

## CHAPTER IV

### KOLIS: A FRINGE CATEGORY

While the focus till now has been on reviewing the disintegration of Mughal Imperial authority and the rise of new polities, the *Nawabs*, it is important to also pay some attention to the 'less' prominent categories who figure numerously in the political order, in some sort of an undefined and incongruous form. Allusion is being made here to the *kolis* who recurrently appear in the political history of medieval Gujarat.

Reference to them loosely spans a wide timeframe approximately starting from the early medieval period to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Interestingly, though the *kolis* settlements are found in different parts of Gujarat, they are not one composite people or grouping. Moreover, the nature of their presence is varied. They appear multifarious as predatory tribes, marauders, mercenary soldiers, freebooters. In Ali Muhammad Khan's *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, they appear as *peshkashi zamindars*, and insurgents acting either on their own or in alliance with more defined and powerful categories like rival nobles. In coastal areas, piracy was their major preoccupation. The *kolis* were quite a ferocious and formidable lot and a recurring theme in the region's historical narrative was their recalcitrance, which was responded with military chastisement and exaction of *peshkash*, with promises and sureties of refraining from creating disturbances by the Imperial officials. However, these commitments were habitually a fleeting affair.

During the eighteenth century, despite their not so prominent status, the presence of *kolis* is numerously manifold, particularly with ambition being so rampant in the wake of the collapse of Mughal Imperial authority. While the more prominent political categories like the big

*zamindars* and Mughal nobles worked towards establishing their autonomous or independent authority, undefined or less prominent categories like the *kolis* sought new lines of support and patronage within the emerging political order, which included the Marathas, the *Nawabs*, besides the clan based chieftains, and the English.

It is relevant to point out that the disintegration of the Mughal Empire marked the disbandment of mercenary militia enlisted in the Imperial army, which redirected themselves, seeking a space in the emerging political order. Important components of mercenary militia included the *Kasbatis*, the Arab *Jamadars*, Sindhis, Afghans, and they find a frequent mention in the political narrative of the eighteenth century. The role of the Arab *jamadars* and *Kasbatis* is particularly significant in relation to the establishment of *Nawabi* regimes, both on the mainland and in peninsular Gujarat. These mercenary elements played a vital and decisive role, as military primacy was fundamentally integral to establishing and consolidating political authority. Their presence is particularly important in relation to the *Nawabi* at Junagadh.

Ali Muhammad Khan makes an insightful reference to the vicissitudes of the *Kasbatis* in the changing times stating that “Soldiers lived in large numbers in the city (Ahmedabad), on the other bank of the Sabar and *qasbas*. They became the source of resistance against the *kolis* in this very region in thorny places and ravines. They attacked villages, drove away cattle, escorted *nazims*, took responsibility of collecting *peshkash* from *zamindars* on a small salary, they got enlisted as recruits in the army for a few days, ..... Thus they maintained themselves. Most of them lived on fodder and grains of their fields. There were wars and battles especially with the Marathas in other *subas*. They did not accept service there. Now there remained no name of them. In course of time,

they got extinct due to unemployment, confiscation of their fields, by massacre and plunder. Those who were left were apparently the needy and they took to spinning like women and maid servants".<sup>524</sup> Alongside, the above mentioned categories, the *kolis* also increasingly appear as mercenaries during this period. Their services were often sought by the Marathas, the *suba nazims*, the *Nawabs* and rival nobles in the actualization of their ambitions.

A survey of some important references pertaining to the *kolis* and their manifold activities in different parts of Gujarat during the eighteenth century may be insightful and has been attempted here.

The *kolis* were known for their predatory character<sup>525</sup> and they frequently appear in this role at the port town of Cambay. Alexander Hamilton who visited this city in the early eighteenth century describes the insecure conditions therein stating "Rasspoutes (Rajputs) and Coolies (*kolis*)..... plunder even to the gates of the city, sometimes plundering the city itself". This sort of plunder became so formidable that the governor of Surat who was entrusted the task of chastisement was unable to fulfil the same.<sup>526</sup> The immediate impact of such plundering activities, besides causing loss and damage resulted in the delay or disruption in supplies of yarn from the textile hinterland of Cambay which was to be transported from there to Surat. It may be recalled that Cambay acted as a clearing house between Ahmedabad and Surat.<sup>527</sup> Further, Daniel Innes, the English agent at Cambay, in his letter to Surat Factor records that on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1725; a large number of *grasias* and *kolis* ravaged the areas

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<sup>524</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 580

<sup>525</sup> Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Delhi, 1999, p. 76. An interesting remark on brigandage by Pelsaert is quoted herein, "He (Jahangir) can be regarded as the King of the plains or open roads only, for in many places you can travel only with a strong body of men or on payment of heavy tolls to rebels"

<sup>526</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, ed. William Foster, London 1930, Vol., I, P.

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<sup>527</sup> Aniruddha Ray, p. 35-36

outside the city walls and plundered 10 carts coming from the Portuguese Pol (*mohalla*) of the city near the sea.<sup>528</sup> Similar references to plunder are also recorded during the subsequent decades. Joseph Tieffenthaler, who visited Cambay in January 1751, has made a note of this aspect. Explaining the financial pressures experienced by the Governor (Momin Khan), he records that the Marathas and the *kolis* carried away the products of the surrounding areas which made it very difficult for him to maintain troops.<sup>529</sup>

In a campaign, against the city of Jambusar, a *pargana* in Bharuch *sarkar*, the *koli* chief, Zalim Jalia, figures as an ally of the *Nawab* of Cambay. Under the patronage of the prominent merchant-banker, Nana Ratan, at Jambusar, the local merchants from Surat and Cambay used to bring goods, especially silk cloth in small boats which deprived the *Nawab* at Cambay of the custom revenues accruing from it. To remedy the situation, in 1756 Momin Khan launched an offensive against Jambusar where at a time when the Peshwa's *faujdar* Ganesh Appa was not present. In this campaign, Momin Khan enlisted the support of the *koli* chief Zalim Jalia, of Dehwan, on the promise of sharing the plunder. For five days the combined forces indulged in the plunder of Jambusar.<sup>530</sup> While the purpose of *koli* involvement in this event was plunder as usual, it is noteworthy that they appear as allies of the Cambay *Nawab*.

