

Inter-Regional and Maritime Trade



Lesson: Inter-Regional and Maritime Trade

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10.1 Definition of Trade

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The term 'trade' can be described as collection, distribution and commercial exchange (buying and selling in domestic or international markets) of goods and services. This includes the nature and quantity of production, transportation, safety, security and pattern of exchange. Large numbers of people, such as merchants, traders peasants and artisans, are engaged in this process.

10.2 Debates Related to Trade in Early Medieval India

Several historians have worked on the theme of trade in early medieval India. One set of historians suggests that trade declined during this period, while the other set negates this view altogether by citing evidences of the existence and flourishing of trade. In order to understand the complexities of this topic, it is essential to comprehensively evaluate the main arguments of different historians.

10.2.1 Relative Decline of Trade

R. S. Sharma, in his book *Indian Feudalism* (1965), puts forward the idea of decline in the volume of trade with the Roman Empire after 300 CE due to several reasons. He believes that the feudalization of Indian economy led to the languishing of trade, especially long-distance trade between the 4th and the 12th centuries CE. Commercial activities gradually declined in two stages, first from 700 to 900 CE and then from 900 to 1300 CE. At the same time he accepts the notion of a partial revival of trade in 11th and 12th centuries CE due to changing perspective of Indian feudalism.

In the first phase, the relative decline of internal trade was linked to a paucity of coins. Sharma argues that commodities were largely produced mainly for local consumption in self-sufficient villages which emerged due to a pervasive phenomenon of land grants. From the 6th century CE onwards, India's long-distance trade with Southeast Asia, Central Asia and the Byzantine Empire or Eastern Roman Empire declined. The consequent fall in the inflow of precious metals from the foreign countries led to a severe scarcity of metallic currency in India. This, in turn, led to an increased use of land grants as an alternative means of payment by the kings (Sharma, 2001, 27). Though India continued some commerce with China and Southeast Asia, its benefits were largely reaped by the Arab middlemen. Eventually, in the period before the 11th century CE, the Arabs monopolized the export trade of India. Moreover, as Sharma contends, Indian participation in the Southeast Asian trade between the 9th and the 13th centuries CE was less than consequential, and the meager appearance of Chinese coins, mostly copper, in south India, does not indicate much trade. The decline of commerce from the 6th to the 9th century CE was evident in the near absence of coins in both north and south India (Sharma, 1987, 138). Other phenomena, such as the fragmentation of political power; dispersal of power among local chiefs and religious land-grantees; and rise of intermediary landlords who imposed high taxes, served to dampen the enthusiasm of traders and merchants and led to a decline in trading activities. Frequent political wars also discouraged the commercial activities during this phase.

In regard to India's trade with Southeast Asia, on the basis of archaeological evidence, Sharma challenges the notion that south India expanded commercial relations with Southeast Asia between 4th and 10th centuries CE. He claims that generally articles exchanged in this trade have not been mentioned. In further support of his argument, he cites weak numismatic evidence for India's trade with Southeast Asia. Although a few Gupta coins have been found in Java, no Southeast Asian coins appear in India. This was so probably because Burma and Cambodia did not develop their own systems of currency until

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the 16th century CE (Sharma, 1987, 137-38). The study based on Cambodia shows that between 600 and 800 CE, Southeast Asia could not develop any system of coinage and, therefore, barter provided the essentials in the Khmer empire's economy. There is some evidence for early medieval coins from western and north-western India and also from some parts of Ganga valley. But, they had no drastic impact on the overall economy. The coins found were mostly of poor quality and played a trivial role in exchange relations. Compared to the rising population and expanding area of settlement, the volume of metallic money in circulation was limited. Therefore, it can be assumed the relative decline of metallic money had an impact on India's trading activities in the first two centuries after the Gupta period.

Sharma has also linked the phenomenon of de-urbanisation in India (600-1000 CE) to the decline of long-distance trade with the Eastern Roman Empire and Central Asia. The division of the Roman Empire into western and eastern halves by the beginning of the 4th century CE and its subsequent collapse reduced the long-distance trade carried out through the ports of peninsular India. The Indo-Byzantine trade, mostly in silk, also received a setback in the middle of the 6th century CE, as Byzantium, the capital of Eastern Roman Empire, learnt the art of rearing silkworms on mulberry leaves. India thus lost a vital foreign market due to these developments. Thus, two emerging manifestations of urban decay were evident. First, the decline of trade and the paucity of metallic currency suggest the rarity of exchange at the commercial level (Sharma, 1965, 129). The scarcity of coins, especially of gold, from 600 to 1000 CE was witnessed in almost all parts of the subcontinent, except in Kashmir, Punjab, western Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (Sharma, 1987, 123). There was also an absence of seals used for commercial purposes by the corporate bodies of merchants, traders and artisans; disappearance of fine pottery; and the reduced use of objects made of shell, glass, ivory, terracotta and iron. Second, there was a decline of major urban centres and towns in the Gupta and post-Gupta period. Sharma's Indian feudalism model further puts forward the thesis that urban centres lost their identity as areas of exchange and craft production and were transformed into centres of religious prominence.

