

## ***INTRODUCTION.***

THE Konkan is now held to include all the land which lies between the Western Gháts and the Indian Ocean, from the latitude of Daman on the north to that of Terekhol, on the Goa frontier, on the south. This tract is about 320 miles in length, with a varying breadth of thirty to sixty miles, and is divided into the British districts of Thána Kolába and Ratnágiri, and the Native States of Jawhár Janjira and Sávantvadi.<sup>1</sup> The Pant Sacihiv of Bhor in Poona has also a group of villages below the Gháts.

The word Konkan is of Indian origin and of considerable antiquity, but its meaning as the name of a country is not obvious and has never been satisfactorily explained, although various interpretations of it have been given. The district known under the name appears to have had very different limits at different periods. The seven Konkans of Hindu mythology are mentioned in a Hindu history of Kashmir, and are said by Professor, H. H. Wilson<sup>2</sup> to have included nearly the whole of the west coast of India. Grant Duff<sup>3</sup> considered the Konkan to extend along the coast from the Tápti to Sadáshivgad, and inland as far as the open plains of the Dakhañ, and he thus included in it part of both Gujarát and Kánara, and of the country above the Gháts. This latter he called Konkan Ghát-mátha as opposed to Tal-Konkan or the lowlands: and he inferred that the Musalmáns were the first who limited the name to the low country.<sup>4</sup> Ferishta<sup>5</sup> also speaks of the Konkan under the name of Tal-Ghát, and Khafi Khán calls it Tal-Konkan. This inclusion of the hilly district above and near the edge of the Gháts is very reasonable : for any one who passes from west to east will see that the country immediately above and immediately below the Gháts is of exactly the same character, although so different in elevation, while it is a few miles further east that the great bare plains which characterise the Dakhan begin. This narrow district above the Gháts is made up of the *Mávals*, the *Khorás*, and the *Murhás*, but it should be stated that neither the name Konkan-Ghát-Mátha,

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<sup>1</sup> As the Sávantvádi state has always been closely connected with Kolhápur, the main part of its history must be looked for in the account of Kolhápur and not in this work.

<sup>2</sup> Asiatic Rescarehes, XV. 47.

<sup>3</sup> History, 3.

<sup>4</sup> History, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Briggs, II. 338.

nor the meaning of the words describing its divisions is now generally known.<sup>1</sup> As opposed to this extended interpretation of the Konkan, Bird states that according to Sanskrit writers the Konkan stretched only from Devgad to Sadáshivgad (that is a distance altogether of only about ninety miles), from the Tápti to Devgad being Abhir, or the country of the shepherds : that the divisions of Abhir were Berbera or Marátha from the Tápti to Bassein, Virát from Bassein to Bánkot, and Kirát from Bánkot to Devgad.<sup>2</sup> It is curious that the limits thus assigned to the provinces of Virát, Kirát, and Konkan should exactly coincide with those generally given for the districts of the Parbus, Bráhmans, and Shenvis respectively.

Whatever the old signification of the word may have been, the name Konkan is now used in the sense first mentioned, and the modera division of the district is into North and South Konkan, meaning the parts north and south of Bombay,<sup>3</sup> the boundary between the North and South Konkan is, however, sometimes considered to be the Sávitri river, which divides the Habshi's territory from Ratnágiri, as, for some years after the English conquest, the district of the North Konkan included the sub-divisions as far south as the Sávitri.

Of this district it may be said generally that the parts near the coast are fertile, highly cultivated, and populous, and the inland parts rocky and rugged, not much favoured by nature nor improved by man. Compared with other parts of India the climate is moist, the rainfall being very heavy, and hot winds but little felt. Although enervating it is much more equable than that of the Dakhan: and the district, especially the southern part, may be called decidedly healthy. North of Bombay the coast is low and sandy, containing in many places great expanses of salt swamp, the rivers few and shallow, and the harbours insignificant. South of Bombay the coast is bold with a line of hills often bordering the sea, never receding more than two or three miles from it; there are many navigable rivers and commodious harbours, and in most parts deep water near the shore. At various places along the coast are small rocky islands, generally within a quarter of a mile of the mainland, and which

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<sup>1</sup> The meaning of *Mával*, *Khora*, and *Murha* has been thus explained to the writer; The *Murhas* are the comparatively level parts of the Ghát country found at the top; the *Khorás* the narrow gorges and ravines (*Khora* being similarly used throughout the Konkan) stretching towards the bottom; and the *Mavals* (the word meaning west) the lowest slopes of the hills extending quite into the Konkan.

<sup>2</sup>History of Gujarát, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Grant Duff, 168.