On another occasion the *koli* settlement, served as a refuge zone for various elements. In 1734, the *nagarsheth* of Ahmedabad, Khushalchand was forced to flee from the city in the wake of the *suba naib nazim* Ratan Singh Bhandari's manoeuvres to undermine him. He was provided refuge

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<sup>528</sup> A. Malet, Historical Narrative of the District of Cambay, Calcutta, 1865, p. 25. (Abbreviated hereafter as HN)

<sup>529</sup> Quoted in Aniruddha Ray, op cit, p. 44 - 45

<sup>530</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 780

for some time by the *kolis* at Vasna in Ahmedabad district, from where he subsequently went to Sorath.<sup>531</sup>

It is noteworthy that *Peshkash* collection from the *zamindars* and more frequently the *koli zamindars* was a military affair. It was a routine practice to lead contingents for assessing and collecting *peshkash* during the harvest time. Wherever revenues were not forthcoming, an offensive was initiated to chastise the rebellious chief and securities were taken for his good behaviour in future. During the first half of the eighteenth century it is important to note that *peshkash* even in the areas surrounding the *suba* capital Ahmedabad was not easily forthcoming which necessitated chastisement and compliance of securities. Areas of *koli* dominance were even more difficult to deal with. In 1738, when Momin Khan the *suba nazim*, entrusted the charge of assessing revenue and collecting *peshkash* to his *naib* Fida-ud-Din Khan, despite submission of securities by the *kolis* for not creating disturbances and to ensure smooth revenue collection in the Sabarmati district, he encountered resistance<sup>532</sup>. During this period, it is recorded that Jawan Mard Khan, the *faujdar* of Patan was forced to seek the assistance of Fida-ud-Din Khan to chastise the *Koli* chief Jama of Kankrej,<sup>533</sup> who had a notorious reputation for rebelling and creating trouble in the villages of Pattan *sarkar*. The rebel was effectively chastised and the troublemakers fled the place.<sup>534</sup> Further, a skirmish is recorded between the Imperial forces and the *kolis* of the *pargana* of Bahial in Ahmedabad *sarkar* in 1740.<sup>535</sup> Around 1741, Fida ud Din Khan accompanied by Zorawar Khan Babi, led a campaign against the *koli* stronghold at Dabhoda, about nine *kos* from Ahmedabad.

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<sup>531</sup> *Ibid*, p.517

<sup>532</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 586

<sup>533</sup> Kankrej was located in the *Pargana Haveli* of Pattan *Sarkar* and had a thana under the jurisdiction of the *faujdar*. *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, Supplement, p. 195

<sup>534</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p.587

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid*, p. 598

The *kolis* tried to resist the Imperial forces for two days with arrows and muskets but eventually were compelled to yield, pay *peshkash* and give securities.<sup>536</sup>

Hereafter, these very *kolis* of Dabhoda figure very prominently and in varied roles at the *suba* capital, Ahmedabad. In 1756, an attempt was initiated by Momin Khan to recapture Ahmedabad from the Marathas<sup>537</sup>, who around this time were busy in the north. Among his important supporters in this project were: Shambhuram, the mercenary military leader, Muhammad Lal, a Rohilla, and Ganga Jat, Sindhis, Arab *jamadars*, Muhamad Rashid Beg, Mir Shamshuddin, Shuur Habshi, and the Qazi of Kadi, besides the *kasbatis* of the town. The *koli* chief of Dabhoda was also invited to collaborate making liberal promises to him. These *kolis* were recruited by Shambhuram at the rate of eight *annas* per horse and two *annas* per footman per day.<sup>538</sup> Consequently, following an offensive which met with little resistance from the Marathas, Ahmedabad was captured on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1756.<sup>539</sup>

The response from the Marathas to these developments was prompt and concerted. They besieged Ahmedabad. The siege was a prolonged affair and lasted for about fifteen months which is indicative of the resolute resistance put up by the Imperial forces.

Once inside the city, the *kolis* were back to their basic preoccupation of loot and plunder, whenever opportunities came by, and these were very frequent. The irony in this situation was that categories which were basically anti-establishment were indulging in refractory activities as a component of the administration, right in the *suba* capital Ahmedabad itself. Ali Muhammad Khan describes the situation thus: “..... *kolis*

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<sup>536</sup>*Ibid*, p.597

<sup>537</sup>Ahmedabad had been under Maratha control since 1753.

<sup>538</sup>*Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p, 795

<sup>539</sup>*Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, 795-800. Also see, Gense and Banaji, I, p. 113

broke open shops of bankers, cloth merchants and houses of people by blows of axes and carry away cash and goodies in bundles..... the *Koli* plunderers returned after conveying pillaged goods and clothes to their respective homes, despite the vigil at the city gates”.<sup>540</sup>

Meanwhile, Momin Khan was seriously hard-pressed for funds which made him resort to the exaction of *biwarah* for the fourth time that became a cause of great distress. The residents “were forced to sell their household goods. Houses of those who had gone out were opened by their relations and street-dwellers in the presence of tax-collectors and other salaried persons. Their cash and goods were sold out. The *kolis* purchased their goods at half the price, sent bundles of them at night and sold them at higher price outside in villages. Hindi records of their ancestors of many years were sold on weight”.<sup>541</sup>

The highest gains during the course of the Maratha siege of the Ahmedabad were made by the *kolis* who lived in at Dabhoda and its nearby villages. It is significant that they chose to align with both the contending parties: the Mughals and the Marathas.

Despite the Maratha siege, the *kolis* managed to maintain supplies to the city but at a great personal risks, which nonetheless made them very wealthy. The profits in these transactions made by the followers of Hari Kotwal, the *koli* chief, were substantial and this generated rivalry among the *kolis* of Dabhoda. The *kolis* of this village were divided into two sections: Kotwalis and Pagis. They appear both, as co-fellows and rivals of each other.<sup>542</sup> When the Kotwalis aligned with the Imperial forces, they became very wealthy, especially on account of plunder and high profits earned in maintaining supplies of essential commodities like food stuffs

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<sup>540</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 799

