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24

Trade Routes and Sacred Landscapes: Processes of Religio-Cultural Assimilation

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Abstract
This paper seeks to examine the socio-economic dimensions of community formation and their relationship with trade routes in western coastal and adjoining hinterland regions. Drawing on traditional sources, the study examines the migration of communities associated with King Bimba, who are understood to have moved along established trade corridors while carrying their social structures, occupational groups, and religious traditions. The presence of goddesses and deities such as Champavati, Jeevdani, Kalkai Mata, and their related forms is analysed as an integral component of this migratory process, reflecting the interconnectedness of religion, economy, and community identity. This paper argues that these movements were closely linked to mercantile activity, with merchants and other key socio-economic actors playing a significant role in establishing new settlements along ghats, trade routes, and nodal points of exchange. Travelling considerable distances, these communities contributed to the development of religious landscapes and cultural practices in regions that would later emerge as Mahim Bimbasthana and other settlements where they settled. Further emphasis is placed on the spatial proximity of these communities to centres of trade and circulation, and the paper examines evidence indicating such associations. The study also investigates processes of cultural assimilation and continuity, highlighting how communities preserved and transmitted their cultural and religious traditions even amidst changing religious affiliations and socio-political contexts. Trade routes are treated as critical frameworks through which a wide spectrum of socio-cultural and economic activities of the region can be understood. Finally, the paper engages with the Jeevdani Mahatmya to explore its connections with trade, socio-cultural and economic activity, and cultural exchange, thereby situating religious narratives within broader historical patterns of mobility and interactions.
Keywords*: Socio-cultural, religious assimilations, archaeological sites, goddesses, sister goddesses, Mount Mary/Mari Aai, Champavati, trade, communities.*

Introduction

The story of *Bimba* and his chronology is complex, to say the least. His historicity has also been debated by scholars such as Pandit, V.D. Rao, R.C. Dhere and Dahisarkar in their works.[1] But one aspect of his migration is clear: the presence of communities that travelled with him or without him, who are part of modern society and in records like *Mahikavati chi Bakhar or Bimbakhyana*. In which there are precise dates given to the migration of the 66 communities or *Kula's* that are supposed to have been migrated with him. We have the names and identities of these kulas or communities as well as their lineages today. King *Govardhan Bimba* permitted his brother, *Pratap Bimba*, to proceed towards Northern Konkan around the year Shake 1060 or 1138 CE approximately (Rajwade 2013).

From this, we can observe that Bimba was not the first name of Kings during this period; it was their surname, and also that King *Govardhan Bimba* was *the Mandalika* or regional ruler or governor of a state in a larger kingdom, and in our context, that kingdom was of the *Anhilawada Patan Chalukyas*, of which *Govardhan Bimba* was the *Mandalika (*Regional Ruler). The Bimba Family ruled the *Champaner* region of the *Patan Chalukyas*, and when *Pratap Bimba* proceeded towards North Konkan, he was not alone. Seven ministers and an army of 10,000,

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comprising horse riders and foot soldiers, of whom one was the Mahamatya (Prime Minister), who would advise him and be of prime use to Pratap Bimba (Rajwade 2013). Although there are differences of opinion among historians, not only about the historicity of *King Bimba*, but also there are differences in opinion about the entire chronology of Bimba and his rule, there are differences in opinion about the presence of single or multiple rulers from the same or different families (Pandit 2020). According to *'Mahikavatichi Bakhar' or 'Bimbakhyana'*, after successfully conquering North Konkan, Pratap Bimba set up this region's capital at Kelve-Mahim and started to rule from there. His Prime Minister, *Balkrishnarao Somavanshi*, launched another campaign with the authority of the Pratap Bimba King to conquer the rest of the North Konkan up to *Walukeshwar (Walkeshwar) Banganga.* We see his entire conquest highlighted and put forth by V. K. Rajwade in his Book on *Mahikavatichi bakhar (Mahim chi Bakhar)*.[2]

