

# The *Shāhbandar* at Surat in the Mughal Empire<sup>1)</sup>

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## I . Preface

In this paper I will study the position and the functions of the *shāhbandar* (hereafter shahbandar) at Surat in the Mughal Empire. The position and the functions of several types of the shahbandar in Asia were studied by W. H. Moreland about 70 years ago [Moreland : 517-33]. And the shahbandar in Gujarat, especially at Surat, has been recently studied in some detail by A. Das Gupta and by M. P. Singh among others.

Relying mainly on the unpublished records of the Dutch East India Company in the first half of the 18th century, Das Gupta has proved the following points : The two important officers concerned with maritime affairs under the *mutasaddi* (hereafter *mutasaddi*) or the governor of Surat were the *mīr baḥr* (hereafter *mir bahr*) and the *dārogha* of the *furṣa* or the customshouse. The former was the harbour master whose men watched against smuggling along the river banks. The latter was the customer, i. e. superintendent of imperial customs, a post usually kept in the family of the *mutasaddi*. In contrast to these two officials, the shahbandar at the

port of Surat, being the spokesman for the merchants coming from abroad, was never more than a minor figure, although all round the Indian Ocean the shahbandar presided effectively over the harbours [Das Gupta : 23-7].

What has been proved by Das Gupta is very different from the popular view on the shahbandar at Surat. B. G. Gokhale, for example, listed the shahbandar, the mint-master, the *kotwāl* and the *qāẓī* besides the *mutasaddi* as the most important officers at Surat. According to him, the major work of the shahbandar was the assessment and collection of customs dues [Gokhale : 61-2].

M. P. Singh has studied the polity in Gujarat, especially at Surat in his *Town, Market, Mint and Port in the Mughal Empire 1556-1707*. Though his work is a good contribution to our historiography, his view on the shahbandar is more or less similar to the popular view, as follows : The official whose main concern was the collection of customs at the port was the shahbandar (harbour master) . He acted as the deputy (*nā'ib*) of the *mutasaddi*. He was the chief of the customshouse. The Europeans variously called him *dārogha* (of the customshouse), shahbandar and customer. He was also called *mir bahr* [Singh : 203-4, 206-10].

It is, therefore, necessary to ask how far it is tenable in the 17th century what Das Gupta has proved about the shahbandar at the beginning of the 18th century.

In this paper first I will enquire the relations among the shahbandar, the customer (i. e. the Chief Customer, chief customs officer) and the *mir bahr* at Surat in the 17th century. Secondly, I will trace the careers of the shahbandars from the beginning to the middle of the 17th century, focusing on the career of Is-ḥāq

Beg. The aim of tracing their careers is to know the position and the functions of the shahbandar in the polity of Surat more concretely.<sup>2)</sup>

## II. The Shahbandar, the Customer, and the *Mir Bahr*

At first we will take up the *mir bahr*. F. Steingass' *Persian-English Dictionary* explains *mīr baḥr* as "a collector of port-duty, harbour-master ; an overseer of boats." The *Ā'in-i Akbarī* has a chapter entitled "*Ā'in-i Mīrbaḥrī*" and stresses the importance of appointing an experienced man to look after the rivers. He should settle every difficulty which arises regarding fords and should also prevent people from crossing at night [Ain I : 202-4 ; *Ibid.* I. tr. 289-92]. Further, the *zakāt-i mīr baḥrī* is listed as one of the forbidden cesses in the so-called 12 decrees issued after Jahāngīr's accession to the throne in 1605. Recently, J. F. Richards introduced to us a document form for the official order of the appointment to the position of *mir bahr* in the Mughal Empire. According to this, the duty of the *Mīr-baḥrī wa Dārogha-i Nawāra* (Harbor master and Superintendent of boats) was to "protect the ships carefully at nightfall" and to "use the utmost vigilance to ensure that none of the malefactors and rebels are able (to board the ships) and cross over" [Richards : 67-8]. According to H. Mashita's recent study, a passage in the *Mir'āt-i Sikandarī* describes that Maḥmūd Āqā, *mir bahr* [of either Diu or Gujarat Kingdom — this inference being Nagashima's], filled the ships with soldiers with canons and guns and they shot and killed many Hindus at Diu in 1526 [H. Mashita : 135-6 ; cf. MS : 265-6]. Based on these sources and

the studies by I. H. Qureshi, Atul Chandra Roy and J. F. Richards, we can say that the *mir bahr* was the chief-officer whose main duty was in charge of the water police or / and war fleet [cf. Richards : 68]. The *mir bahr* as the head of the water police is exactly the same office as that in the beginning of the 18th century which has been depicted by Das Gupta.

However, I have come across only a few other sources which indicate clearly the existence of the *mir bahr* at Surat and Gujarat in the 17th and 18th century. First, as mentioned by M. P. Singh, the *Mir'āt-i Aḥmadī*, written in the middle of the 18th century, mentions *mir bahr* in its description of port administration at Gogha and Gandhar as follows :

The *maḥāls* which belong to the *mutaṣaddī : furṣa* [port], where *ḥāṣils* [taxes] are collected by the government when goods for trade come and go via the sea route, the subordinate(s) [pāinām] of the *furṣa* being *mīr baḥr shāh-bandar*. . . [MAH-S : 194 ; cf. *Ibid.*, tr. : 190].