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid*, p.814

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid*, p.824

and fodder to the city during the siege. This caused jealousy among the Pagi and the other Kotwalis of distant and near villages, and boosted their ambitions to seek similar advantages. They turned to the Marathas who were preoccupied with schemes of recapturing Ahmedabad from the Imperial forces. They started giving securities for not rising in revolts and rebellions and submitted themselves to Sadashiv Ramchandra who had been sent by the Peshwa to recover Ahmedabad. They began to block supplies to the city on an agreement of daily payment from the Marathas which were, however, often secretly conveyed. Profits gained in consequence of conveyance of commissariat were enormous. They soon surpassed the Kotwalis in bringing food stuff and carrying away horses, camels and oxen of the Maratha army. Sometimes they were caught red handed and punished severely. Soon these elements (Pagis) also affiliated themselves to Shambhuram and came with their families in the Bhadra (the fortified Imperial establishment) along with the Kotwalis.<sup>543</sup>

Ali Muhammad Khan in his description of the changed conditions mentions that the place which was the alighting place of the nobles and princes and residence of eminent *amir* was now inhabited by such people. Dressed in pyjamas made of *mashru* and the *kinkhab*, with turbans embroidered with bands of gold and silver, in a style, undreamt of by their forefathers and with golden ornaments on their neck and arms and precious jewels in their ears they used to move about the streets of the city scrutinizing every house with the sinister intent of visiting the same at night.<sup>544</sup> A striking figure among the *kolis* was their chief Hari Kotwal who viewed himself as his patron Shmabhuram's equal.<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> *Ibid*, p. 825

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 824-26

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid*, p. 825



While the *kolis* of Dabhoda and its surrounding areas had become prosperous and pretentious outwardly, they were well aware of the ground realities. In spite of Momin Khan's resort to exactions of *biwarah*, confiscations and fines, the chronic problem of funds remained. The siege could not hold on for long. The mercenary soldiers' salaries were beginning to fall in arrears which eventually induced many of them to resort to desertion. A similar tendency was noticeable among the *kolis* of Dabhoda too. Hari Kotwal, the *koli* chief, left the city on some pretext and the others followed him.<sup>546</sup> In view of these conditions, Damaji invited all the deserters, irrespective of soldiers or non-soldiers to enrol in his contingents.<sup>547</sup> Eventually after a siege which lasted for about fourteen months, in 1758 Ahmedabad passed under Maratha control.

Besides Ahmedabad and Cambay, the role of the *kolis* in the developments relating to fortunes of the *Nawabi* regime at Bharuch is also significant.

In 1754, the Mughal *faujdar* at Bharuch, Nek Alam II, died. He was succeeded by his younger brother Khair Talab Khan, while his son Hamid Khan was forced to seek refuge at Surat. In about three months, the death of Khair Talab Khan marked the commencement of succession disputes at Bharuch. A minor son of the deceased *faujdar* was installed under the regency of Bibi Bholan, a wife or mistress of Nek Alam I. In these circumstances, the dispossessed heir Hamid Khan had to battle his way to assume authority.

During the course of these developments Hamid Khan resided with his brothers and dependents at Miyagam, located about 12 *kurohs* from Bharuch, which was held by the *koli* zamindar Ranmal. This is indicative of the level of trust which Hamid Khan reposed in the *koli* chief. James

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<sup>546</sup> *Ibid*, p. 831

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid*, p. 834

Forbes, the famous official of the English East India Company who was familiar with the area, describes Ramnal stating that “this Hindu chieftain, more than any I ever saw in India reminded me of the ancient patriarchs..... Ranmal Singh was highly esteemed in that province; although not abounding in wealth or possessing large revenue, he was kind and hospitable to strangers”.<sup>548</sup> Incidentally, support of the *kolis* of this locality was also sought by Bibi Bholan. Eventually, Hamid Khan emerged victorious in the military operations that ensued, and assumed authority at Bharuch as the *Nawab*. The support of the *kolis* was indeed crucial in his accession.<sup>549</sup>

Further, when Bharuch was occupied by the English in 1772, *Nawab* Muazziz Khan was forced to flee the city. Initially, he reached Amod, the base of a *girasia* chief, who refused to provide shelter. However, the *koli* Chief of Dehwan, Zalim Jalia in a very chivalrous manner gave him refuge despite threats by Lallubhai, the fugitive *Nawab*'s *diwan*.<sup>550</sup> Quoted below are some verses from Munshi Abbas Ali's Urdu *masnavi*, *Qissa-i-Ghamgin*, which provide insights to the *kolis* in the Mahi Kantha region:

*Hua kya jo koli hun main ai Nawab  
main kanthe ka raja hun samjho ye aap  
Hai dedh lakh kamthi par mera hukm  
mera hukm fere nahin kisko dum*<sup>551</sup>

*Shitaazi se pakwai fir haziri*

<sup>548</sup> James Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs* III, P. 322-23

<sup>549</sup> Details of these developments have been given in the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p.771-776. Also see *Commissariat* II, pp. 520-22

<sup>550</sup> *Qissa I Ghamgin*, Unpublished text. pp. 130-140.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141, 2213-14

*lagaa karne Nawab ki chaakari*  
*Kadhi daal khushk digar rotiyan*  
*thi gehun bajari ki tanik motiyaan*  
*Rakhi haaziri aagu Nawab ke*  
*kahaa fir ki laayak nahin aapke*<sup>552</sup>

The context in these verses is the arrival of the *Nawab* to Dehwan from Amod. The *koli* chief Zalim Jalia, invited the *Nawab* to accept his humble fare. Besides the modest stature of this fringe category, these verses are suggestive of the strong sense of fraternity among the *kolis* of surrounding areas who could be mobilized in times of need. It is quite likely that though, these were different tribes or clans operating independently, they could be mobilized for concerted action if an occasion to this effect arose.

