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historical
explorations



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Empires, Religion & Trade

The *Mughals, the Portuguese and the Indian Ocean: Changing imageries of maritime India* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2013 Pp 234) is a new book authored by Pius Malekandathil, professor of history at JNU, but whose career as historian has taken him through the Goa University.

The Indian Ocean became the meeting point of two emerging empires in the early 16th century: the Mughal and the Portuguese empires, both different in their nature and objectives. While the Mughals were the dominant land power in the Indian subcontinent, the Portuguese dominated the coastal waters and the sea lanes. They influenced each other's fortunes and of the region as a whole.

Pius Malekandathil presents us a collection of ten of his published essays, using the Indian Ocean, Mughals and Portuguese as a connecting thread, sewing together the land-centred activities and maritime developments of the period and the region. While five essays concentrate on the economy and politics of the Mughals, the other five delve into socio-economic processes of maritime India.

The opening chapter focuses on Akbar's well-known interest in religious dialogue which led him to invite Jesuits from Goa as a strategy to track the Portuguese power centre. Political and commercial interests were

never far from these exchanges of overtly religious nature.

The chapter "Fishing the pearl and the soul" introduces the Marakkars attacking the Portuguese private traders along the pearl fishery coast. The Portuguese intervened to protect the exploited native Paravas, whose leader João de Cruz convinced the King of Travancore of the advantage of being a Christian to get horses from the Portuguese. The conversion of nearly half a lakh natives to Christianity left a profound impact upon society and politics of the region.

Goa, as the headquarters of the Portuguese Estado da Índia, occupied an important place in the maritime history of that time. The chapter 'City in metaphor', surveys two centuries of Goan history since it was taken over by the Portuguese in 1510 from Adil Shah. By 1530 it became the administrative and commercial hub of the Portuguese empire in Asia, witnessing large scale urbanization that saw various social and religious mechanisms that were aimed at refurbishing its commercial fortunes. 'Golden Goa', 'Rome of the East' are two better known metaphors. St Francis Xavier was also drafted for the mission of saving the declining empire.

In "Trading networks and region formation" we get to know about the formation of South India as a region during 1500-1750. It analyses the integration

of land and marine zones in trade. The focus is on the inland trading activities rather than on maritime commerce. This chapter contributes to understanding how southern India gained a larger identity that surpassed smaller linguistic and cultural identities. It was the new trading activities and their impact on politics that made this possible. The Portuguese arrival enhanced this ongoing process (that was present since the 3rd century as studied in chapters 5 and 6) through its trade networks linking south India with eastern Mediterranean and African markets.

Chapter 7 takes us into understanding the interface of coast and interior, illustrating the trade exchanges between coastal northern Konkan and the Mughal world. The weakening of the Portuguese control by the Dutch and the English had permitted native traders to have a share in trade by establishing direct contacts with production centres in the hinterland. The banias of Diu had become the main suppliers of quality textiles of Gujarat to East Africa in the late 17th century.

Varthamanapusthakam, a travel narrative of a round-trip undertaken by Thomas Paremakkel from his native place to Rome via Lisbon is the subject of analysis in chapter 8. It is presented as a voice of dissent and criticism of the Portuguese *Padroado* domination of the In-

dian christians. The author recognises it as a seed of Indian nationalism defending the rule of the Indian Church by Indians. The author sees in the Pinto conspiracy of Goa a parallel contemporary trend. He sees in both, an influence of the American congregationalist churches to throw off the colonial yoke of the English.

In "Trade, religion and politics," the author deals with the religious processes that caused large scale migration of catholics into the city of Calcutta. There is an analyses of how the English were able to break the *Padroado* control by negotiating with the Rome controlled *Propaganda Fide*. The Portuguese had developed an informal trading network served by the Augustinians belonging to the *Padroado*.

In the closing chapter, "Ruralization and ethnic mutation," the late 18th century saw a major shift in Portuguese trade practices due to other powers taking over. There was a shift to ruralization as illustrated in the new conquests of Goa. Trade continued to be vibrant, though in a different format, with private traders having an important share. Many Luso-Indians turned Anglo-Indians under a more favourable English dispensation.

Pius Malekandathil has woven well the story of the mutual impact of religion and trade in the interaction of empires in India in the early modern age.