It is not clear, however, whether the phrase “*mīr baḥr shāh-bandar*” means “*mīr baḥr* and *shāh-bandar*” or it means “*mīr baḥr* i. e. *shāh-bandar*.” M. P. Singh seems to understand the phrase in the latter sense. But since it has been known from the above mentioned Dutch records that at least at the beginning of the 18th century the shahbandar was an officer different from the *mir bahr*, it is not probable that the shahbandar was another name of the *mir bahr*, though a person might have been the *mir bahr* and concurrently the shahbandar.

Secondly, J. Fryer, who visited Surat in 1675, mentions the “Meerbar’s Choultry.” It was a building or a office located by the

landing place near the customhouse and from where the waiters i.e. watchmen, watched people "to make them pay Caesar his due" [Fryer I : 247]. This "Meerbar's Choultry" must have been the same thing as "a Kiochk, or covered Pavillion, where Sentinels are placed to observe and view all that goes in or comes out of the Bark" described by M. de Thevenot around the same period [Thevenot : 2]. Fryer himself does not explain anything else about *mir bahr* and his description gives us an impression that the person who was in charge of the shahbandar or the chief customer was concurrently the head of the Meerbar's Choultry when Fryer was at Surat.

Thus though the term *mir bahr* existed in the 17th century at Surat, it is not clear whether the officer entitled *mir bahr* was actually appointed there in the 17th century. However, as we will see later, it is clear that the *mir bahr*, if any, was not considered by the Europeans in 1616, for example, as one of the important officers such as the shahbandar and the customer. It is possible that a person in charge of the customer or the shahbandar was concurrently appointed as the *mir bahr* and the Europeans could not distinguish them. But it does not necessarily mean that the *mir bahr* was always the officer identical with the shahbandar or the customer.

As for the relation between the shahbandar and the customer at Surat, J. Fryer tells us as follows : The shahbandar is "King of the Port, or Chief Customer." He further says :

The Custom-house has a good Front, where the Chief Customer appears certain hours to chop, that is, to mark Goods outward-bound, and clear those received in : Upon any suspicion of de-

fault he has a Black Guard that by a *Chawbuck*, a great Whip, extorts Confession... [Fryer I : 274].

There is not much evidence, however, which confirms his remark. The following examples may exceptionally support his remark. Abbé Carre, a French, met a Persian shahbandar at the customshouse at Broach in 1672[Abbé Carre I : 140]. The president of the English factory at Surat explained in 1639 how the bales from Sind had been all packed in the presence of the shahbandar and sealed with his [the shahbandar's] seal. Though it is not very clear whether this shahbandar was that of Sind or that of Surat, in any case he is an example of the shahbandar who "chopped" the goods [at the customshouse] as stated by Fryer. According to J. B. Tavernier, at Thatta, when an Englishman passed "in front of the custom-house, where the Governor of the town, the Shahbandar, and the Master of the mint were seated in a divan," and they stopped him and told him to go to the custom-house [Tavernier : 11]. Even these examples do not confirm that the shahbandar was always the same officer as the customer at Surat.

On the other hand, not only at the beginning of the 18th century but also in the years 1616-20, 1636-37, 1641 and 1663 both officers were different from each other. It is clear from the English and the Dutch records that there was the customer or "the judge of the *alfandiga*" along with the shahbandar during the period from 1616 to 1620. The president of the English factory at Surat tells us in 1616 as follows :

For heer [at Surat] is no goverment but the wills of the cheifes. Abram Chan [*Mutasaddi*], a verry sober man, is abused through his clemency ; for besides him, the Divon [*Dīwān*] , the Shaw-

bandar, the Captain of the Castle, and the Customer heare causes, force and abuse the poore at their pleasure without controll [SC : 84].

Shah Husain, the customer, was expelled from the office due to his suppression of the people, and a new customer was appointed in 1616. But the latter was no better [SC : 84]. The English, therefore, appealed to Prince Khurram against his bad activities and received “a letter from the Princes secretary [Afzal Khān] written in his owne Name to Abram chan, Salath beage, and Isack beage, to ouersee the Customer that hee wronged not the English nor suffered any other” [Roe : 332] . Ibrāhīm Khān [Abram chan], Ṣalāt Beg [Salath beage] and Is-ḥāq Beg [Isack beage] were the *mutasaddi*, the *dīwān* and the shahbandar of Surat at that time respectively. The latter two were brothers to each other and, contrary to the *mutasaddi*, they were rather hostile to the English. And the customer took yet another attitude to the English, as we will see later [Letters IV : 344-348].

According to a Dutch letter from Surat to Amsterdam in 1619, the shahbandar was different from the customer then as follows :

Every year when the ships reach here, it is necessary to keep to present gifts to the *mutasaddi* [gouverneur], the shahbandar [sahbander], the customer [jeus d'alfandiga], the governor of the castle [gouverneur van t'casteel], and the *qāzī* [? gouverneur van reeden]. Because without their friendship, we cannot expect any day which will pass without any difficulties [VOC 1068 : f. 429 r ; cf. Prakash : 84].