Significantly, the *kolis* were also an important factor during the early phase of Maratha expansion in South Gujarat and even thereafter.<sup>553</sup> It may be pertinent to observe that an important dimension to the Maratha ascendancy in South Gujarat and Baroda, under the leadership of Pilaji, was the support extended by local chiefs like that of Dharampur and Rajpipla, the Bhils and *kolis* besides the Desais of Padra, Chhani and Bhayali in Baroda district.<sup>554</sup> The *kolis* appear both as mercenaries in the Maratha contingents and as freebooters creating diversions during the course of their campaigns. In 1732 when Pilaji was assassinated at the instance of Abhay Singh, the *suba nazim*, the response from the Maratha camp were retaliatory attacks on Ahmedabad in which the *kolis* collaborated as freebooters. Describing these activities, Ali Muhammad

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<sup>552</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141-142, 2224,24,26

<sup>553</sup> Commissariat II, p, 401

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid*, p. 402

Khan states “In short, the Dekhanis during the day and the *kolis* at night were not remiss even for a moment for one week in burgling, carrying and burning”.<sup>555</sup>

Besides South and Central Gujarat, important strongholds of the *kolis* during the eighteenth century were located in the *sarkar* of Patan. In the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* Supplement, the *parganas* of Santulpur, Kankrej have been described as areas inhabited by the *kolis* who paid *peshkash* only by force of arms.<sup>556</sup> Ali Muhammad Khan cites numerous instances of disturbances in the *parganas* of Chunwal, Kheralu, Kankrej, all or which were located in the Pattan *sarkar*. The attitude of the *kolis* chiefs towards the Mughal Imperial authority had always been antagonistic and these areas often served as refuge zones to Mughal rebels. Also importantly, these *kolis* were always in search of alternative supporting linkages. Mention of instances relating to these areas during seventeenth and eighteenth is noteworthy.

In 1605, an uprising of *kolis* is recorded. Rai Gopinath, the son of Raja Todarmal, had been sent to Gujarat by the Emperor to establish order and settle revenue matters which were in a state of chaos. During the course of the military operations, Kalyan Baria, *zamindar* of Bilpar (Bhilpur, perhaps near Mandu) was taken captive. The *kolis* of surrounding areas rallied together and launched an offensive in retaliation in which the Imperial forces suffered heavy losses and were forced to withdraw to Ahmedabad. Shortly thereafter, an offensive was launched to chastise the *zamindar* of Kankrej, a *koli* stronghold in the Pattan *sarkar*, who too was taken captive. Both were subsequently released on payment

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<sup>555</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 507

<sup>556</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* Supplement, p. 198

of considerable amounts and made to give securities to refrain from creating disturbances in future.<sup>557</sup>

Once again during the *nizamat* of Saif Khan (1635-36), reference is made to disturbances by the *koli zamindar* Kahanji, of Chunwal. He was charged with robbing merchant caravans passing by. Around this time, Azam Khan (1636-42) was appointed as the *suba nazim* in place of Saif Khan. When complaints against the *koli* depredations were made to him, he launched an offensive against the rebel, Kahanji, who on being overawed, fled to the *pargana* of Kheralu in Pattan *sarkar*. Eventually, he was forced to yield and return the plundered goods. Further, he was forced to present a *peshkash* of ten thousand Rupees and give a security of not creating disturbances in the future.<sup>558</sup>

Azam Khan's tenure is famous for the chastisement of refractory elements, particularly the *kolis* and *kathis* in peninsular Gujarat. Besides launching military operations against them, he created fortifications and established *thanas* wherever required and cleared jungles which served as hideouts on a large scale. Commenting on his measures, Ali Muhammad Khan, states thus "... when the book is being written (mid eighteenth century), the high and low of Gujarat nickname him Azam, the Udhai. *Udhai* means white ants. These white ants destroy produce wherever they are seen. No miscreant had power from Jalor within jurisdiction of the *suba* of Ahmedabad to the end of *Kathiawar* joining the frontiers of the Jam and Bahara and the sea-coast to oppress and harass the weak"<sup>559</sup>

Despite these measures recalcitrance of the rebellious elements including the *kolis* continued to persist. Shaista Khan, the *suba nazim*'s (1646- 48) petitions to the Emperor reiterates this aspect. This was

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<sup>557</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 163

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid*, p.184

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid*, p. 186-87

despite the fact that he had been appointed with a higher *mansab*, and provided with additional funds to arrange *sibandis* for effectively collecting revenue.<sup>560</sup>

During the second *nizamat* of Shaista Khan, 1652-54, the *koli zamindar*, Kahanji of Chunwal, led numerous plundering raids on the villages of the *pargana haveli* of Ahmedabad, besides the *parganas* of Dholka, Kadi, Jhalawar etc. The *nazim* led the expedition in person and expelled the rebel Kahanji. Eventually to chastise him decisively, the *zamindari* of this place was given to Jagmal Girasia of Sanand, in the *pargana* of Dholka.<sup>561</sup> However, this arrangement was short-lived. When Prince Murad Baksh, was appointed the *suba nazim* (1754-58) Kahanji, the dismissed *zamindar* of Chunwal, sought an opportune moment, and through the mediation of Syed Shaikh Khan, presented himself before the new *nazim*. On furnishing of a reliable security and promising to refrain from creating trouble, he was reinstated to his *zamindari* at Chunwal. His *peshkash* was fixed at Rupees ten thousand.<sup>562</sup>

Despite these compulsive commitments, Chunwal continued to remain a troublesome region even later. The refractory stand of the *zamindars* was habitual and is a recurring theme in the political narrative of Gujarat.

During the war of succession, the fugitive Dara Shikoh was provided refuge and assistance by Kahanji. The *koli* chief personally accompanied him along with his followers and safely reached him to the confines of Kutch. It is significant that in contrast, the Rao of Kutch treated Dara like a virtual stranger, probably wanting no trouble with the new reigning

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<sup>560</sup> *Ibid*, p. 198

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid*, p. 204

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid*, p206

authority.<sup>563</sup> This is particularly surprising. About three months earlier, Dara had been well received by the Kutch ruler, Rao Tamachi (1754-52) and at the request of the Prince, the Rao gave his daughter in marriage to his second son, Siphir Shikoh.<sup>564</sup>

The predaciousness of *kolis* of Chunwal also finds mention in the writings of Bernier, the French physician who traveled through north Gujarat on his way from Surat to Agra.<sup>565</sup>

On a later occasion, when a Baluch adventurer, impersonating as the late Dara Shikoh, resorted to insurgency in the vicinity of the *pargana* of Viramgam, in Ahmedabad *sarkar*, the *kolis* too joined him. Mahabat Khan, the *suba nazim* 1662-68, led the offensive in person and the refractory elements were subjected to severe penalties. An insight to the seriousness of the matter is provided by the issuance of an Imperial order to the *suba nazim*, that *Dud koli* of Chunwal should be chastised decisively. This challenging assignment was entrusted to Sher Khan Babi, who was sanctioned additional troopers for this purpose.<sup>566</sup>