That the decline of trade led to the decay of many towns is evident in the post-Gupta archaeological record of the urban sites. Archeological excavations suggest the downfall of old commercial centres in the post Gupta times, especially Vaishali, Pataliputra, Rajghat and others. The archaeological evidence is corroborated by the travel account of the 7th-century-CE Chinese-Buddhist pilgrim-traveler Xuanzang, who mentions the desertion of several towns. A restricted market forced artisans and merchants living in these towns to migrate to rural areas in search of alternative means of livelihood. It is perhaps such depopulation of cities that is implied by as the Puranic accounts of Kali age crisis. Thus, there was a decline or decay of urban centres on a pan-Indian scale. In the absence of regular well-established markets, villagers met their daily need for iron, oil, salt, spices and cloth either by producing these commodities themselves or through weekly fairs. This led to the rise of smaller units of production leading towards a self-sufficient economy (Sharma, 2001, 28). However, in his later works, Sharma admits that long-distance trade never disappeared completely between 6th and 10th centuries CE. He points to textual references to trade in costly and luxury goods to cater to the kings, feudal chiefs, temples and the heads of the monasteries. Commodities, such as precious and semi-precious stones, ivory, horses, etc., formed major part of this surviving long-distance trade.. On the one hand, there are very few references to trade in daily products, although some commodities of daily use like salt and oil which were not produced by every village, were traded from outside. Thus in totality, during earlier phase, commercial activities catered mostly to the needs of landed intermediaries and feudal lords but to not the common masses. Other factors which caused a relative decline of trade were the fragmentation of political authority

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and dispersal of power among local chiefs and religious land-grantees. This had a negative impact on the trading activities in an economy largely based on land grants. The enthusiasm of traders eroded due to the depredations of intermediary landlords, especially in less productive areas. Thus, the initial period was a period of political tussles among ruling chiefs, which adversely affected the morale of the trading communities.

Another cause for the decline of foreign trade was the expansion of Arabs on the north-western frontiers of India during the 7th-8th century CE. This made the region's overland routes unsafe for Indian merchants. Further, mutual conflicts between the Tibetans and Chinese during this phase also negatively affected the flow of goods along the routes in Central Asia. Moreover, the sea-trade of western coast of India was disrupted and trade languished due to the raids of Arabs on important commercial centres and ports. However, later, in the 10th century CE, these Arabs played a significant role in the growth of Indian maritime trade. Though some trade with Southeast Asia was in evidence, overall it could not fill the lacuna created by the decline of trade with the West, i.e., the Roman Empire.

Sharma's argument suggests the decline of urbanization, though the decay and desertion of many towns during the early phase of early medieval period. The process was caused by a combination of interconnected and concurrent processes: issue of a large number of land grants to religious and secular officials for their services to the kings, paucity of metallic currency as a medium exchange, ruralization of economy leading to the rise of villages as self-sufficient economic units where production was carried out for local consumption, and decline of inter-regional and foreign trade. The rise of landed intermediaries entailed the enserfment of peasantry (i.e., high tax burden and increasing obligations to perform forced labour) and subinfeudation.

The feudalism model, as mentioned earlier, recognises a partial revival of trade and commerce in the 11th and 12th centuries CE a period marked by agrarian expansion, increased use of coined money, re-emergence of market economy wherein production was for exchange rather than personal consumption. Due to agrarian expansion, there was a greater production of staple and commercial crops which, in turn, encouraged the expansion of both internal and external trade. This phase also witnessed growth of artisanal activity which supplemented the agricultural production. For instance, there was progress in several areas, such as textile and oil production; sugarcane cultivation; and craftsmanship in metal (iron, silver, copper, brass and gold) and leather goods. All of these combined to stimulate the process of regional and inter-regional exchange. This revival further received a boost from the re-emergence of metal money, attested by inscriptional and literary references (discussed in detail in the next chapter on monetization). There has been a good deal of scholarly speculation about and debate on the value, content and circulation of a variety of coins circulating in this period. Here arises an important question: if the use of this coined money was for market transactions, was there any revival of trade, with multiplication of the exchange centres? Or do these coins represent only a partial monetization, as argued by the proponents of feudalism model. Despite numismatic evidence from different regions, the proponents of feudalism model argue that the overall volume of money in circulation was mostly negligibly insignificant, and the coins were highly debased and low in weight. This, to them, constitutes 'partial monetization'. Further, referring to the currency system in south India in the second phase, they suggest that the transitions were not much affected by coined money. Thus, barter system remained the main medium of exchange in inter-regional and possibly in inter-national commerce as well. This partial monetization would have contributed, to a certain extent, to some economic growth. At the same time, there is some evidence for the development of credit system (debit and credit facilities), such as *hundis* or bills of exchange which were probably used by merchants for commercial

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operations. Recent regional researches have posed questions to the feudalism thesis on the decline of trade and arrived at conclusions, diametrically opposed to those put forth by the feudalism thesis.