This is further confirmed by Van den Broecke's account to the Dutch East India Company in January 1620 [Broecke : 383].

In 1636-37 the shahbandar was Hājī Zāhid Beg, while the customer was Mīr Maḥmūd Amīn [EF 5 : 301, 314 ; GM I : 622]. *The Daghregister Gehouden int Casteel Batavia* lists “the shahbandar, the king’s commissary [? *wāqī ‘a-navīs*], the governor of the al-fandiga” as those officials who were to support the new *mutasaddi* of Surat who was appointed in October 1641 [DB 1641-42 : 188-9 ; cf. *Ibid.* 1643-44 : 180]. The person who was appointed to the customer at that time was Mirzā ‘Arab. [EF 7 : 23, 169].

In 1663 the eldest son of ‘Ināyat Khān, the new *mutasaddi*, was appointed as the customer at Surat and oppressed the merchants including the English. When as a result a dispute started between him and the English, “all the eminent merchants” pressed reconciliation [EF 11 : 206]. This customer could not have been the shahbandar, because the latter was one of the eminent merchants of the city.<sup>3)</sup>

Thus in many cases the shahbandar was different from the customer at Surat in the 17th century.

### III. Is-hāq Beg, and Other Shahbandars

(1) Khwāja Ḥasan ‘Alī (spelled as Hoja Assan Alli, etc.)

As far as I know, he is first mentioned in December 1611, and at that time the governor of Surat and he, as the shahbandar, went aboard Middleton’s ship and they were detained as pledges there. He received a letter from the Portuguese Viceroy at Goa, which was to thank him that “he would not permit the English Nation to trade at Surat, willing him to continue in that mind.” [Purchas III : 181-3].



It is certain that he was the shahbandar in October 1612, January 1613, and from January to March in 1615, too. He was one of those who signed to the treaty with T. Best in October 1612. In January 1613 he as the shahbandar together with his father-in-law, Medigoffer [Mirzā Ja'far], and divers others went to Swally (the outer port of Surat) and delivered a Emperor's *farmān* to Best [EF 1 : 150 ; Best : 40 ; cf. *Ibid.* : 30, 31, 143-4, 230]. Mir Ja'far, Khwāja Ḥasan 'Alī's father-in-law, was "a merchant and one of the chief of Zuratt," and he also negotiated with the English, being usually friendly with them. He was also one of the signatories of the treaty [Best : 30, 40, 112, 114, 139-47]. At one time the shahbandar accompanied to Swally a ship's captain of Surat who wanted to procure the general's [Best's] pass for the Red Sea [*Ibid.* : 118].

In January 1615 just before the attack of the Portuguese fleet against the English fleet, "the Nabob [Muqarrab Khhān, so-called Viceroy of Surat and Cambay] sent the Sahabandar [shahbandar] and divers other principall men of the towne [Surat] to the Viceroy [of the Portuguese] with a present of great provisions," and they made some treaty of peace. The shahbandar went aboard the English general's ship and presented him divers provisions immediately after the English fleet's victory over the Portuguese. The Nabob and Is-ḥāq Beg also sent him a present respectively. The shahbandar and other merchants of Surat were sent by the Nabob to Best to ask him to stay at the port for a while in order to avoid the Portuguese retaliation to Surat after the departure of the English fleet [Downton : 17, 23, 30].

According to an English note, the chiefs of Surat in 1614 were as follows:

The Viceroy was Nabob Magrobchan; the Governor Cojenassan [*Khwāja Nizām*], and the Sabendar Cojeallp [*Khwāja Alp*]. Great men friendly to the English were Isacke [*Is-ḥāq*] Beg, Milljoffer [*Mīr Ja'far*], Cojearabe [*Khwāja 'Arab*], Mahamud Hassan, and Mallim Ganier [*Mu'allim Ghānī*] [SC : 47].

*Khwāja Ḥasan 'Alī* does not appear in the list, though he must have been one of the "great men friendly to the English." It is, therefore, possible that "Cojaallp" is a misprint of "Cojaalli" i. e. *Khwāja Ḥasan 'Alī*. But *Khwāja Alp* is also a common Muslim name, though I have not met his name in Surat in other sources of the period. If *Khwāja Ḥasan 'Alī* was the shahbandar in 1614, he was in charge of the shahbandar from 1611 to 1615 continuously. If he was not the shahbandar in 1614, we have to admit the frequent changes of the shahbandar at that time as in the latter half of the 1620's, as we will see later.

At the end of 1623 the English were allowed by the Mughal government to rent *Khwāja Ḥasan 'Alī's* house for their Surat factory [EF 2 : 309-10, xxxiii], though we do not know why his house was selected for this purpose.

(2) *Mirzā Is-ḥāq Beg* (Isack Beeck, Issack Beck, etc.)