Trade, Communities, Cultural Exchanges, & Assimilation

What is culture? Cultures encompass many aspects of human life, such as shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviours. Cultures often vary by region or location, and they can change and evolve (N. Akshata, B. Stephanie, M. Changiz, 2023). Simply put Extra somatic means of adaptation is called culture. The communities that supposedly migrated with King Bimba to Mumbai or the North Konkan all have cultural traditions, rituals, and specific deities that they brought with them during their migration; thus, they naturally brought their culture with them. We find many such evidences in oral traditions and the *Bakhar* literature, which primarily support this hypothesis. Who were the different communities that migrated from Gujarat to North Konkan? They are the *Somavanshi Kshatriya, Suryavanshi Kshatriya, Seshavanshi Kshatriya, and Pathare Prabhus* primarily. We also see them in the court of Pratap Bimba, namely *Keshvarao Somavanshi, Anandrao Seshavanshi, Gambhirrao Suryavanshi, Purashottamrao Somavanshi, Gangaji Patvardhan, and Pratap Bimba's* Prime Minister *Balkrishnarao Somavanshi* (Rajwade 2013). As discussed earlier, these communities brought with them their deities and oral traditions. We observe that Kalkai Mata is worshipped in the Champaner region of Gujarat and by these communities, specifically the *Somavnshi Kshatriya and the Pathare Prabhu*. One of the most interesting aspects of this goddess is that she is also worshipped in the North Konkan region as *Champavati* or as Mount Mary (Vaidya, 2025). Records say that 66 communities migrated with Pratap Bimba from *Champaner* to the North Konkan. The need to bring these communities along arose from the establishment of a new kingdom and possibly even the expansion of King Govardhan Bimba's kingdom. *Somavanshi Kule 28, Suryavanshi Kule 12, Seshavanshi Kule 9, Panchal Kule 5, Manumaya 2, Silik 3, Trathaka 4, Devadnya 5, Ghodele Kule 7, Gurjaravaishaya Kule 6, Lada 9, Dashalada 2, Visalada 3, Moda 1 and Dashamoda 2* together form the 66 *Kulas*[3], who migrated to settle a new kingdom and along with these communities came the Vaidika, Pandita, *Aacharya Upadhaya, Jotirvidya Purohita, Naik*; these communities also came with *Pratap Bimba* to North Konkan via Paithan[4] (Rajwade 2013).

Now that we have discussed these communities, we will examine their connections to religion, trade, and socio-economic activity. These communities arrived in Mumbai via Paithan after the new regions were already conquered and authority taken from the defeated Kings and regional governors. The Hinterland region around Mumbai and the Ghats that join the coastal regions to the regions above have been in use since the time of Indo-Roman trade and even earlier. These are the routes that have been ingrained in human memory and are naturally in use in the modern period. Cities like Paithan (Prathisthana), Ter (Tagara), Nashik, and Ujjain, and others are all located in the inland regions and are closer to the Western coast of India; ports like Kalyan, Chaul, Sopara, Mumbai, Bharuch (Barygaza) were very important in accessing these inland hubs of trade.

There were two major Inland trade routes, the *Uttarapatha* and *Dakshinapatha*, of which *Uttarapatha*, the major north-south trading route,

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is one of the earliest and is commonly referenced in ancient records. This powerful route connected the Indus Valley to the Gangetic Plains and went all the way to Central Asia and China.[5] *Dakshinapatha* was the Indian Southern trade route, which connected regions like Tamil Nadu with Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and the Arabian Peninsula.[6] These roads facilitated the export of goods like Black pepper, cotton, ivory, and spices, which were highly sought after by traders worldwide (Chahat.D, Preeti.S, 2025). Gujarati merchants have been trading on these routes since the Indo-Roman times, namely from *Bharukkacha* (Barygaza or Bharuch) to Rome and around. We see the presence of Gujarati Merchants even today in cities like Surat, which is a very big Diamond trade hub.