The formidability of the *kolis* is testified in the death of Muhammad Mubariz Khan, the *naib faujdar* of Pattan and the son of Sher Khan Babi in 1695. He was killed during the offensive to chastise the rebels at Sanpra in Pattan *Sarkar*.<sup>567</sup> It is from this juncture that the Babis become increasingly prominent in the province and significantly, Pattan *Sarkar* constituted to remain their mainstay. The members of this clan held offices both at the *pargana* and the *Sarkar* levels herein. Though it is not clearly suggested anywhere, it is perhaps probable that some kind of understanding was gradually arrived at between the Babis and the *kolis* in

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<sup>563</sup> *Ibid*, 216-217

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid*, p. 214-215

<sup>565</sup> F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 88-91

<sup>566</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, 227

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid*, 294

these parts.<sup>568</sup> The Babis continued to enjoy important offices in the challenging Pattan *Sarkar* during the first half of the eighteenth century. It is important to mention that when Balasinor was occupied by the Maratha forces in 1761, *Nawab* Sardar Muhammad Khan Babi (son of Sher Khan Babi, the Junagadh *Nawab*) was able to retrieve his territories from the Marathas with the support of the *kolis* residing therein.<sup>569</sup>

In 1734, the *kolis* appear as allies of Jawan Mard Khan II, *faujdar* at Viramgam, who made an attempt to conquer Idar which had been transferred by the *suba nazim* to his brothers, Anand Singh and Rai Singh. Idar had been a part of Jawan Mard Khan's *jagir*. It is important to note that this campaign against the Rathods was initiated by Jawan Mard Khan Babi in his personal capacity. In this venture, he sought the support of Akraji, the *koli* chief of Katosan, and Amraji, the chief of Ilol Kanra (both these were *peshkashi* areas in the Sabarkantha district)<sup>570</sup> promising them a share in the booty. Meanwhile the Rathods sought help of the Maratha generals, Malhar Rao Holkar and Ranoji Sindhia, who happened to be in the vicinity of Idar. Jawan Mard Khan was compelled to withdraw and make peace with the promise of payment of rupees one lac seventy five thousand. Further along with his brother Zorawar Khan, and *peshkar*, Ajab Singh, his *koli* allies Akraji and Amraji were taken as hostages till the payment was effected.<sup>571</sup>

In the wake of the collapse of Imperial authority, while the plundering activities of the *kolis* were on an increase, their services were sought by the *suba* administration in campaigns and relief operations. During the *nizamat* of Abhay Singh, Ali Muhammad Khan notes that the *kolis* in the vicinity of Ahmedabad were neither chastised nor were

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<sup>568</sup> For details refer to chapter three.

<sup>569</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* p. 992

<sup>570</sup> *Commissariat*, II, P. 449

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid*, p. 519-21



securities taken from them which emboldened them to indulge in brigandage without any fear and apprehension.<sup>572</sup> Further, in the face of the famine conditions in 1732, Ratan Singh Bhandari the *naib nazim* summoned parties of *kolis* from Bhuhan, Hajipur and Tappah Chunwal and ordered them to maintain supplies of food-stuff and fodder to the city.<sup>573</sup>

The *kolis* were also found in certain parts of Peninsular Gujarat. According to Abul Fazl, they were dominant in the environs of the Gir forest near Junagadh.<sup>574</sup> Their chief submitted to the Mughals after the conquest of Junagadh in 1592.<sup>575</sup>

Besides the Gir forests, the *kolis* were concentrated in certain portions of Eastern *Kathiawad*. In view of this being a coastal area, the mainstay of the *kolis* in these areas was piracy. According to the Bombay Gazetteer, the *kolis* were dominant on the east coast of *Kathiawad*. Their important strongholds were Sultanpur and Talaja. Throughout the medieval period these areas served as a base for piracy which proved to be a major hindrance to trade in the Gulf of Cambay. Later these *kolis* were also a menace for the English vessels passing by. It is noteworthy that two expeditions were led against them by the English to end piracy in 1734 and 1771.<sup>576</sup> The latter offensive was launched in collaboration with the Bhavnagar ruler Akherajji, which ended with the expulsion of the *kolis* and the conquest of these areas.<sup>577</sup> Significantly, besides being formidable pirates, these *kolis* were reputed as skilled and daring seamen,

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<sup>572</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 510

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid*, p. 552

<sup>574</sup> Abul Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, Tr. H. S. Jarret, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Corrected and Annotated by Jadunath Sarkar., Calcuta, 1949, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Delhi, 1978, p. 252

<sup>575</sup> A. R. Khan, *Chieftains in the Mughal Empire During the Reign of Akbar*, Simla, 1977, p. 45

<sup>576</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. IX Part I Gujarat Population, Hindus*, Bombay, 1901, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Haryana, 1988, p. 237

<sup>577</sup> *Statistical Account of Bhavnagar Being the Bhavnagar Contribution to the Kathiawar Portion of the Bombay Gazetteer*, J.W. Watson, Revised ed. Bombay, 1883, p. 27. It is noted herein that these were the Baria Kolis.

and in subsequent times they constituted the best and most trusted component of every Indian crew that sailed under the British Flag.<sup>578</sup>

Certain pertinent issues emanate from the above discussion. Who were these *kolis*? What were their antecedents? While they were scattered in different parts of Gujarat they do not appear to be a homogenous group. Rather, they seem to be different clan-based settlements, dominant in specific areas that were held hereditarily by their chiefs. In generic terms, these groupings were classed as *kolis*. The question then is: what does the generic term *koli* denote? Both in stature and material terms they appear to be modest.

It is significant that during the Mughal period, the stand taken by these chiefs was primarily anti-establishment, and tribute exaction from them was infrequently a military affair. Though they had been integrated in the Mughal administrative structure, as minor *peshkashi* chiefs, they had to be invariably chastised, both during the heydays of the Empire and more so in the phase of Imperial crisis.

Ali Muhammad Khan provides important details on the landholdings and revenue rights enjoyed by the *kolis* during the Mughal and pre-Mughal period. At the end of the passage he also describes the changing conditions of the *kolis* during his times.

He observes: "During the regime (*nizamat*) of the Khan-i-Azam (1588-92), the *desais*, *muqaddams* and peasants of most of the *parganas* complained to the Imperial court that the agents of the *nazims* and *jagirdars* were seizing all the revenue (or produce) through (various) cesses. Rajputs, *kolis* and Muslims created disturbance because of their appropriation and mowed down standing crops of cultivators. This would cause the ruin of the peasantry and fall in the revenues of the government.