As we have just seen, *Mirzā Is-ḥāq Beg* was not the shahbandar but one of the "great men friendly to the English" at the end of 1614. We have also seen that he sent a present of fruit from his own garden to the general of the English fleet in January 1615. Immediately after that the Nabob Muqarrab *Khān* desired to make peace with the Portuguese and appointed the shahbandar, *Is-ḥāq Beg* and 'Abd al-Raḥīm to draw up the treaty [Downton : 23, 40]. These show that he was an eminent merchant next to the shahban-

dar at that time.

He seems to have been appointed to the shahbandar and concurrently to the “Amine (a new office appointed by the Prince [Khurram] to determine differences)” by the beginning of August 1616, as has been supposed by the preceding studies [SC : 72 ; cf. *Ibid.* : 117, 118]. And as we have seen he was no doubt the shahbandar and his brother, Şalât Beg, was the *dīwān* in November of that year.

Is-hāq Beg became the de facto *mutasaddi* of Surat sometime between August 1618 and March 1619 [EF 1 : 150, 100 ; cf. *Ibid.* : xvi]. It is confirmed from an Dutch letter dated 2 June, 1619 [VOC. 1072 : f. 232 v, (Van Ravesteyn and Goeree at Surat to De Haze at Masulipatam) ; cf. Prakash : 97-8].<sup>4)</sup>

He seems to have been the de facto *mutasaddi* and concurrently the shahbandar till the arrival of the new *mutasaddi* at the end of November of that year. It is, therefore, difficult to distinguish his activities as the shahbandar from those as the *mutasaddi* during that period.

Thus we will see his activities before his becoming the de facto *mutasaddi*. Around that time he and other merchants were intending an ample investment at Navsari for baftas and other kinds of cloth for the Red Sea [SC : 76]. Around November 1616 he was called by the English their “archenemy” [Letters 4 : 347], and he had many disputes with them. For example, at that time the English set up a small bell-turret with a small vane on the outside of the common hall of their dwelling. Then the people of Surat made an outcry to the Governor that infidels had taken possession of their town, alleging that the sign of the cross [i.e. vane] was an espe-

cial token of victory and of winning the town. The *mutasaddi* was rather sympathetic toward the English. But Is-ḥāq Beg (shahbandar) and his brother Ṣalāt Beg (*dīwān*) were of more violent disposition and forbade the servants of the English and all others to come to the house which was used as the English factory. The chief of the English discussed the matter often with the shahbandar and others in the presence of the *mutasaddi* [Letters 4 : 346-8 ; SC : 99]. When the English captured a frigate of Diu, the shahbandar called the chief of the English to his house and used threats to make them release the ship [SC :98 ; Letters 4 : 349]. Further, the shahbandar prevented merchants from dealing with the English factors for lead, which he desired to monopolize. And as a result of a brawl in which an Englishman was concerned, the shahbandar deprived the English at the factory of food and water, and he insisted on the surrender of the above mentioned frigate and the removal of the factors to a smaller thatched house [SC : 99-100 ; Letters 4 : 350 - 4]. But with an intimation by the English that the factors intended to repair to their ships, the boycott was withdrawn [SC : 100]. When the chief of the English decided to confer with the general of the English fleet on the matter of the frigate, he had to wait for two days before he could obtain leave from the shahbandar to cross over the river [SC : 102]. But it was not the shahbandar but the customer who insisted on the release of the frigate to the end, declaring that otherwise he would not clear the goods or presents, and would stop all victuals for the ships. However, finally he also consented to the English request, having been bribed by the English [SC : 102]. As a result the English got the goods and presents cleared from the customshouse and they obtained from the shah-

bandar and the customer a certificate that the goods were presents for the Emperor, and "requiringe conduct and nightly watch from the townes and villages" [SC : 114]. The letters of Thomas Roe, the English ambassador to the Mughal Emperor, to the *mutasaddi* and the shahbandar arrived in Surat opportunely, and a licence was obtained for the English caravan's despatch to the Mughal court [SC : 117].

From the above summary of the events which occurred at the end of 1616 it seems rather difficult to distinguish the shahbandar's functions from those of the customer, though it is sure that the shahbandar had negotiations with the chief of the English factory in many matters. The shahbandar usually sent victuals for the European ships. But the customer also seems to have done the same thing and he seems to have had the right to stop it whenever necessary. As regards to the right of issuing certificates or licences to the Europeans and their goods, it was not confined to the shahbandar alone. On the other hand the shahbandar could play a role like that of the *mir bahr* when he permitted the chief of the English to cross over the river. As we have seen earlier, the English considered the condition of the government at Surat as follows : "Heer is no government but the wills of the cheifes" [SC : 84].

As we have seen, Is-ḥāq Beg took charge of the *mutasaddi* of Surat by the end of March 1619. The English made a list of his "mischief" to them after his getting power as the de facto *mutasaddi*. But its content was more or less similar to what we have just seen [EF 1 : 150 ; cf. *Ibid.* : 101, 147-8 ; EF 2 : 285-6].

As is well known, one of the motives of his organizing a general boycott against the English was the fear which he and other

merchants of Surat felt of the new venture by the English, i. e. their investments in cloth for the Red Sea besides their existing investments in cloth for Southeast Asia.