The communities that arrived with *Bimba* also took part in Trade and have been active in the Patan region too. These communities were chosen with careful thought, as new settlements were made and people who would bring up the economy of the regions were needed. According to *Mahikavatichi Bakhar*, People who could preserve the culture, who would be part of the economy, such as traders and merchants, were needed along with religious leaders, as there was a lack of them. That is where we see the migration of the sixty-six clans or communities, and more came from Patan to Mumbai via Paithan. Cultural exchanges are a common feat in constructs like trade, but they are also very important for culture to evolve and not be stagnant. We see these exchanges via the food of these communities, and their historical memory as in oral traditions, and rituals that take place today for the deities which were brought by these communities while migrating, as their religious leaders also came with them, there was no breakage in the continuation of the rituals and or worship of their deities. In the *Bakhar* literature, we clearly see the *Kuladevis* being mentioned as part of their identity, and they are as follows: *Padmavati, Hirabadevi, Kalika, Narayani, Lalita, Yogeshwari, and Kumarika are the Kuladevis* of the 7 ministers who were instrumental in the campaign of *Pratap Bimba*. Out of which we will focus on and take the example of Kalika Mata for our discussion on Cultural Assimilation and cultural exchanges. The groups traditionally believed to have migrated with King *Bimba* include the *Somavanshi kshatriya*, also known as *Pachkalshi*, the *Pathare Prabhus*, the *Chaulakshi,* and others, who are regarded as belonging to the broader *Somavanshi kshatriya* fold. These communities are also associated with the transmission of the Goddess *Kalkai or Kalika Mata*, who later came to be identified with Champavati. The exact period or process through which this transformation in the goddess's identity occurred remains uncertain. Even today, members of the *Pathare Prabhu* Community continue to venerate *Champavati* under the earlier names of *Kalkai or Kalika Mata*.[7] (Vaidya 2025)

An additional noteworthy aspect of this tradition is that *Champavati i*s believed to have been linked to the maternal line rather than the paternal lineage. As a result, it is said that the goddess was symbolically carried southward by the women of the migrating families when they moved toward the Mumbai region. From a historical perspective, the figure of *Champavati* appears to be connected with patterns of Migration and gradual settlement, which took place according to the *Bakhar* literature, to repopulate the region, which was now under their control, with the people who would be and are loyal to the king, as there is little to no clear evidence of her worship before the 11th-12th centuries (Ibid 2025).

From this, we can observe that Migrating families brought deities with them and how years of migration could have gradually changed the identities of the goddess *Kalkai* into *Champavati*, and it's entirely possible that when some of these communities settled in *Champavati (Chaul)*, those who brought with them *Kalkai* became part of Chaul and gradually, as she was in *Champavati*, she also started to be called *Champavati*. Due to the local cultural influence, her assimilation into the local culture resulted in Champavati, although further work is needed on the goddess *Champavati* or *Kalkai*. During the Portuguese period, as mass conversions and inquisitions were common, the deity *Champavati* converted to Mother Mary, as there are many similarities with the rituals that

take place, and both of these deities are motherly in nature. Traditions and culture are not abandoned in Indic cultures it is carried forward, even in terms of assimilation and cultural exchanges. It is incorporated into the newly assimilated religion. It becomes a permanent part of it, as people will worship its rituals and deities, as they have been ingrained in their historical and cultural memory and don't fade away due to their long history.

The traditions surrounding the migration of the *Somvanshi Kshatriya, Suryavanshi Kshatriya & Seshavanshi Kshatriya & Pathare Prabhus*, among others, into North Konkan under King *Govardhan* and *Pratap Bimba*[8] can be meaningfully interpreted through Iravati Karve's Model of social assimilation.[9] Karve argued that Indian society developed historically through the gradual incorporation of incoming groups, who initially preserved distinct clan identities but progressively adapted to the linguistic, religious, and social frameworks of their new regions [10] (Karve, 1961; Karve, 1968). Rather than being rigid from inception, caste society, in her view, evolved as migrating lineages established stable positions within regional hierarchies by adopting local customs while retaining selective markers of ancestry.

The Bimba migration traditions reflect precisely such a process: these communities maintain narratives of northern *Kashtriya* origin and clan-based descent[11], yet their long-term settlement in the North Konkan could have led to the adoption of the Marathi Language, integration into coastal networks, and participation on region specific administrative and occupational roles. The transformation of the goddess *Kalkai or Kalika* into the localised form of *Champavati*[12] further illustrates what Karve described as Cultural adjustment through regional embedding, whereby migrant deities and rituals are reshaped to align with the sacred geography of a new homeland (Karve, 1961). Over time, these groups ceased to be remembered as mobile warrior bands and instead crystallised into endogamous caste communities with Karve's broader thesis that caste formations often represent the settled outcome of earlier processes of migration and assimilation[13] (Karve 1968).