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were in earlier times, and especially under the Maráthás, fortified and highly valued. Such are Arnála, Kolába, Dánda-Rájápur, and Suvarndurg. At Málvan, besides one or two islands of this sort, there are a great number of smaller rocks and reefs, and the whole sea between that port and the Vengurla rocks (formerly called by the Portuguese Ilheos Queimados, and thence shown in old English maps under the name of 'The burnt rocks')<sup>1</sup> is made dangerous by rocks of all sorts and sizes. Passing inland, the North Konkan is less rugged, and contains far more arable land though a thinner population than the South Konkan, which is, speaking generally, a rocky plateau slightly elevated, and from want of soil exceedingly sterile. But it is intersected by many great rivers and arms of the sea, and the valleys through which these and their tributary streams flow, partly make up by their fertility for the barrenness of the surrounding plateaux. The North Konkan is still in most parts well wooded, and in the coast districts the palmyra and the date palm spring up spontaneously in every direction. Parts of the Southern Konkan are also well covered with trees, though, from the nature of the soil, many parts are bare. On this part of the coast neither palmyra nor date tree is seen, but their place is better supplied by great groves of cocoanut trees planted along all the sandy parts of the coast and the banks of the creeks. The villages throughout the Konkan are almost invariably shaded with trees, and wherever there is room enough the houses stand in their own compounds, while in many of the inland districts they are found in scattered hamlets, several of which go to make up a village.

"The Konkan in early times seems to have been a thinly inhabited forest, from which character it has even now but partially emerged."<sup>2</sup> The last remark is at the present day true of part of the North Konkan only, the South possessing a population very thick compared with its arable area. It may be considered certain, however, that the whole was to a comparatively late period a district " where beasts with man divided empire claimed." The population Elphinstone considers to have been always Marátha,<sup>3</sup> but there is a great difference between the inhabitants of the northern and those of the southern half. In the latter the population is purely Marátha, and the castes are few and very exactly defined ; but in the north there are large tribes more or less aboriginal, several somewhat

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<sup>1</sup> From their colour and ruggedness. De la Valle, III. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Elphinstone, 220.

<sup>3</sup> Elphinstone 220.

mixed castes, and, except for comparatively recent settlers, a total absence of pure Maráthás and Bráhmans. The whole tract is agricultural, the largest town having little over 14,000 inhabitants, Until the accession of the British Government the population had always a distinctly warlike character, and the South Konkan still supplies so great a number of recruits to the Bombay Army, that there are as many military pensioners in this district as in the whole of the rest of the Presidency. Besides this, all castes of the South Konkan are much more in the habit of seeking their living abroad than the natives of other parts, though they almost invariably return home to end their days. Both coast and interior are remarkable for the number of forts, so that it is little exaggeration to say that in some parts every rock and promontory, mountain and hill, were fortified. These forts are now all in ruins, but the beauty of the creeks and hills and valleys remains, and in many cases the forts themselves

" As stately seem but lovelier far  
Than in the panoply of war."

Though the Konkan can scarcely be called historically famous, its long coast line and convenient harbours, together with its comparative nearness to the Arabian coast, made it known to the earliest travellers, while the natural strength of the country and the character of its inhabitants gave it in later days much greater importance than its wealth or extent would have justified. The Buddhists and after them the Bráhmans chose Sálsette for one of their greatest monastic establishments, and in other parts of the Konkan their cave temples are remarkable. The descendants of immigrant Pársis Jews Abyssinians and probably Arabs are still found in considerable numbers. The Musalmáns had two or three famous marts on this coast, and when the Portuguese began to make settlements in India the coast of the North Konkan was one of their early acquisitions; and in the South Konkan, factories of the English Dutch and French were established early in the seventeenth century. A little later the great founder of the Marátha empire chose a Konkan hill-fort as his capital. And when, after two or three generations, the pure Marátha dynasty lost its power, the Konkani Bráhmans better known as Konkanasths or Chitpavans inherited it and extended the Marátha conquests over the greatest part of India. Thus, though the Konkan has never been more than a province of some inland kingdom, it has many famous associations. And if, as geographically it does, the island of Bombay be considered

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to belong to it, the Konkan may be said to possess also one of the greatest centres of modern commerce. But the history of Bombay does not come within the scope of this memoir, and it must be admitted that the Konkan generally has for the last hundred years lost the greater part of such importance as it formerly had, and, except for its nearness to Bombay, would be even less regarded than it is. The Thána district has, indeed, benefited by both the railways which end at Bombay, and roads run through almost every part of it. But it is only within the last few years that roads fit for wheeled vehicles have been commenced in any of the districts south of Bombay, and many parts of the south, as well as the whole of the Jawhár and Janjira states, are still without cart roads. The Gháts separate the Konkan like a wall from the great plains of the Dakhan, and in the whole length of these mountains there are but eight cart roads leading from the Dakhan to the coast, and of these the two principal have been to some extent superseded by the railways that run close to them. In fact, none of the influences which have spread wealth over the rest of the Presidency in the last few years have affected the Konkan, except as regards a comparatively small part of the northern half. The interest of the country must depend therefore on the beauty of its scenery, its past history, and the character of its inhabitants and in these respects it need not fear comparison with the more favoured and celebrated provinces of India.

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*Note 1.*—Owing to the Konkan, though geographically so distinct, having been from the earliest times divided, and its various parts attached first to one kingdom and then to another, no history of it either by a Native or European author is known to exist. This accounts for the great number of references to the works of historians and travellers which will be found in this short sketch.

*Note 2.*—In the Second Section (Antiquities and Traditions) great additions have been made to Mr. Nairne's narrative for which he is not responsible. These refer in some cases to discoveries made since Mr. Nairne left India.