Is-ḥāq Beg was recalled from the post in November 1619 and Mirzā Jamshed Beg seems to have been appointed to the new *mutasaddi*. He was, however, reinstated to the office in October 1621, as he had run hard for office [EF 1 : 275, 281].

Is-ḥāq Beg seems to have been concurrently the shahbandar during his first term of the *mutasaddi*, though we have not come across any one as the shahbandar in the sources during the period. He was the shahbandar at least a little before his second term of the *mutasaddi*-ship. According to a letter sent by Coen at Batavia to Van den Broecke at Surat on 17 October, 1621, the "shahbandar" Is-ḥāq Beg had sent textiles to Batavia on a Dutch ship, and due to some accident the Dutch were to provide him compensation to the extent of the cost price plus a small profit as mutually agreed upon [Prakash : 176]. He had, therefore, been the shahbandar when the ship had left for Batavia from Surat several months before the date of the letter.<sup>51</sup> The Dutch, contrary to the English, were keeping good relations with him at that time.

In February 1622 he was recalled from the *mutasaddi* to Prince Shāh Jahān (i.e. Khurram), because he had not been able to pay the Prince the promised amount from the taxes collected at Surat [EF 2 : 25]. Jamshed Beg seems to have been appointed to the *mutasaddi* as his successor soon afterwards [EF 2 : 25, 39, 71].

The next *mutasaddi* Ḥākīm 'Abd Aillāh was appointed just before 22 December, 1622 [EF 2 : 144]. According to an English complaint, "concerninge lead which was stollen from the seaside and

the English tooke the theeves, but Isa Beag [Is-ḥāq Beg], deputie to Hakiem Abdela, tooke them out of their hands, whereby they were defeated of their right..." [EF 2 : 308]. It is not clear which office the "deputie" actually means, though it might have been the *faujdār* (hereafter *faujdar*) of Surat in this case, as the *faujdar* represented the military or police power of the imperial government in local areas.

While the English were disputing with Is-ḥāq Beg, at the same time they bought cloth from his broker at Baroda. According to an English letter written from Baroda to Surat in the end of 1622, Peerebora [Pīr Bohrā] and Tappidas [Tapī Dās] dealt with the English very fairly at Baroda [EF 2 : 168]. The former was named as Is-ḥāq Beg's brother, while the latter was Is-ḥāq Beg's broker at Baroda [EF 2 : 168]. However, Pīr Bohrā might have been his broker instead of his brother. Is-ḥāq Beg was a "Mirza" [EF 1 : 147], and he and his brother Ṣalāt Beg were called "Mogolls", as we have already seen. Further, as we will see, Is-ḥāq had a strong connection with Persia. In the 18th century the shahbandar was the spokesman for the merchants coming from abroad, while the *qānūngo* being the spokesman for the local merchants [Das Gupta : 27]. Is-ḥāq Beg as a shahbandar must not have been a Bohrā or a native of Gujarat, while Pīr Bohrā was a Bohrā.

Prince Shāh Jahān revolted in the end of 1622 and Ḥākīm 'Abd Allāh, *mutasaddi* of Surat, sided with him. While Is-ḥāq Beg seems to have been the governor of Anklesvar, a town near Surat, under Ḥākīm 'Abd Allāh at that time, he left the town at the end of August 1623 just before the attack against the town by the imperial government forces [EF 2 : 256-7]. And he returned to Surat safely

by the middle of October and talked with the English and the Dutch in order to solve the problem of the capture of Indian ships by an English fleet. He and other officials seem to have tried to make the dispute only a merchants' issue, as they were afraid of being recalled from their respective offices, if the Emperor came to know the dispute [EF 2 : 275]. The dispute was once settled in November 1623 under the English threat [EF 2 : xxxii-iv, 283-6, 296-312, 318-9]. The merchants and officials of Surat, however, retaliated on the English, having acquired a *farmān* from the Emperor for that. As a result, a final settlement was reached in September 1624, when a modified agreement was signed on both sides [EF 3 : v-viii, 27-30].

Is-ḥāq Beg signed the agreement fourthly, after the *mutasaddi*, *qāzī* and the captain of the castle [EF 3 : 30]. This fact indicates that he was still one of the important officials of Surat at that time. The Dutch sources describe him as the governor [gouverneur] in January 1623 and in November 1624 [VOC. 1079 : f. 205 v ; Broecke : 299 ; *Ibid.* tr. XI : 8 ; Coen 7 : 1051]. But the *mutasaddi* of Surat was Ḥākīm 'Abd Allāh in the former date, and Saif *Khān* in the latter date [cf. EF 2 : 144, 263, 297, 298]. As Om Prakash interprets, this governor might have been the *faujdar* of Surat [Prakash : 289]. But it is also possible that the Dutch mentioned him as the governor (*mutasaddi*) vaguely, because they were describing his past activities in the period of his *mutasaddi*-ship.