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<sup>578</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, Vol. IX, *op. cit.*, p. 241

A royal order was therefore issued to the effect that the *diwan* of the *suba* should collect half the revenue with consultation of the *desais* and *muqaddams*..... Land of the fourth part should be separately shown as belonging to the *kolis* (and others). No revenue should be charged on it. A reliable security should be taken for this purpose.....In olden times the country of Gujarat was in the possession of the Rajputs and *kolis* ..... During the time of the Sultans of Gujarat, when the power and strength of the Muslims was fully established, owing to the rebelliousness of these people (the Rajputs and *kolis*), they (Sultans) devoted themselves to punishing and chastising them. Helpless, they had no choice but to offer submission and obedience. Entreating (to be forgiven), they accepted (the obligations of) service and payment of revenue. A fourth part of their native places and villages, which (portion) was called *banth* in the dialect of Gujarat, was settled upon them, while the (other) three-fourths of it called *talpad*, was attached to the government. The big *zamindars* who held many *parganas* and had their *taalluqa* settled upon them on condition of their joining service and maintaining troops in the same way as by *jagir* that is everyone was to be present with his troops of horse and foot, according to his resources and strength. So that for a long time, *kolis* and Rajputs who held *banth* in various villages performed watch and ward duty in their respective places and enjoyed the possession of their *banth*, giving on each crop something by way of *salami* to the *jagirdar*. In the course of time some of the Rajputs and *kolis* and others who had acquired a little strength, raised disturbances in the *ryoti* villages far and near, lifting cattle and killing the cultivators at the time of sowing operations. The peasants of these places were thus compelled to gratify them by giving them, in some places a fixed amount of money every year, or one or two cultivable fields. This exaction is known as *giras* and

*udal*. This practice has become well established in this country and it is increased very much now on account of weakness of *nazims*. In short, there seems to have been, in the province of Gujarat, shortage of places in the *parganas* on account of which most of the Rajputs, *kolis* and Muslims had no residences or *giras* and *udal*.”<sup>579</sup>

The passage further goes on to explaining the compulsions which engendered brigandage and insurgency. It seems that during the Mughal era, shortage of land in *parganas* and absence of *giras* and *udal*, forced these categories to indulge in brigandage and refractory activities whenever opportunities came by in the form of weak *nazims*. Though the establishment of *thanas*<sup>580</sup> maintained some order, in the first half of the eighteenth century the *koli* presence seems to be more pervasive and challenging. It is stated that “.....Now *thana-fortresses* have been demolished gradually in most of the places due to want of discipline. They themselves settled down as residents in certain places and are seizing the whole of the *talpad* or a portion under the government but in addition they occupy and claim most of the places villages by way of *giras*.”<sup>581</sup>

The latter part of this passage indicates that the *kolis* were trying to expand their landholdings. However, it may be noted that with the weakening of the Imperial authority in the province, while attempts at assuming autonomy were rampant, Marathas – Peshwas and Gaekwads were steadily gaining ground. Also aspirants such as the *nazims*, *faujdar*s, *mtuasaddis*, their *naibs*, *desais*, small and big *zamindars*, and the Marathas did not leave much sope for fringe elements like *kolis*. They were compelled to become brigands and subsequently take to alternative

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<sup>579</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, pp. 149-150

<sup>580</sup> It may be relevant to recall the nizamat of Azam Khan (*udhai*) 1636-42

<sup>581</sup> *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, p. 150

means of sustenance in the nineteenth century when the British regime dealt with them decisively.<sup>582</sup>

Their predatory character indicates that their resources were limited, which made them resort to loot and plunder, whenever opportunities came by, either in their individual capacity or in collaboration with others where their services were enlisted.

The description of the *kolis* in the *Qissa-i-Ghamgin*, is suggestive of their marginal or fringe status in both political and material terms. This seems to be valid at least for most of the *kolis* settlements on the mainland. Though the *kolis* were often styled as *Rajas* and *zamindars* and *peshkash* was exacted from them by the *suba* authorities, in their own perception too, a consciousness of their fringe status is in evidence. Yet, they were indeed formidable, well rooted to their area of operations, and continued to be refractory, despite chastisement.

In the Bombay Gazetteer, the term *koli*<sup>583</sup> connoting clansman, clubman, (wielding the club) or boatman denotes the various warring or predatory tribes scattered in different parts of Gujarat and *Kathiawad*. They are often perceived as the aboriginals of the plains akin to the Bhils. Another opinion is that the *kolis* and Rajputs were basically of the same stock.<sup>584</sup> Amongst the different meanings and derivatives of the term *koli* cited in the footnote the most appropriate for the bulk of the *kolis* in Gujarat is *Kola*, signifying a bastard or of half-caste. The generic term

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<sup>582</sup> H. G. Briggs, *The Cities of Gujarashtra*, Bombay, 1949, pp. 235-37; *Bombay Gazetteer*, *Op.cit.*, p. 245 and Commissariat, III, p. 981

<sup>583</sup> In the footnote are important citations on the Kolis. Accordingly, J. Wilson (Aboriginal Tribes) translates Koli as clansman. Mr. Taylor prefers Clubman, derived from the attire of these people who are armed with a heavy babulwood club, about four feet long when on watch. Among the different meanings forwarded for the Koli, the one best suited for the bulk of Kolis in Gujarat is Kola, with the sense of half bastard or half caste, implying loss of caste. Kola is used as half caste in Elliot's History, Vol. II, p. 200. This corresponds with the sense of degradation which is attached to the Kolis in Rajasthan, Tod, *Annals*, II, p. 318. J. M. Campbell, ed., *Bombay Gazetteer* Vol., IX, Part I, *Gujarat Population: Hindus*, Bombay, 1901, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Haryana, 1988, p. 237

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*

*koli* was an attribute ascribed to clans which were relegated to the fringes in certain circumstances. The *kolis* seem to be an evolved category.