10.2.2 Critics of the Theory of Decline of Trade

Sharma's critics have cited plenty of literary sources to prove the existence of brisk commercial transactions during the Gupta times. Gupta inscriptions from Pundravardhana (north Bengal) and Gupta seals from Vaishali in north Bihar frequently refer to caravan traders (Chakravarti, 2001, 74). Not only are references to an active role played by merchants in town councils in the Gupta period, but there are also references to riverine trade in deltaic Bengal during the 5th-6th centuries CE. The Chinese, Arab and Persian travellers' accounts describe the conditions of trade, both by land and by sea, besides the details of economic life of different cities, ports and kingdoms. Al-Beruni, the famous 11th-century-CE Arab traveler from Central Asia, describes the existing trade-routes in northern India. Chinese-Buddhist pilgrim-travellers Fa Hsien (who travelled in India from 399 to 415 CE) and Hsuan Tsang describe the premier ports in the Gangetic delta, as also the direct sea-borne contacts between Bengal and China through Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The coast in the Tamil area served as a major centre of contact between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. John S. Deyell shows, arguing against Sharma's thesis on the paucity of coins, that between 750-1000 CE there was a significant circulation of coins in western, northern and northwestern parts of India, and between 1000 and 1200 CE there were also some qualitative changes in the metallic content of the coins. But, overall for him, 'the hypothesis of a decline of trade is in conflict with the pattern of coin movements along the coastal axes centering on Gujarat, or the overland axis centering on Afghanistan and terminating in Delhi. There is a priori evidence of long-term disequilibrium in the balance of payments in inter-regional trade' (Deyell, 1990, 244).

There was also sea-borne trade on the west coast of India although it was comparatively lesser than that on the east coast. The Byzantine emperors and the Sassanids in Iran exhibited a huge interest in maritime trade in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea (Chakravarti, 2001, 1-102). The distribution of Red Ware sites in coastal Gujarat, the Indus delta, the Makran coast and the coastal areas of Iran indicate the presence of an extensive trade network.

The historians supporting the idea of Indian feudalism in early medieval period argue that the period from 600 to 1000 CE witnessed the crystallization of the traits of feudal economy all over India on the one hand, and the rapid decline of trade, especially long-distance trade, on the other. They attribute this to the decline of India's trade with Eastern Roman Empire and Central Asia.

R. S. Sharma contends that this phase saw the growth of a self-sufficient and enclosed village economy in three areas, namely the Ganga-Yamuna doab and Rajasthan under the Gurjara-Pratiharas; Bengal and Bihar under the Palas; and the Deccan under the Rashtrakutas. This supposed development of a closed village economy led to the marginalization of trade, as the commodities produced in a given area were consumed locally without any need for their exchange. (Chakravarti, 2001, 75-76). He defends this theory by arguing for a huge decline in trade due to the paucity of minted metallic currency. The vibrant money economy of preceding centuries was replaced by an economy wherein cowry shells served as the main means of exchange. The use of cowries in great quantities is suggested by archaeological and literary data; this, however, implies the continuation of maritime trade, since these were mainly imported from the Maldives. But it has been

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argued that these cowry shells were restrictive to long-distance transactions, which needed high-quality coinage of precious metals. Thus, a serious crisis in money economy arising from the paucity of metallic currency eventually led to a decline of trade. The then chief political powers, such as the Rashtrakutas, the Palas and the Senas, did not issue any currency, whereas coins of other dynasties lacked a high metallic content and purity and, thus, were unfit for long-distance trade (Chakravarti, 2001, 76-77). This deficit in the availability of metallic coins forced the states to issue land grants to their officers in lieu of cash payment. The decline of trade and decrease in commercial activities played a paramount role in the overall decay of the non-agrarian sector of the economy, leading to the formation and consolidation of a self-sufficient and closed rural economy.

The rise of nomadic Huns, too, had an unfavorable impact on the security and stability of overland trade-routes linking northern India to north-western parts of India and thence to West and Central Asia. Hsuan Tsang's account *Si-Yu-Ki* gives an impression of the decline of towns in the Ganga valley. There are other literary records which reflect the transformation of towns into villages. The proponents of Indian feudalism consider this as the period of de-urbanization when in a closed economy the needs of landed intermediaries were met locally and this resulted in the reduction of trade.

Another view of Sharma, in relation to the Sino-Indian trade, was challenged by Tansen Sen. According to Sharma, the Sino-Indian trade declined after the transfer of sugar-making technology to China in the mid-7th century CE. But on the basis of documentary evidence, Tansen argues that there was no widespread use of sugar or its byproducts among the Chinese people or the Buddhist clergy before or during the Tang dynasty (618-907), nor is there any reference to importation of this product in bulk quantities from India. Thus, it seems that the transfer of sugar-making technology made minimal impact on Sino-Indian commercial exchanges during the 7th and 8th centuries CE and on the Indian economy (Sen, 149-151).

