 45. There were four other *parvus* of which one received Rs 35, another Rs 25, and the remaining two Rs 15 a month each.[85] The inspector at the *latty*, Manikji Pestonji, received Rs 50 a month as his salary. At the *furza*, Malari Samji, the head *parvu*, had a salary of Rs 41 and Vithoba Pilaji, the second *parvu*, received Rs 25 while the inspector Mian Saheb got Rs 30 a month. Govindbhai who collected the Company's share of the customs, received Rs 50 a month.

The English Company also employed a number of local people in its various other establishments. The Purser of the Marine employed *parvus*, clerks, sailors and peons to discharge his responsibilities. In 1796, there were at least twenty-six employees attached to this office with a total monthly salary of Rs 250.[86] The office of the Civil Paymaster and Agent for Building and Repairs employed a number of persons for account keeping and disbursing salaries, an overseer, master carpenters and bricklayers, and a few others to muster workmen and supervise their work and payments. In total there were fourteen persons employed with a total salary of Rs 176 per month. The head *parvu*, Keshav, responsible for writing the accounts, was paid a monthly salary of Rs 40 whereas Dayaram, a *parvu*

[83] FRS 74, Proceedings, Surat, 7 May 1796, pp. 521-3.

[84] Ibid., p. 545.

[85] Ibid., p. 521.

[86] Ibid., pp. 541-42. This included a head *parvu* with a monthly salary of Rs 45, a second *parvu* with Rs 30, a third with Rs 25, and a master carpenter who was also paid Rs 30 a month (ibid.).

writing a monthly account, received Rs 30. They were employed on a permanent basis as many of them are reported to have served in their respective capacities for several decades.[87]

The Marathas also placed a number of persons at the *furza* in order to ensure that they received their third of the revenue at Surat. We do not know the strength of the office of the Maratha *chauthia* stationed at the *furza*. Apparently it consisted of a staff comprising some accountants, a cashier, and a few peons. Each of the Peshwa's and Gaikwar's *chauthias* also maintained thirty to forty armed soldiers in the city to carry out their responsibilities. The total strength including the servants of the *chauthias* came to about 200 men together.[88] The intermediate social groups such as merchants and scribes as well as the subaltern group, in this case the urban poor, benefited from this triplication of revenue offices as well as the creation of minor offices in other establishments in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Conclusion

The data presented above indicate the significance of intermediary and subaltern groups in the political economy of Gujarat in the eighteenth century and demonstrates the varying trajectories each of them took. The textile manufacturers were perhaps more privileged than others since they were often in a good bargaining position in view of the constant growth in Euro-Asian demand for cotton and textiles. Their relative position in the economy remained by and large unaffected by the changes in the balance of political power in Gujarat. The Maratha state in Gujarat and the erstwhile Mughal state in Surat showed no particular interest in intensifying control over the economy. The English Company was limited in its ability to pursue any vigorous commercial policy that pushed either merchants or producers into a subordinate position. The commodity and labour markets functioned rather smoothly in Gujarat throughout the eighteenth century. The penetration of merchant capital in production processes, through the system of advances, was a bulwark against the influence of 'state mercantilism'. The data also debunk the notion of artisan's professional immobility, often attributed to the caste and other ideological factors. While some castes like the Khatris and Kunbis continued to play a dominant role in Surat's textile industry, there were new groups as well that took up weaving as their profession.

Surat's labour market possessed features of a dynamic market institution with the freedom of employment of labour and fair wages. No major employers could exert undue pressure on any category of labour by arbitrarily reducing wages. The role of intermediaries or brokers was quite instrumental in the functioning of the labour market. They acted as surety for the payment of wages and ensured fair treatment from the employers. In the case of disputes between sailors' families and the Dutch

[87] Janardhan, overseer, thus served the Company in that capacity for 35 years, Bhukandas Mehta for 34 year, Shambhudas, shroff, Coverji and Devji, peon, for 32 years, Kalyan and Yaran, head builders, for 30 years (ibid., pp. 549-50).

[88] The Marathas wanted to keep a troop of 400 armed men in Surat to which the Nawab did not agree. For the details concerning the points of dispute between the two, *see* FRS 64, Proceedings, Surat, 10 Jan. 1786, pp. 14-29.

Company, the *zielverkopers* were often the spokesmen for sailors. Like the system of advances in the textile industry, the intermediaries in the labour market invested their capital in providing means of subsistence to the families from which sailors were recruited. The penetration of merchant capital in the labour market incapacitated the English to subdue and exploit the artisans and labourers.

The smooth functioning of the markets and the relatively higher wages in Gujarat entailed a large flow of income into the society. Their high wages contributed to the growth of local demand for consumer goods. In the present state of our knowledge, it is not possible to locate an 'industrious revolution' in eighteenth-century Gujarat. The circumstantial evidence, however, indicates that the activities and services of the groups discussed above and their monetary gains had some implications for the society's consumption behaviour. From the data presented above, it may well be construed that the society of Surat and probably elsewhere in Gujarat, was vibrant and that, thanks to the widespread circulation of money, people's propensity to consume goods like sugar grew in the second half of the eighteenth century. The large-scale import and sale of these commodities in Gujarat by the Dutch and other European companies and private traders, as we will see in chapter four and five, was possible because of the growing demand for these goods and because the market remained open for all merchants and producers. The proliferation of intermediate groups in Surat is a major development of this period. The large number of petty officials with good salaries together with an even larger number of merchants, entrepreneurs, and revenue farmers formed a social cluster that may be described as an emerging middle class. With substantial means and an assured income on a permanent or quasi-permanent basis, this group contributed to the rise in the demand for a variety of imports.

It may also be argued that the large amount of money circulating in Gujarat was invested in consumption rather than in state building or state mercantilism. This distinguishes Gujarat from other parts of the subcontinent where military fiscal states siphoned off a large part of surplus resources in order to improve their coercive powers. In Gujarat where money flowed through relatively stable market institutions, coercion as a state weapon for the control of the economy was of little relevance. Whereas the state received its share in the form of revenues from land and customs and income from the mint, peasants and producers and merchants were free to reap the benefits of the market and invest their earnings in consumption of spices, pepper, sugar and many other imports.