Is-ḥāq Beg suddenly left for Persia on a Dutch ship in November 1624. The Dutch gave him every facility, because they found it necessary for them to keep on good terms with him [Broecke : 299-300 ; *Ibid.* tr. XI : 8 ; cf. Coen 7 : 1051]. According to an English



letter from Gombroon in February 1628, he was very friendly to the Dutch at Hormuz, whom he greatly helped in obtaining freight goods [EF 3 : 237].

Is-ḥāq Beg returned to Surat aboard a Dutch ship on 7 March, 1628 after his stay at Gombroon for more than three years. According to Van den Broecke, "Is-haq Beg, who was formerly Governor and Shahbandar of Surat,... was welcomed with much honour in Surat" [Broecke : 340 ; cf. *Ibid.* tr. XI : 213].

He was still one of the important merchants of Surat in the end of 1630 [EF 4 : 116].

It seems that Is-ḥāq Beg continued to have been the shahbandar since 1616 to 1624 when he left for Hormuz, as we do not come across any other name as the shahbandar in our sources during this period.

(3)Khwāja Jalāl al-Dīn (Hoja Jellardin, Coja Illardin, Codi Gelaldei Mahomet, etc.)

The next shahbandar after Is-ḥāq Beg seems to have been Khwāja Jalāl al-Dīn. His name appeared as the shahbandar on 8 October, 1626 in Van den Broecke's diary [Broecke : 327 ; *Ibid.* tr. XI : 207]. He was called "Shawbandar or admirall of this port" by the English and was allowed to send his goods in an English ship to Batavia in January 1628 together with some other eminent merchants [EF 3 : 212].

His father-in-law was Khwāja Nizām who was the de facto *mutasaddi* of Surat under Nabob Muqarrab Khān in the 1610's. Khwāja Jalāl al-Dīn was taken hostage by the English in lieu of his father-in-law in 1611, and he and Khwāja Nizām's real son sent a merchant ship to Mokha in 1616 [Downton : 264, 268 ; Broecke :

101]. He, together with Mirzā Maḥmūd and Harī Vaisha, endeavoured to solve the dispute with the English, when the latter captured some Indian ships in 1623. They seem to have been the three merchants to whom the English decided to send suitable presents, thanking them for their endeavour [EF 2 : 276, 280, 304, 320 ; Broecke : 287-8 ; *Ibid.* tr. XI : 4].

(4)Mirzā Maḥmūd (Mirza Mahmood, Merza Mahmud, Mirja Mahmoet, etc.)

According to Van den Broecke's diary on 30 May, 1628, Mirzā Maḥmūd as the shahbandar with some other merchants negotiated with the Dutch on the latter's capture of some Indian ships. He and the *dīwān* of the customshouse brought Van den Broecke a present (turban cloth) from the governor of Surat [Broecke : 344-5]. It seems, therefore, that a change in the shahbandar took place sometime between January and May 1628. His tenure of the shahbandar seems to have been less than one year, as we will see later.

He was also one of the eminent Muslim merchants of Surat for a long period. As we have just seen, he was friendly with the English in 1623 [EF 2 : 321]. And he praised Kerridge, ex-president of the English at Surat, and asked in 1629 that the latter might be re-appointed as president [EF 3 : 325].

He placed an agent at Bantam in Indonesia and traded there, using the ships of the English and others [EF 3 : 330]. He sent his own ships to Gombroon, Mokha and Bengal, too. With regard to Gombroon, we have information about his trade there, for example, in 1639, 47 and 56 [SC : 149 ; EF 8 : 111 ; EF 10 : 83]. When the *Tofakee* [*Taufiqī*, Mirzā Maḥmūd's ship] and some other ships of Surat were captured by English pirates in 1636, he naturally nego-

tiated with the English in order to solve the issue [EF 5 : xx-xxiv, 192, 197-9, 200-1, 233, 254]. After its solution, one of his ships sailed to the Maldives in the same year [EF 5 : 255]. And the ship sailed from the Maldives to Bengal, and then to Persia, and returned to Surat at the end of May 1639 [SC : 149].

(5) Hājī Zāhid Beg (Hagee Zahed, Hodge Zahed Beague, etc.)

Hājī Zāhid Beg was called as “our new Shaubander” by the English in April 1629, probably succeeding Mirzā Maḥmūd [EF 3 : 330]. It is not clear why this change of the shahbandar occurred, because the latter was active as one of the eminent merchants even after that. His name indicates that he performed *hajji* to Mecca.

He was an “especiall friend” of the English, and the latter exceptionally allowed him to send his goods to Bantam aboard their ship in 1629. It was because the English owed him in many respects, besides they were indebted to him upwards of 6,000 pound sterling [EF 3 : 330].

His ship sailed to Johore Kingdom in the Malay Peninsula. According to an English letter in 1647, the skipper, &c. of Hājī Zāhid Beg’s vessel tried to monopolize the trade there [EF 8 : 169].

With regard to his trade with the Red Sea ports, one of his ships returned from Aden in September 1636 [EF 5 : 301]. The four ships of Hājī Zāhid Beg and Mustafa Chelebi sailed with an English ship to Mokha in March 1639 [SC : 144]. The English sent their goods consigned to Mokha on his ship, *Salāmatī*, in April 1644 [EF 7 : 161].