According to some of their legends, the antecedents of the *kolis* are located in the entire course of developments when the *Mihira (Mairs)* or *Gujars* came into Gujarat from Sindh in the fifth century. The assumption was that, at this point of time, the plains were controlled by the Bhils who were perceived as Rajputs. These Bhils were displaced by the new arrivals, who subsequently became dominant in the plains of central Gujarat. In certain areas, they mingled with the indigenous people and this intermixture resulted in the loss of caste or the attribution of a half-caste status.<sup>585</sup> The story with which the Parantij (near Ahmedabad) *kolis* explain their origins is that their progenitor was a Rajput who lost caste by taking water from the hands of a Bhil woman.<sup>586</sup> Similar legends abound for different other *koli* settlements in the region which is probably reflective of the appropriation of the 'greater tradition' at some point. Nonetheless, the connection between the *Mairs* and the *kolis* is validated to some extent by the fact that the *Mairs* brought with them the tradition of worship of *Hinglaj Devi*, who figures as an important deity among the Patanvadiya *kolis*.<sup>587</sup>

Further, the details in the Gazetteer suggest that a new phase of displacement and subjugation took place with the arrival of the Turks.<sup>588</sup> Some of the displaced ruling clan chiefs migrated to Gujarat from the north and the east (Rajputana and Malwa). It is likely that some sort of shuffling occurred whereby a portion of the new arrivals intermingled with some of the half-caste or *koli* clans which however resulted in the loss of caste or the status of half caste for the new arrivals (Rajputs).

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<sup>585</sup> *Ibid*, p. 238

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>587</sup> The Patanvadiya were a Koli type, based in the region of Patan in central Gujarat. *Ibid*, p. 241

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid*, p. 238

Traces of a Rajput connection is a recurrent feature among the different *koli* clans in Gujarat.<sup>589</sup> The gazetteer makes reference to the different categories of *kolis* clan and settlements in Gujarat, among which four of the most important are as stated below:

- 1) *Chunvaliyas* also classed as *Jahangriyas*, derive their name from Chunval, a *pargana* in the Pattan *sarkar*, located in the north-east of Viramgam or Jhalawar. The place-name Chunval is either a corruption or derives originally from the term *Chumalis*, meaning fortyfour. Possibly it signified an administrative division comprising of forty four villages. The *Chunvaliya Thakordas*, or landlords, claim to be *Jhala* Rajputs. The *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* references cited earlier indicate that the *kolis* of Chunwal were indeed, the most formidable and so were the Jhalas.

*Khants*, literally meaning borderers, are concentrated in *Kathiawad* and Rewa Kantha. Their chiefs, who are known by the title of *Mer*, claim to be descended from a Bhati Rajput, One of their chief, Dhandh Khant, was supposed to be the son of Sonang Mer (the legendary chief of the *Mairs* and *kolis*) and is said to have conquered Dhandhuka which was long held by his descendants. He is also supposed to have conquered Dhandhalpur in the Panchal in *Kathiawad*. Another chief, Patal Khant, is supposed to have conquered Petlad. The most famous leader of the *Khant kolis* was Jesa or Jesing, who assisted Muhammad Tughluq in capturing Junagadh (1350) from Ra Khengar. In return for their help, the Sultan is said to have bestowed on the *Khants*, the hill of Girnar

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<sup>589</sup> The following is a list of the Rajput Koli Thakordas or lordlings in North Gujarat: the Solankis of Bhankoda, Chaniar, Dekavada and Kukvav in Chunwal; the Makwanas of Katosan, Jhunuvara and Punar; the Rathods of Ghanti and Vaghpur on the Bankd of Sabarmati; the Dabhis of Ghodasar in the Charotar; the Chauhans of Amliara in the Mahi Kantha; and the Vaghelas of Kankrej. *Bombay Gazetteer*, op. cit, p. 238

and the twenty four villages of Bilkha chovisi<sup>590</sup> The Gazetteer also quotes some verses popular among these *kolis* which testify the above details.<sup>591</sup> It is however significant that a hundred and fifty years later, when Mahmud Begada, the Sultan of Gujarat conquered Junagadh (1472) he found the *Khants* dwelling in Girnar.<sup>592</sup> Abul Fazl also mentions that the *kolis* were dominant in the environs of the Gir forest.<sup>593</sup> In the latter part of the eighteenth century, reference is made to a rebel leader in these parts who is named Mansa *Khant*.<sup>594</sup> It is quite likely that these *kolis* were residing in these areas since a long time.

- 3) *Patanvadiyas* as the name suggests were people hailing from Patan, in central Gujarat. They are also classed as *Kahodas* or *Axes* on account of their rudeness. They claim to be descendants of a Solanki Rajput chief who married the daughter of a Bhil chief at Patan. These *kolis* operated as mercenaries, plunderers and most importantly, as pirates.
- 4) *Talabdas*, according to *koli* tradition was a corruption of the term *talpati* that is landlord. They are also referred as *Dharalas* or swordsmen claiming descent from a Parmar Rajput, of Dharanagari in Malwa who married the daughter of a *Bhil* chief in Gujarat to secure his support.

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<sup>590</sup> The *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* Supplement refers to *Pargana* Bilkha located about 8 kos southeast of Junagadh in the Sorath *Sarkar*. *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* Supplement, p.265

<sup>591</sup> Patoji Bhati has the following verse on the marriage of a Khant maiden with a Khatri and in another verse the achievements of the Koli chiefs are commemorated:

“Jag kahe Jesalmer, atalibal utat parno Bhil padmini”

The world famous Jeaslmer of exceeding strength married the Khant.

“Dhande Dhandhuko liyo, Patale lidho Pelad;

Jasiye Gadh Juno liyo, Maheri Mehar Ran”

Dhand took Dhandhuka, Patal took Pelad (Pelad is Petlad) and Jasiye took the ancient fortress (in earlier references Junagadh is also called Gadh Juno). Quoted from *Bombay Gazetteer*, p. 240

<sup>592</sup> Skandar bin Muhammad (Manjhu), *Mirat-i-Ahmadi-i-Sikandari*, Eng. Tr. Sir Edward Clive Bayley titled, *Local Muhammadan Dynasties – Gujarat*, 1886. Ed. Nagendra Singh, Delhi, 1970, p. 181

<sup>593</sup> *Ain-i-Akbari*, II, p. 252

<sup>594</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, p. 26



Besides these four categories other important clans were *Barias*, *Dalvadis*, *Gediyas*, *Shials* and *Valakiyas* which were scattered in different parts of Gujarat. Among these the *Shials* and *Valakiyas* enjoyed a high reputation for piracy. It is quite surprising that Ali Muhammad Khan does not refer to this classification anywhere. In the chronicle these clans are classed as *kolis* and their settlement areas are stated.