The model of Indian feudalism has been challenged by many historians on other grounds too, as discussed in the next chapter on the process of urbanization. Self-sufficient village economy is considered a myth by the critics of Sharma; they argue that Indian villages always lacked two significant items of daily use, salt and iron, which were procured from outside through trade. They have also brought to light a large amount of evidence for trade, urbanization and money economy in the early medieval India. The regional-level studies, delving into numismatic, epigraphic and, to some extent, archeological data, have adequately showed the prevalence of different types of merchants, various levels of marketplaces and exchange centres. They argue that land grant economy aided in the expansion of agriculture and thereby led to a growth in rural economy. As a result, local and regional trade centres emerged to become a vital linkage with the markets of urban centres. These trade centres were called *mandapikas* in north India, *penthas* in Deccan and *nagarams* in extreme south (the Tamil area). Both B. D. Chattopadhyaya and Ranabir Chakravarti demonstrate the presence of trade, marketplaces and traders in regions like Rajasthan and coastal Konkan in the early medieval period.

Chattopadhyaya, in his book *The Making of Early Medieval India* (1994), argues that although there is evidence for decline of some old urban centres in the early medieval period, at the same time, there were others that simultaneously continued to flourish and some new ones that also emerged. His research, based on early medieval Rajasthan, identifies trade networks in and across the region, marked by the role of money. According to him, in the first phase, from 9th to 11th century CE, there was a proliferation of local centres of exchange within the dominions of the emergent Rajput lineages. These centres were the points of intersection for traffic of varying origins; this gave rise to a certain

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measure of hierarchy in these centres. The second phase, between 11th and 12th centuries CE, witnessed the resurgence of old, local merchant lineages which had already been in operation, and the emergence of new, hitherto unfamiliar lineages—both of which established wide intraregional and interregional networks (Chattopadhyaya, 1994, 88-119). He criticizes Sharma's thesis that a decline in foreign trade led to a decline of urban centres on the ground that a decline in foreign trade may not necessarily imply a decline in internal trade and consequently a decline of urban centres. In defense of his view, he offers two arguments. Firstly, as the foreign trade did not play a crucial role in the birth of early urban centres, a reduced volume of such trade may hardly be held responsible for their decay in the post-Kushana or post-Gupta times. Secondly, the alleged decay of urban settlements coincided with and, in several cases, even preceded the period when land grants grew rapidly. Thus, decline in trade and urban centres may not have logically followed from the types of assignments that were made in the early and medieval India (Chattopadhyaya 1994, 147-48). Further, he argues that after 1000 CE India did witness the crystallization of new networks of exchange, the formation of trade guilds and a new phase of money production and circulation. He terms this phase as the third phase of urbanization in India. Similarly, Chakravarti, in his book *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society* (2002), questions the stereotyped image of early Indian commerce merely in terms of trade of luxuries, and draws the attention to transactions in daily necessities. While the early medieval north India is said to have experienced a drastic economic decline in commercial and urban economy from 600 to 1000 CE, there was a definite rise in the growth of urban centres and markets in the in the post-1000-CE period. Chakravarti's study of the distribution of *mandapikas*, however, demonstrates the emergence of exchange centres even prior to 1000 CE.

Further, Chattopadhyaya challenges the notion that a stable political structure promoted the rise of trade and urban centres, arguing that there was no guarantee that the rise of a kingdom or an empire would necessarily bring in trade and urbanism. He gives epigraphic evidence for many cites of the early medieval period acting as centres for exchange of goods. The centre of these activities was the *mandapika*, a term used for a pavilion though its contextual meaning is derived from the word *mandi* in Hindi and *mandai* in Marathi (Chattopadhyaya 1994, 171-72). In this sense, they can be linked to modern *mandis*. They were mostly located in northern and western India. Several inscriptional references evince the presence of brisk commerce at *mandapikas* as centres of brisk trade between mid-8th and early 11th centuries CE. Several commodities ranging from staples to luxury commodities were available in these markets. These included varied types of agricultural products brought from different surrounding regions. Probably, these markets acted as a link between the rural exchange network and trade in urban regions. Some of these *mandapikas* became huge in size and were called *mahamandapikas*; those related to urban areas were called *pattanamandapikas*. Several references suggest that duties or cesses were imposed by the political authorities and by some mercantile groups in favour of a deity or a religious establishment at the *mandapikas*. The administrative authorities, thus, must have given recognition to these centres of exchange as they also became centres of collection of tolls and customs. The *Lekhapaddhati* documents, too, list several revenue officers apparently connected with revenue collection at the *mandapikas*. These officers used to collect taxes from foreign merchants for importing and exporting in accordance to the prevalent laws and customs (Chakravarti, 2002, 187-195). There was a re-emergence of markets and merchants, as reflected in the holding of weekly *hattas* or rural fairs that became nodal exchange centres, as also a revival of long-distance trade. The rural markets or *hattas* closely correspond to the *addas* in eastern Deccan and *santhes* in western and central Deccan. They were periodically held on certain days of a week. It can be presumed that they had a direct link with the rural hinterland that supplied exchangeable agricultural

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and artisanal produce (Chakravarti, 2010, 329-330). This phase of urbanization, therefore, happened due to agrarian expansion and increased craft production which went beyond the confines of temples or monasteries. And there also emerged several grades of traders during this period.