He sent his ships to the Persian Gulf, too. A ship of Zāhid Beg’s sailed to Hormuz in autumn 1636 [EF 5 : 255]. His “jounke”, *Maḥmūdī*, sailed from Surat to Gombroon in February 1645 [EF 7 :

257]. And at Basra in August of the year the Portuguese armada or *cafila* was expected to arrive (probably from Hormuz), and in which were “two jouncks [i. e. ships] of Hodgee Zahad Beagues, richly laden with all manner Agra, Guzuratt, and Decaun comodities” [EF 7 : 274]. According to a letter despatched from Surat to Batavia at the end of either May or June of the year, Ḥājī Zāhid Beg, “ex-shahbandar” [geweesen sabandaer] in Surat received from his servant letters that his frigate ship, carrying cloth equivalent to about 70,000 rupees from Gamron [Gombroon] to Basra, had been caught by a Dutch ship there [DB 1644-45 : 257]. This ship might have been the “Surat juncke” caught by the Dutch at Hormuz on 19 April of the year [cf. EF 7 : 269].

We can see the activities of his ships in 1636 as follows : a ship from Aden and another ship from Aceh returned to Surat at the end of April [EF 5 : 251] ; a ship from Mokha and another from Aden returned in September [EF 5 : 301] ; and a ship sailed to Gombroon in the autumn. These facts indicate how actively he was engaged in his business as a shipowner and merchant. He as the shahbandar also tried to solve a dispute with the English resulting from the capture of Indian ships by English pirates in the same year [EF 5 : 241].

It is said that in 1657, being demanded by Prince Murād Bakhsh, Ḥājī Zāhid Beg as “Prince of the merchants [*malik al-tujjār*] of Surat Port” and Vīrjī Vōra as the leader of the *bania* (Hindu and Jain) merchants lent him Rs. 600,000 (or Rs. 500,000), representing all the other merchants of Surat [ML II : 7, 250]. Ḥājī Zāhid Beg seems to have been the leader of the Muslim merchants of Surat at that time.

On his invasion of Surat in January 1664, Shivāji nominated Ḥājī Zāhid Beg together with Vīrjī Vōra and the *mutasaddi* and another merchant as those who were to negotiate with himself. But as they did not respond to him, most parts of the city were burnt and Zāhid Beg's house and stores were also plundered. But "Hodjee Zaied Beague and Virjee Vorah, the two great merchants of this towne," continued their commercial activities on a large scale as before [EF 11 : 299, 308, 313].

In 1666 the whole cargoes of the Dutch ships from Batavia were almost exclusively sold off to Ḥājī Zāhid Beg, balking their former merchant Vīrjī Vōra, who had usually bought up the Dutch cargoes [EF 12 : 148].

He died in 1669, and his son, Mirzā Ma'sūm, succeeded his commercial activities [EF 13 : 184].

By the way, how long was Ḥājī Zāhid Beg in charge of the shahbandar ? M. N. Pearson says that he was in the office between 1629 and 1669. And based on this and other facts, he asserts that "if the shahbandar was an official, he was clearly not subject to removal at regular intervals, as were most other officials," because the shahbandar had the character of the headman of the traders at the same time [Pearson : 127-8 & n.].

He played a role of an intermediary as the leader of the Muslim merchants of Surat in many occasions, as we have seen. J. B. Tavernier who visited Surat several times between 1648 and 1667 stated as follows :

In the whole of Surat there are only nine or ten well-built houses, and the Shāh-bandar, or chief of the merchants, has two or three of them. [Tavernier : 7].

The shahbandar who was considered “the chief of the merchants” and had two or three big houses seems to have been Ḥājī Zāhid Beg who was called “Prince of the merchants.” When Shiv-ājī attacked Surat, his house consisted of a “great house” and “a great company of warehouses” [Escalot A : 259 ; Ibid. B : 318].

It is, therefore, highly probable that he was the shahbandar continuously from 1629 to 1669. As we have seen, however, he was mentioned as “ex-shahbandar” in a Dutch record in 1645, and I have not seen his name with the title of the shahbandar since April 1637. It is, therefore, necessary to study further about this point. In any case it is clear, as we have seen, that he was not concurrently the customer at least at some time. It is also possible that he was not the customer at all during all his tenure of the shahbandar.

#### IV. Conclusion

We may summarize our discussion in this paper as follows :

1. Though the term *mir bahr* which was the title of the head of the water police existed in Surat in the 17th century, the European sources seldom mentioned the title. It may be either because the *mir bahr* was not considered so important as the shahbandar and the customer by them or more probably because the function of the *mir bahr* was performed concurrently either by the shahbandar or by the customer.

2. Though J. Fryer tells us that the shahbandar was the same officer as the customer at Surat, there is little evidence which confirms his remark. On the other hand, for example, in the years

1616-20, 1636-37, 1641 and 1663 the two officers were different from each other.