These details on the antecedents of the *kolis* are drawn from the compilation and documentation of their oral traditions, by the British, during the course of the nineteenth century. However it is important to note that legends and oral traditions suffer from the problem of chronology and interpolations which makes it somewhat problematic and call for caution and corroboration.

It is quite likely that the *kolis* were basically different clans which wielded political power over areas located both on the mainland and in peninsular Gujarat<sup>595</sup> which came to be classed as *kolis* at different points of time. The antecedents of the *kolis* in Gujarat could be traced way back to the early medieval period when lineages deriving from the *Gurjar-Pratihara* combine became dominant. In the political context, what can be elicited from the oral traditions of the different *koli* clans is the process of establishment, consolidation and expansion initiated by the *Maitrakas* (*Mihir* clan) rulers (490-770). It may be noted that their origins being foreign or indigenous is a matter of controversy.<sup>596</sup> However, it is significant that one of the rulers of this dynasty claimed the title of *Chakravarti*.<sup>597</sup> It is quite likely that during the course of state formation,

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<sup>595</sup> This is suggested in terms like *chumalis* (lit. forty-four) and *chovisi* (lit. twenty-four). Probably these signified the number of villages under the authority of ruling clans.

<sup>596</sup> Commissariat, I, p. xxxviii- xxxix

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.* This is also indicative of tendency towards Ksatriyization. Refer to B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, Oxford, 1994, p. 210

the erstwhile ruling components got dispossessed, subjugated and in some cases, marginalized and pushed to the fringes.

Further, during the course of the Solanki era (942-1242), while efforts were initiated towards consolidation and expansion of political authority, it is probable that despite resistance, certain power centres were once again subjugated. Amongst the subjugated clans, it is likely that a pattern of displacement and dispossession gained momentum. While the more politically strategic clans persisted in the new set up as autonomous, or semi autonomous chiefs, the remaining were pushed to the fringes or probably persisted in an undefined form enjoying some space.

A similar process may have been in operation on the mainland during the Sultanate period when Gujarat became a province of the Delhi Sultanate (1298-1407). Likewise under the Muzaffarids (1407-1573) too a pattern of pervasive subjugation and displacement of clans was operative both on the mainland, in the peninsula, and in Kutch. During this period it is likely some of the erstwhile ruling clans or clans-men were marginalized. An explanation to the war-loving and predatory character of the *kolis* lies in their undefined and marginalized status.

There is an important social dimension too in relation to the *kolis* status. In societal terms, the *kolis* appear to be an evolved category emanating from 'deviant' acts or serious omissions of caste stipulations like intermixture of Rajput and Bhil or *kolis* through matrimonial ties. Oral traditions of the *kolis* bear a testimony to this aspect as mentioned earlier in connection with the *Patanvadiyas*, the *Khants* and the *Talabdas*. In some instances, partaking of food by Rajputs with Bhils amounted to loss of caste and thus the *koli* status. The *Talabda kolis* or *Dharalas* explain their origins in terms of this rationale. They claim to be Rajputs at a certain point of time. During the reign of Ahmad Shah (Gujarat Sultan

1411-42) when an attempt was made to convert them to Islam they sought the protection of Asa Bhil. On the Sultan's demand for handing over of these Rajputs, Asa refused explaining that they were his followers and caste people. They however had to partake of the Bhil's food and thus became *kolis*.<sup>598</sup> Similar apprehensions of loss of caste are also find mention in the *Ras Mala*.<sup>599</sup> This tradition holds some validity by virtue of the fact, that it was basically under the Muzaffarids that large scale effective subjugation of Rajput or indigenous clan settlements was successfully affected in which religious conversion was an important instrument that was invoked to consolidate political authority in conquered areas.<sup>600</sup>

It is significant that during the early nineteenth century, disturbances created by fringe categories like *kolis* and *Kathis* was dealt with decisively by the English which compelled them to search for alternative means of sustenance like cultivation. This changeover had an important ideological dimension in the form of the *Swaminarayan* sect. This religious order was established by a religious reformer Sahjanand Swami (1780-1830) who belonged to the village of Chhapaiya close to Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh. In 1799 he arrived at Loj, a small village near Junagadh and became a disciple of Ramanand, the leader of the *Ramanandi* sect, an offshoot of *Vaishnavate* doctrines of Ramanuja. On the death of Ramanand in 1802, Sahjanand carried on with his ideas which gradually developed into a full-fledged institution drawing into its fold followers from different classes and castes in society. He forbade the worship of idols and exhorted his disciples to worship only one God: Narayan. He is said to have a miraculous impact on his disciples and followers putting

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<sup>598</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, op. cit, p. 243

<sup>599</sup> Alexander Kinloch Forbes, *Ras Mala*, Ed. H.G. Rawlinson, Oxford, 1924, I, pp. 344-357.

<sup>600</sup> The narration of campaigns for expansion under the Muzaffarids are discussed at length in M. S. Commissariat, I

them into a trance and making them visualize in this mesmerized state an identity between Sahajanad and Krishna. He boldly denounced the irregularities pertaining to the mode of worship and moral degradation that had crept into the *vaishnavite* faith led by Brahman priests called *Goswami* or *Gosainji Maharajs* and advocated greater emphasis on purity of conduct and high standards of morality. Commenting on the efforts of Sahjanand, H. G. Briggs states that “the genius of Sahajanad Swami was not confined to the rigid establishment of Hindu worship in its virgin integrity - it was also directed to the recovery of thousands of those unfortunate men to be found throughout the province whose means of sustenance hitherto were equally lawless and precarious”.<sup>601</sup> Prominent among his followers were the lawless *kolis* on the mainland and the *kathis* in the peninsula who were being forced to shift from loot and plunder to other professions like cultivation due to the more decisive measures of the British regime in dealing with them.<sup>602</sup>

The long standing presence of this category, despite consecutive change of regimes from the Solankis to the Delhi Sultans to the Sultanate of Gujarat, and finally the Mughals is indeed fascinating. Further their role in relation to the Imperial breakdown and the rise of the *Nawabis* and the Marathas is important.

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<sup>601</sup> H. G. Briggs, *The Cities of Gujarashtra* Bombay, 1849, pp. 235-37

<sup>602</sup> Commissariat III, P. 981; Bombay Gazetteer, pp. 240-41