Like the northern and western India, Deccan, too, witnessed the beginning of a new type of market centre known as *pentha*, as suggested by epigraphic and literary sources. Chakravarti argues, on the basis of *Yashastilakachampu* by Somadevasuri, that *pentha* was divided into many well-laid out chambers, had large storage areas for merchandise and was provided with drinking places, feeding house, assembly hall with seats and streets or shops. Merchants from different areas flocked there. It was marked by ditches, rampart, fortification and moat (Chakravarti, 2010, 329-330). It had a commercial character insofar as the boxes of merchandise were opened as referred as stockade with warehousing facility. Sometimes, many areas in the *pentha* were let out to merchants for storage, display and sale of their commodities against payments of tolls, shares and rent at a moderate rate. Other sources refer to *pentha/pintha* as a trade and toll-collecting centre. The size of this trading centre was probably larger than rural-level market places and weekly fairs but smaller than a sizable urban centre (Chakravarti, 2010, 331). These markets could reach out to both rural hinterland and large urban market areas. Besides *penthas*, there were *nagarams* and *mandapikas* that acted as middle-range commercial centres in their respective regions. There are also several inscriptional and literary references to various kinds of merchants, such as *vaidehaka* (petty traders), *banjara* (hawker), *sarthavaha* (caravan merchant), *shreshthin* (very rich merchant), *vadduvyavahari* (senior merchant) and *nauvittaka* (ship-owning merchants) (Chakravarti, 2010, 331).

Another noted historian, Andre Wink, in his book *Al-Hind: The Making of Indo-Islamic World* (1990), postulates the commercial impact of Islamic expansion on the Indian subcontinent. He cites evidence for towns and circulation of plenty of coins from the 7th to the 11th century CE as the Islamic Middle East acquired economic supremacy while establishing new links between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. He argues that the growth and development of a 'world economy' in and around the Indian Ocean, with India as the epicenter and the Middle East and China as its two dynamic poles. Thus, India was affected by continuous economic, social and cultural integration into ever wider and more complex pattern under the auspices of Islam.

There have also been many researches on the corporate associations or guilds of merchants with a well-defined structure and a carefully framed code of conduct and membership, governed by certain regulations and qualifications (Chakravarti, 2001, 326). According to the earlier researches, the guilds began to decline in number in the Ganga valley during the early medieval period. This view has been criticized by the recent researches that demonstrate the prominent position of guilds and their merchants, as also their and their commercial activities in Gujarat and far south (medieval Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala), during this very period. Particularly notable are the works of V. K. Jain and R. Champakalakshmi which show the role of mercantile bodies in early medieval Gujarat and south India respectively.

The Indian Feudalism model and its thesis on the declining volume of India's long distance trade has hardly paid attention to the expansion of the Indian Ocean trade in around the 8th century CE. With the rise of Islam, the Arabs expanded their political dominion in northern Africa, the Mediterranean region, Central Asia and some parts of India. This expansion gave them a prominent control over Indian Ocean trade. Their new faith with a distinct thrust on commerce and urbanism inspired the Arabs to politically dominate vast areas of Asia, northern and eastern Africa, as also some parts of Europe and thereby play a

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significant role in the maritime commerce of the Indian Ocean zone (Chakravarti, 2002, 160-186).

Arab traders emerged as significant players in the trade along the overland and maritime routes that connected Europe with east Asia. K. N. Chaudhuri, in his book *Trade And Civilization in the Indian Ocean* (1985), argues that from middle of the 7th century CE to the end of the 15th century CE, there existed a long line of trans-continental trade, going all the way from southern China to eastern Mediterranean. The commodities exchanged were such as could be easily integrated to the local demands. In regard to the Indian Ocean trade, he states that it incorporated shorter voyages and distances with flow of commodities going in the direction of regional markets. This pattern of trans-continental trade changed probably in the beginning of the 10th century CE, when Arab ships and merchants sailed all the way to China and back, calling at the intermediate ports according to the available trading opportunities there. A single voyage mounted across the whole breath of the Indian Ocean, though it incurred considerable transaction costs, and gradually this particular pattern of trading was discontinued in favour of shorter, segmented voyages between a number of leading port-cities (Chaudhuri, 1985, 37-39). By the 11th century CE, the Indian Ocean trade was divided into smaller segments, such as the stretch from the Red Sea and Persian Gulf to Gujarat and Malabar; from the Indian coast to the Indonesian archipelago; and from Southeast Asia to East Asia. Many Asian products of trade, such as silk, porcelain, sandalwood and black pepper, were exported and exchanged for incense, horses, ivory, cotton textiles and metal products. This transoceanic trade later gave way to organized trade in short segments, based on the intermediate urban emporia of the Malabar coast and the strait of Mallaca (Chaudhuri, 1985, 49).