3. It seems that the main function of the shahbandar at Surat was to mediate, for example, between the foreign merchants including the Europeans and the Mughal officials. As Das Gupta explains, he seems to have been the spokesman for the merchants coming from abroad. On the other hand the main function of the customer was the assessment and collection of customs dues. The shahbandar often brought a present of provisions to the European ships when they arrived at the harbour. The shahbandar appears in the documents almost all the time as being one of the leading negotiators who mediated between the Mughal authorities and the Europeans. On the occasions of the capture of Indian ships by the Europeans the shahbandar along with other eminent merchants often approached the Mughal authorities with a request for the arrest of the members of the European factories in order to solve the problem in their favour.

It is not clear what kind of daily work the shahbandar did, besides bringing a present of provisions to foreign ships which entered the harbour. The functions of issuing a license or certificate, for example, for crossing over the river and going to the outer port or for a caravan's despatch were not confined to the shahbandar alone. The *mutasaddi* and the customer also played the similar functions sometimes. A further study is necessary in this aspect, too.

4. We have traced the careers and activities of the five well-known shahbandars of Surat who seem to have been in the office from the beginning to the middle of the 17th century successively.

Khwāja Ḥasan ‘Alī and Mirzā Is-ḥāq Beg seem to have been in the office for several years respectively, and Ḥājī Zāhid Beg probably for nearly 40 years, though there are some doubts about their tenures. On the other hand Khwāja Jalāl al-Dīn’s tenure was probably less than 4 years and that of Mirzā Maḥmūd was one year. Thus, as M. N. Pearson argues, the shahbandar as official was clearly not subject to removal at regular intervals, as were most other officials, though Mirzā Maḥmūd’s tenure was, for example, very short. All the above mentioned shahbandars were the leading merchants of Surat who traded widely abroad. Most of them were big shipowners, though it is not clear whether Is-ḥāq Beg was so or not. The shahbandars and their relatives were often in charge of other important officials of Surat than the shahbandar as well. The Europeans such as the English and the Dutch companies were often indebted to the successive shahbandars for large sums. And of course the shahbandar was important to the Europeans as a mediator of the disputes between them and the Mughal authorities. There is, therefore, no doubt that the Europeans in the 17th century considered the shahbandar as important as the customer.

5. The shahbandar preserved a non-official aspect as the spokesman for the merchants coming from abroad up to the beginning of the 18th century, even though sometimes he might have concurrently served as the customer.

It is not clear why the shahbandar became considered to be a rather minor officer than the customer by the beginning of the 18th century. The following reasons may be tentatively supposed : First, it may be because by that time the Europeans such as the



Dutch had accumulated sufficient experience and ability to negotiate directly with the Mughal authorities such as the *mutasaddi* without the mediation of the shahbandar. Secondly, it may be because the peaceful mediation of the shahbandar lost efficiency in the period of uncertainty at the decline of the Mughal Empire. Thirdly, the beginning of the 18th century was the period when an Indian Muslim merchant, Mullā 'Abd al-Ghafūr, was actively engaged in foreign trade as the biggest shipowner of Surat and the Muslim merchants coming from abroad including the shahbandar seem to have lost to some degree their previous position and power. Fourthly, the shahbandar might have been the *mir bahr* concurrently till sometime in the 17th century and the latter might have become independent of the former after that. Then the former must have lost the previous importance as a result.

However, Surat is considered to have enjoyed her heyday as the home of the largest commercial marine in India at the turn of the 18th century. The effect of the beginning of decline of the Mughal Empire might not have been felt at Surat by then. Further, Aḥmad Chelebi, a (descendant of a) Muslim merchant coming from abroad, was active in foreign trade along with a grandson of Mullā 'Abd al-Ghafūr during the 1720's [cf. Das Gupta : *passim*]. It is not at all clear that the shahbandar was in charge of the *mir bahr* concurrently till some time of the 17th century, either. A further study must, therefore, be necessary before we attribute the fall in the status of the shahbandar by the beginning of the 18th century directly to the decline of Surat, to the decline in the power of the foreign Muslim merchants at Surat, or to the supposed separation of the *mir bahr* and the shahbandar.

## NOTES

1) This is a revised and abridged English version of my paper originally published in Japanese in the *Journal of East-West Maritime Relations*, Vol. 3, 1994. The revised portions are mainly on the *mir bahr*.

2) In this paper I am not very particular about the difference of the dates between the Julian calendar and the Gregorian calendar, and usually follow the dates in respective sources, i. e. the Julian calendar in the case of the English sources and the Gregorian calendar in the case of the Dutch sources, though I usually follow the Gregorian calendar in the descriptive parts of this paper.

3) Besides these the customer seems to have been different from the shahbandar in 1628 and 1646, too [cf. EF 3 : 192 ; EF 8 : 50]

4) Here and later parts of his book, Om Prakash wrongly equates Isack Beeck with Yusuf Beg [cf. Prakash : 98, 176, 289] .

5) However, here I relied on Om Prakash's introduction of the content of the letter. As in his book he sometimes identifies the "gouverneur" with some official, it is necessary to check whether the term "shahbandar" was actually used in the original letter or not.

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