Assimilation and the Socio-economic context

In addition to the processes of social assimilation, patterns of migration in early and early medieval western India were frequently connected with the expansion of trade networks and the establishment of new agrarian-urban centres.[14] Scholars of the peninsular and western Indian history have shown that the movement of ruling lineages, warrior groups, and Brahminical settlers often occurred alongside the relocation of merchants, artisans, and service communities, who together enabled the economic viability of the new settlements (Champakalakshmi, 1996; Gurukkal, 2010). The Konkan coast, including the region later associated with *Mahikavati*, formed part of a long-standing network of maritime and inland routes linking ports such as Sopara and Chaul with the Deccan plateau through the Western ghat passes (Ray 2003). In such a context, it is historically plausible that traditions of elite migration under a figure like King *Bimba's* also reflect the movement of economically functional groups to the consolidation of settlement through agriculture, craft production, and exchange.[15]

While the *Mahikavatichi Bakhar* itself is primarily concerned with political conquest and lineage origins, the later prominence of communities associated with administration, artisanal skills, and temple patronage in the North Konkan region suggests that the growth of these settlements was not purely military in nature.[16] The establishment of stable centres required access to trade routes, surplus production, and systems of redistribution, all of which are widely recognised as drivers of early medieval state formation in India (Champakalakshmi, 1996; Gurukkal, 2010). It is therefore reasonable to interpret the remembered migrations not only as movements of warrior elites but as part of a broader socio-economic process in which control of coastal and ghat-linked corridors encouraged the clustering of merchantile service groups around emerging political centres. Even where direct documentary evidence is lacking, such an interpretation aligns with established models of

how trade, polity, and settlement interacted in early medieval western India (Ray 2003)[17]

The *Jeevdani Mahatmya* provides an important religious narrative that can be read alongside migration and assimilation[18] traditions associated with early settlement in the North Konkan. Rather than presenting the goddess as a singular, fixed entity, the text reflects a layered identity in which *Jeevdani* becomes associated with multiple maternal forms, including *Champavati, Jeevdani*, *Ekvira*, and others. This merging of goddess traditions suggests a process of religious assimilation, in which deities linked to different communities or regions were gradually identified with one another as populations interacted and settled in shared landscapes[19] Such patterns are consistent with broader historical processes in early medieval India, where migrating groups often localised their clan or lineage goddesses by integrating them into pre-existing sacred geographies (Champakalakshmi 1996).

This process closely parallels traditions preserved in the *Mahikavatichi Bakhar*, where migrant communities such as the *Somavanshi Kshatriya*, *Suryavanshi Kshatriya*, and *Pathare Prabhus* are associated with the transmission of *Kalkai or Kalika*, later identified with Champavati. In both textual traditions, the goddess serves as a cultural anchor linking memory of movement with claims to place. The transformation or identification of multiple goddess forms reflects not theological abstraction but the historical layering of community identities. Through such narrative assimilation, migrant and local traditions become intertwined, producing a shared sacred framework that legitimises settlement and belonging.

The storytelling structure of the *Jeevdani Mahatmya* is also significant as a vehicle of historical memory. Like the *Mahikavatichi Bakhar*, it encodes social and spatial integration within narrative form, while the *Bakhar* uses genealogy and conquest to narrate the establishment of political authority, the *Mahatmya* uses divine intervention and sacred geography to situate the goddess within a specific landscape. These different narrative perspectives serve similar functions[20]: both transform processes of migration, settlement, and integration into enduring socio-cultural memory.