The emergence of the Cholas in south India and their maritime activities, conducted by flourishing merchant guilds, at the centre of Indian Ocean trade system made south India an equal participant along with China and Southeast Asia (Shrimali, 2008, 745). In regard to south India, Kenneth R. Hall's work, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas* (1980), demonstrate that there was considerable commercial activity in the south Indian hinterland and that well-organized trade networks supplied the commodities demanded by foreign traders during the Cholas period. Burton Stein's work, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (1980), indicates that from the 12th century CE, trade and urban life in south India progressed in comparison to the preceding period.

B. N. S. Yadav, in his book *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (1973), points out the increased productivity in agriculture and the developed state of industry during the 11th and 12th centuries CE, which may be connected with the comparative development of trade and commerce in northern India, as against the economic decline which was the feature of the post-Gupta period. In a similar vein, V. K. Jain's *Trade and Traders in Western India* (1990), based on indigenous epigraphic and literary sources and foreign accounts of western India during the period 1000-1300 CE, shows that western India witnessed unprecedented commercial activities. As a large number of luxury and essential goods were carried by merchants from a place to another, state collected varieties of tolls and taxes at toll houses. At the same time, there were active mercantile activities at ports and in towns, and merchants occupied high positions in contemporary society and politics. In totality, this suggests that there was a great economic expansion in this period in the region of Gujarat and southern Rajasthan (Jain, 1990, 250-53).

Jain argues that there was a greater use of money during this period. He also suggests that though there are no references to *vishti* (forced labour) in the historical records, there are clear references to payment of taxes, services and loans in cash. There is

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also evidence for the use of *hundikas* or bills of exchange to assist large-scale commercial transactions without the use of much currency (Jain, 1990, 250-53). Further, there are inscriptional references to toll houses, and commercial taxes were a significant source of state income. He also points to the factors for the development of trade and commerce in western India, such as growth in population, consequent increase in the number of rural settlements and in the agricultural production (as waste or virgin lands were brought under cultivation), as well as cultivation of commercial crops like sugarcane, cotton and indigo. While agreeing with Sharma's feudalism theory, he points out that commercial development of the age did not disturb the existing land-vassal nexus or the feudal mode of production. For him, Indian foreign trade did exist, and although references to Indian traders going abroad are scarce, he believes, they did have contacts with Arab traders who collected their goods from China, Southeast Asia and India and carried them to the ports of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea for sale in the European continent (Jain, 1990, 250-53). Arab trading activities did not let the market of Indian goods abroad to decline, as the traders of western India were inclined to restricting their trade to coastal and internal trade. The main products that continued to be imported to western India included precious and base metals, silk, gems, ivory, fine spices, wine, frankincense and horses. However, there was a change in the nature of Indian products exported overseas. Before the 11th century CE, Indian export consisted mainly of luxury articles, such as textiles, silk and fine muslin, but later it also included sugar, buckram, flaxen, cotton fabrics, tanned leather, leather goods, swords and spears and also cereals (Jain, 1990, 71-108). The finds of early medieval coin-hoards from various parts of western India suggest the use of money as a medium of exchange.

While R. S. Sharma opines that the articles of trade during the Pala and the Pratihara periods were not meant for day-to-day use by common people, except salt and oil which were not produced in the villages in sufficient quantity, Jain points out that both literary and inscriptional sources of 10th century CE and later reveal that merchants in western India handled a tremendous variety of essential and luxury commodities (Jain, 1990, 56).

B. N. Mukherjee, too, questions the Sharma's theses on the paucity of coins (as media of exchange) and decline of trade. He argues that there is no evidence for an unusual decline of trade, but on the contrary brisk trading activities continued in some regions during the early medieval period. On the basis of several historical sources, he refers to different areas famous for production or availability of various articles of commerce. He highlights the existence of regional, interregional and international Indian trade, by citing references from indigenous and foreign travel accounts. The intensity of production and commercial activities might have varied from region to region, but there was no concrete evidence for the decline of trade in northern India during the early medieval period (Mukherjee, 1986, 92). He further concludes that there was no paucity of coins in several regions of north India, and it continued to be used as media of exchange to facilitate trade and commerce. Thus the finds of a large number of early medieval coins suggest their use in coin conscious zones for commercial transactions. Moreover, money in the form of cowries, coins and units of pure metal encouraged the trade.

Another article of B. N. Mukherjee analyses the situation of commerce and money in the western and central parts of eastern India (present-day Bihar, West Bengal and Bangladesh) between 750 and 1200 CE. During this period, under the major dynasties, namely the Palas and the Senas, the politically stable state encouraged the growth of industry and regular movement of articles of commerce (Mukherjee, 1982, 65-66). On the one hand, Ganga and its branches provided very convenient channels of communication; on the other, the sea coast of the territory served as a base for maritime trade. Large-scale trade in commodities and presence of specialized industries prove that the region had a

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thriving industry and brisk commerce. This region under the Pala-Sena rulers saw trade in local products and import of foreign items, as also exploration of valuable articles, produced locally or brought from territories further inland. However, the volume of trade during this period was comparatively less than that in the following period. The inscriptions refer to local shops, markets and big markets. Ruling class may have acquired a portion of wealth through taxation and participation in trade (Mukherjee, 1982, 66-67).

