

**Neglected and Forgotten:  
Indo-European Defense Architecture in North Konkan (1510 - 1818 A.D.)  
with special reference to the Vasai and Revdanda Forts**

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The coastal geographical area of North Konkan, especially of present Thane, Mumbai Sub-Urban, Mumbai districts in Maharashtra that we see today was quite different five hundred years ago, when the Portuguese, the first Europeans to establish their colony in India, set foot in this region. We know of the beauty of this coastal area in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries through travelogues written in these periods, and this region is beautiful still.

The Portuguese had to wage bloody wars with regional dynasties like those in Gujarat, Vijapur and Ahemadnagar Sultanates during the beginning of the sixteenth century to fulfill their commercial and imperialistic ambitions in Western India, although it was primarily in North Konkan where they could secure their biggest territorial possession in India which comprised of the coastal region stretching from Daman to Korlai (presently in Raigad district). This Portuguese-controlled-territory was known as the Provincia do Norte, or Province of the North, with its capital at Vasai (Bacaim: Portuguese/Bassein: English). The Portuguese acquired Vasai in 1534 from the Gujarat Sultanate and annexed Daman and surrounding region to the Province of the North in 1559.

After a series of diplomatic and militaristic exchanges between the Portuguese and the British, the British were able to take control of some portions of Bombay islands in 1667 AD. This process was eventually completed by 1692 AD. With this transfer of power, the region from Colaba in the south to Sion (presently in Mumbai District) in the north were under British control whereas the island of Karanja or Uran, Revdanda, Korlai in Raigad district in the southeast and south of the Bombay islands, Salsette Island and the coastal area north of it up to Daman remained in the Portuguese control. In 1739 AD, after a long and arduous military campaign, the Province of the North (except a few settlements like Diu, Daman, Revdanda and Korlai) fell to the Marathas led by Chimaji Appa. However, Maratha supremacy in North Konkan did not last long, as by 1775 AD, the British took Salsette Island (including Versova and Vasai), Karanja and Hog Island under their control after defeating the Marathas in a series of battles in 1774 AD. In 1818 AD, the region ruled by Peshwa came under British control and they became the ultimate masters of this region. It is important to note that these events were directly and indirectly responsible for contributing to Mumbai's modern identity as a 'mega hub' and the 'Financial Capital of India'.

Controlling the area's defense was one of the most important aspects for securing the territories under control during the Medieval period. Both the Portuguese and the British safeguarded the Bombay and Salsette islands in particular and North Konkan in general with a range of defense structures. Churches, too, were heavily armed during the Portuguese period. Thus, a pattern of interdependency and hierarchy can be observed while examining this range of Indo-European defense structures in North Konkan. Once the region officially came under the British rule in 1818 AD, the utility of most of these defense structures was diminished and some of them were even destroyed by them.

The talk will discuss the defense and settlement pattern of the early phase (1498 - 1818) of the European occupation in North Konkan. As an attempt to initiate studies in the domain of archaeology of European expansion/colonial archaeology in India, the presentation will discuss field findings of the author in the light of textual sources for reconstructing the defense and settlement pattern of the region as they existed during the late Medieval period.

Today, very few Indo-European monuments and sites in North Konkan are protected either by Archaeological Survey of India or Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra while majority of them being unprotected. Besides, due to large scale urbanism in this region, the existence of most of this invaluable cultural heritage has come under threat, barring a few Centrally Protected and State Protected Monuments. It is important to know that Thane, Mumbai Sub-Urban, Mumbai and Raigad districts have witnessed one of the earliest European activities during the late medieval period and have one of the earliest Indo-European sites and monuments in the country. Though their cultural, historical and archaeological importance is immense, very few of them are subjected to rigorous and analytic study by combining material remains and contemporary textual sources. It is pertinent to highlight that although the later phase (especially of the second half of 19th century and 20th century) of British occupation in North Konkan, especially in Mumbai district, has received wide attention from researchers from various backgrounds, the earliest phase of Portuguese and British occupation in North Konkan has attracted negligible attention from archaeologists. Therefore, the talk will focus on the holistic synthesis of material remains and textual sources.