Concluding Observations

This study tried to examine how migration, trade networks, and religious traditions together shaped the socio-cultural landscape of North Konkan. Traditions associated with King Bimba and the migration of multiple communities reveal that settlement in the region was not merely political expansion but a process of social transplantation, where occupational groups, ritual specialists, and lineage-based communities established new socio-economic centres along active trade corridors. The persistence of goddess traditions such as *Kalkai & Kalika*, *Champavati, and Jeevdani* demonstrates how religious identities travelled with communities and were gradually localised within the new sacred geographies. These transformations reflect broader historical processes of assimilation as described in Iravati Karve's model, in which migrant groups retained their lineage memory while adapting to the regional linguistic, economic and ritual frameworks.

The *Mahikavatichi Bakhar* and the *Jeevdani Mahatmya*, though different in Genre, function similarly as narrative archives of cultural and historical memory. Through genealogy, conquest, miracle, and sacred landscapes, they encode processes of mobility, settlement, and integration. When read alongside historical patterns of trade and exchange across the Western Ghats and Konkan Coast, these texts reveal how religious storytelling participated in legitimising emerging communities and embedding them within regional socio-economic networks. Thus, migration, trade, and sacred tradition together formed the foundations of enduring cultural identity in early Mumbai and its hinterland regions.

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Notes

1. Pandit Suraj in his book Varsa Mumbaicha, Dahisarkar Sandeep in his book Sri Bimbakhayana and V.D. Rao in his Research paper for IHC.
2. Rajwade, V.K, talks into much detail about the entire series of events that take place before and after King Bimba, he also tries to put forth a chronology of events. Although his historicity has not been substantiated by historical or archaeological evidence, it is difficult to discuss his political and administrative history. So in this paper the focus will be on the communities and their cultural assimilation, trade and religion.
3. In the Mahikavatichi Bakhar there is an entire list of people who migrated to North Konkan with King Bimba from Patan Via Paithan to Mumbai. These Kulas were probably brought to settle newly conquered regions, so that communities could maintain control over them for a long period, as the majority of societal functions would be assumed by communities loyal to King Bimba.
4. These communities went to Paithan first then to Mumbai, when Bimba also came to North Konkan first, he stopped at Paithan for 2 years and then came with additional support, money and rest to Mumbai. As paithan was being ruled by Vikrama Bhouma, a close friend to Govardhan Bimba, they stayed there and then started.
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6. Andaya, B. W. (2017). Seas, oceans and cosmologies in Southeast Asia. Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 48(3), 349–371.
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8. The narrative of King Bimbas' migration and the settlement of elite lineages in Mahikavati is primarily preserved in the Mahikavatichi Bakahar, a Medieval Marathi chronicle and later interpreted in regional historiography.
9. Karve does not discuss the Mahikavati traditions directly; her model is used here as a theoretical framework to interpret patterns of migration and caste formation in western India.
10. See Karve's discussion of the historical layering of caste society and incorporation of diverse ethnic and clan groups into regional social systems.
11. Claims of Kashtriya or high status lineage among migrating groups are widely noted in studies of caste mobility and social legitimation in early medieval India.
12. The identification of Kalkai/Kalika with Champavati is possibly preserved in community oral traditions, temple histories and the process of localisation of migrant deities.
13. This interpretation applies Karve's broader sociological frameworks to a regional historical tradition rather than presenting a direct historical record of events.
14. This interpretation draws on broader historiography of early Indian state formation, where migration, agrarian expansion, and trade are seen as interconnected rather than isolated events.
15. The Mahikavatichi Bakhar does not explicitly describe merchant or artisan migration; this inference is based on comparative historical models of settlement formation in trade linked regions.
16. Evidence for the occupational roles of these communities emerges more clearly in later historical and ethnographic records than in the bakhar itself
17. This argument applies general economic-historical models to the Mahikavati tradition and should therefore be understood as a historically grounded interpretation rather than direct textual evidence.
18. Iravati Karve conceptualised caste and regional society as historically layered formations shaped by migration, intermarriage, and gradual cultural accommodation rather than rigid isolation (Karve,1961).
19. The identification of multiple maternal deities into a single localised form is a well-attested phenomenon in early medieval temple-centred religious development, particularly in regions experiencing agrarian expansion and mobility (Champakalakshmi, 1996)
20. Sacred geography in South Asia often encodes patterns of social and political consolidation through narrative localisation of divine presence (Eck,2012).

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