The inscriptions of this period do refer to the restrictions and taxes imposed by the government on trading articles. They also refer to *hattika* (petty markets or market dues). The royal officers collecting dues from markets, customs and ferries are referred to as *hattapati*, *saulika* and *tarikha* (Mukherjee, 1982, 66-67). Royal interest in the trade is thus evident. Therefore, according to Mukherjee (1982, 66-67), the western and central regions of eastern India witnessed brisk internal trade, transit trade and international trade during the early Palas, the later Palas and the Senas. In the similar vein, Himanshu Prabha Ray in her article 'Maritime Archaeology of Indian Ocean: An Overview' (1996), has utilised archeological records from Southeast Asia and the Persian Gulf to suggest a continuity in trade from 4th to 14th century CE. She suggests that trade did not cease with the decline of empires; instead, there were relocations in routes and changes in the participants (Ray, 1996, 1-9).

The volume and variety of Indian trade in the early medieval period was, admittedly, comparatively lower than the that in the modern period. There were changes in the list of imports and export items from different countries in due space of time, but certain essential daily items, such as drugs and spices, remained important. Trade in luxury items was still active. Backward navigation techniques and danger of pirates forced the surrounding countries to trade in luxury items, which were comparatively smaller in volume and weight, in order to cater to the demands of the ruling class. Stiff competition existed between the Arab, Indonesian and Chinese traders and, in turn, reduced the Indian traders to performing the role of distributing wares within their country (Gopal, 1965, 159-160). The rise of feudal lords and other chiefs accelerated the demand for luxury items from foreign countries. This contributed to the decline in India's profits from trade.

10.3 Inter-regional Trade

As per the feudal model, there was emergence of new consumers due to increase in distribution of large scale land grants from the 8th century onwards. These were religious men of highest order such as priests, who became entitled to hereditary rights of landed estates and benefices. This new landowning class raised the demand of luxuries and other necessities, in addition to earlier existing ruling and mercantile classes. These religious institutions became huge consumers of many marketable goods. Thus big temples with immense resources and requirements encouraged the growth of commercial activities. In reference to South India, it gave a boost to the inter-regional trade during the concerned phase.

Lallanji Gopal's book *The Economic life of Northern India* (1965) analyzed the internal and external trade, by land and sea; credit and banking, coinage, revenue system and guilds. He shows that inter-state trade continued during the early medieval period, which is evident from the fact that many significant items of daily use like spices, luxury goods, metals and salt which were used all over India came from different regions (Gopal, 1965, 90-104). Other traded products of daily use were food-grains, oil, butter, jaggery and madder etc. The references of these, paying tolls and taxes, showed the existence of commercial activities. Many literary and epigraphic references stated that traders from one

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part of India regularly visited other parts for trading and commercial operations. Many commercial activities were also promoted due to religious journey of pilgrimage (*tirthas*). Similarly education centres, scattered in different parts, which kept alive the contacts between different parts. The merchants anticipating in the inter-state trade generally travelled in groups and were termed as caravan traders. These were considered to be a safe against the robbers invading the highways. Many big merchants before preceding the caravan journey, used to declare their intention to their fellow merchants in the city and invited them to join them in the journey. These caravan leaders disclosed their fellow travellers about the advantages of the route to be taken for journey and gave them useful guidance. There are several references of decline in the volume of trade due to insecurity of the highways. This could not be restrained because of absence of a strong central power which led to the growth of feudal anarchy. These feudal chiefs took advantage of the existing political chaos and the weakness of the central authority, to earn high profits by robbery. Thus political fluctuations, frequent feudal raids and internecine wars must have hampered trade.

There existed a vast network of roads connecting ports, markets and town of different regions, which encouraged the exchanging trade relations between them. Detailed information of several overland trade-routes within India are given in Arabic and Persian records of different travellers such as Xuanzang [seventh century] and Albiruni [1030 CE]. There are detailed descriptions of the routes connecting Khurasan, trans-Indus and cis-Indu regions and Sind to the interior parts of India which reflect the regular mercantile cultural, political and military contacts between India and the Islamic world (Chakravarti and Majumdar, 2008, 761). Other examples of overland route which passed from Bihar to Tibet and to China are also given. The commercial traffic between India, Tibet and China along the routes passing through Nepal drastically influenced the economy of Nepal. There are references to the effect that Bengal received large number of horses that merchants brought through this above mentioned trade route. Indian merchants actively participated in the trade along the north-western India. They mostly visited Iran though not much into Central Asia. After the Arabs established their control over Sindh, India and Muslim world were brought in close proximity for trading relations. Large number of horses, and sufficient quantity of saffron, asafetida and wine were imported to India along the overland north-western route. The other overland trade routes mentioned were from Bayana in Rajasthan to Karchi in Sindh; another from Mathura to the port of Western coast via Ujjain. These routes played a major role in connecting the interior of India to the international sea trade mostly in the post 10th century CE.

