

# Preface



## **History is of course written by the conquerors not the conquered**

Dana April Seidenberg, 1996. In *Mercantile Adventurers*

This book records my journey to uncover the remarkable trade that existed between India and East Africa for at least three millennia - a phenomena that has thus far gone largely unmarked by historians.

After being away from Africa since the age of six I returned to Kenya in October 1951 on completion of my education in Karachi, British India. I started teaching at the Dr. Ribeiro Goan School, Nairobi in January 1952. Independence had come to India in 1947 and so, having lived a few years in independent Pakistan, I felt I was going back in time in colonial Kenya as regards discrimination by colour and race. I got to thinking about the history we had learnt in school. Freedom fighters were portrayed as troublemakers and traitors and believe it or not, our young minds actually thought so!

About this time the Mau Mau freedom movement was gaining momentum in Kenya. My parents lived in Nyeri 'in the thick of it' one might say. On one of my trips home for the holidays I heard that Mr. Gama Pinto who worked for the Colonial Administration in Nyeri, had a son Pio imprisoned by the British in Lamu in the Portuguese fort, because of his anti-British/pro-African sentiments. Pio was very ill at this time and his father, Mr Gama Pinto was asked to make a trip to Lamu to tell his son that he would be released if he promised not to get involved in politics. I thought, as did many Indians that he would listen to his father! But one had to know Pio better. A very dejected Mr. Gama Pinto returned with Pio's answer. Luckily Pio recovered from his illness, in prison.

While shopping in Nairobi's Indian Bazaar like everyone else, I noticed that these *dukawallas* were no different from those I had encountered in Bohori Bazaar in Karachi. I wondered if they were related. Yes they were; they had come from the same country originally. Most of them spoke very poor English. How come? After having lived for so long in a British colony? But I discovered later that they were proud of their origin and their mother tongue. So when did they get here, how, why? One day I would find out.

I started my research at the Kenya National Archives where I had to pay a small fee for use of the library. The staff was efficient and helpful and allowed me to use the whole library. My first target was the Murumbi Collection. I found a wealth of information on my subject of interest. There were also box files containing pamphlets and manuscripts which revealed information on Asian political activities.

I then travelled to Zanzibar to the Zanzibar Archives. I was surprised to find how well preserved the library is, despite all the turmoil the Island has suffered. I had to return a second time to check information and this time I met Professor Abdul Sheriff. He was very helpful whenever I could not get photocopying done or encountered some other problem. He also selected some useful manuscripts for me.

My next destination was Mumbai, India. I had to make two trips to India as well. Both times I worked at the Asiatic Society Library where there is a fairly good collection of material on the historical period of 'Monsoon' trade between India and Africa. In Mumbai I also spent some very profitable time at the University of Mumbai, Kalina Campus, Jawaharlal Nehru Library. I had to plough through at least ten fully packed shelves to find information, but it was rewarding. Here I got information which I did not find anywhere else. I did not find many Indian authors and only a few Arab authors.

I also went to Goa and worked at the Xavier Centre of Historical Research. A great deal of literature is in Portuguese, but I gained a lot from the literature in English. This is a well stocked library on the Portuguese period in Africa and especially East Africa. The Librarian is bi-lingual so I had no language problem.

In all my research I found that Arab and particularly European sources of information downplayed the importance of Indian trade in the Indian Ocean which goes back at least three thousand years BC. *Harnessing the Trade Winds* attempts to kindle in the Indian diaspora a justifiable pride in the achievements of its forebears in East Africa, and indeed in other parts of the world, who helped the development of agriculture, industry and the globalization of trade, stemming from their trading activities in East Africa.

I have consistently used the term Indian for peoples of the Indian sub-continent of pre-independent India. These are the adventurers who ventured out of their homeland with trade goods, in search of trade. They are the true pioneers of trade and globalization and even though these early traders had no intention of settling in Africa, circumstances changed the course of their lives.

**Blanche Rocha D'Souza**