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HARNAI - ONE OF THE LEADING ANCIENT PORT & TRADE CENTRES IN KONKAN



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Abstract: Most of India's trade with the western countries was carried through the port towns situated on the west coast. So the contribution of these port towns is major in the maritime trade. At the same time the role played by Inland emporiums is also equally important because the commodities which were exported were obtained through these centers.

Keywords: Ancient Port , Inland emporiums , Jain Literature , Geography .

INTRODUCTION:

As far as KONKAN is concerned, we are rather fortunate to have different types of sources giving information about the different port-towns, Inland emporium, as well as industrial city. The literary sources like the MAHABHARATA, RAMAYANA, The Buddhist & Jain Literature, Prakrit works & several other literary works of the later period through light on the subject. Another type of literary sources are the accounts of foreigners. In these sources, the Greek Accounts are the most important because the Greek writers written their accounts on the basis of contemporary information. Among the Greek writers, besides the accounts of Pliny, Arrian as well as Herodotus, the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea & Ptolemy's Geography are worth mentioning. These were written by persons who had knowledge of the contemporary trade and trade centers.² According to these sources the Harnai was the one of the prominent trade center and ports in Konkan.

The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea mentions a port named as Aurnobos. This has not been satisfactorily identified, but according to Bombay Gazetteer, is represented by Malvan, a taluka headquarters and a port in the Sindhudurg district.⁴ This view however does not seem to be convincing because there is no phonetical similarity between these two names. It has been stated that the present name Malvan might have been derived from the word 'Mahavan' and since 'Vana' or 'Mahavana' is represented by another word 'Aranya', it might have been formerly known as 'Aranyavaha' and Aurnobos was probably its Greek form.⁵ There is hardly any authentic factor in this observation to make it acceptable on the basis of logic. The identification of Aurnobos is therefore still an open subject Malvan's identification with this place name is further contradicted in the Bombay Gazetteer itself which has equated it with another port and trading centre mentioned in the Greeks accounts as Melizigerus. Therefore the search for the modern equivalent of Aurnobos will have to be made

elsewhere. As phonetical similarity is concerned which is the only means left, Arnala in Thane district seems to be nearer to Aurnobos; Arnala is an island and a port but in spite of its affinity with Aurnobos, it cannot be identified with it because Arnala lies to the north of Sopara, and according to the description of the Greek sources, Aurnobos was somewhere in South Konkan.

The only alternative to Aurnobos as per its geographical location in the Greek accounts is Harnai, about two miles south of Anjarla port, Ten miles west of Dapoli town and fifteen miles north of Dabhol in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra.⁷ This equation fits on the basis of phonetical similarity as well as other grounds also. As mentioned in the Bombay Gazetteer, Harnai is one of the nine prominent ports on the Ratnagiri coast.⁸ In 1872 Harnai had a population of 6193 souls. It is situated on a small rocky bay which is used as a shelter for coasting craft. Under the Maratha Power, it was the headquarters of a subdivision and British had used it as a military base. The place is connected with the Satara and Kolhapur regions through Khed and the Ambivle Pass.¹⁰

Harnai is surrounded by several places of historical importance. To its north is the well known island fortress of Suvarnadurga. The other forts such as Kanakadurga, Fatehgad and Goa fort are located to the other sides. Besides these, there is an island rock which commands the Bay of Harnai. There are several temples of the medieval period on this island such as the temple of Maulidhar, Kamaleshwar etc.¹¹ An important fact about Harnai is that the port is still flourishing. Therefore on the basis of available sources it can be said that Aurnobos is equivalent only with Harnai in Dapoli Taluka of Ratnagiri district.

Harnai - One Of The Leading Ancient Port & Trade Centres In Konkan

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