The heavy merchandise was carried by camels, buffaloes, fine oxen, mules and donkeys. The carts drawn by bullocks, mules, buffaloes and other animals helped in the transport and conveyance of merchants and their merchandise. Thus it appears that providing transport and conveyance was a very lucrative business during this phase (Gopal, 1965, 90-104). Several references of roads are evident such as carriage street, a small street, a high street and a high road, all of which were used for commercial inland trading activities. Some vital roads were demarcated with mile-stones for the convenience of travellers and merchants. In the plains of northern India, rivers were considered to be better and safer mode of travelling and of transporting merchandise than roads.

During the 8th century CE, in south India, *nagarams* emerged, which were mainly connected with the production and exchange commodities, at local, inter-regional or international level. In regard to Chola state, there was an urban growth and direct royal involvement in promoting trade and exchange networks by using the *nagaram* as one of the agents of state synthesis. Trade and commercial activities were promoted by royal policy of

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conquests, development of ports, the encouragement of production centres and guild activities. During the Chola period, in response to constant demand and encouragement, specialization of crafts followed and production centres catered to an expanding market (internal and external) through which organized commerce emerged (Champakalakshmi, 1996, 206). Champakalakshmi showed the growing role of *nagarams* in three phases, first, early Chola period (850-985), growth in the use of metals (gold and silver) as a mode of religious gifts and partial monetization of the economy, meant a greater role of *nagaram* in commercial activities in comparison to the earlier periods. In this phase there were minimal contact between *nagaram* and international mercantile organization. Second, middle Chola period (985-1150), the proliferation and specialization of *nagarams* happened. Many commercial towns appeared throughout the Chola territory and also emerged in the newly conquered territories. *Nagarams* also became the part of wider network of inter-regional and oversea trade from the eleventh century, with enhanced political influence in the crucial links. The *nagaram* organizations and specialization in the marketing of specific commodities became important factor for urbanization of 11th-13th centuries and it is characterized as 'temple urbanization', where the religious institution contributed to the urban and economic growth during this phase. In this period, there established a new close relations between the temples, Brahman communities and merchants guilds also extended to the areas newly conquered by the Cholas rulers. Chola rulers led many raids in order to control the major internal as well as lucrative Indian Ocean trade (Champakalakshmi, 1996, 215-222). Third, the late Chola period (1150-1279 CE) saw a phenomenal increase in trading activities and measures were taken to control over the movement of the goods by different merchant bodies coming together and jointly fixing rates of tolls and the share of the town. In this period local agricultural organization gained more independence and political power as they were supported by merchant guilds. Due to absence of strong single political power under the Chola rulers, these agricultural organizations and merchant guilds acted in independent capacity and held the rights of fixing tolls, commission, share of the town, directing temple building and transporting agricultural surplus and commercial goods (Ibid., 220-222). In the thirteenth century merchant guilds emerged as one of the most powerful social and political organization in southern India, at the cost of Chola court.

10.4 Maritime Trade

Besides giving accounts of inland trade of this period, Gopal showed the references of presence of the Indian foreign trade via land and sea. In regard to foreign trade, Northwest frontier of India had several passes which connected merchants to establish overland trade routes with China, Persia, Arabia and Asia Minor. With the expansion of Islam, the Arabs created hindrances for the Europeans to trade with the Orient. During 650 to 750 CE, there emerged a quadrangular struggle between the Turks, the Tibetans, the Arabs and the Chinese for the occupation of Central Asia (Gopal, 1965, 105-118). Gradually, trade routes across Central Asia declined to a great extent due to lack of Chinese interest as it was unable to establish control over Central Asian states. During the second half of the seventh century the sea-route between India and China was more in use than the overland route. The chaotic conditions on the route across north-western India and Central Asia led the merchants to seek and develop other possible trade routes through Assam, Burma and Sikkim (Ibid., 105-118).

There are several references of Indian foreign trade via sea during the early medieval period. Initially this oceanic trade was shared between Persians, Indians, Indonesians and Ceylonese but after their rise, the Arabs established their dominance by replacing Persians who were major participants in this trade. Soon they became the foremost maritime power in the ninth century and expanded their influence in the east.

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From the tenth century the Arabs had to yield a part of the monopoly, especially to the west of Indonesian countries, to the ports of Sumatra, Java and Malaya (Ibid., 119-160). Later in the twelfth century, they faced a firm competition with the Chinese who finally succeeded in establishing hegemony right up to the Malabar ports.

Arabs had control over Persian Gulf and the Red Sea which helped them to expand their maritime enterprise. By uniting western Asia and Egypt they were able to control all the sea routes going towards India and other eastern countries. Other participants of Southeast Asian trade were Ceylon, China and Indonesia. India lacked control over maritime trade in comparison to these countries, firstly, due to backwardness in the techniques of ship construction and navigation. As Indian ships were small in size and slow in speed, they were incapable of taking long journey in comparison to their counterparts. The second reason was the inability of the Indian states to protect the interest of Indian ships against coastal powers engaged in piracy. The increasing instances of piracy must have deterred Indian merchants taking frequent voyages to distant areas. Lastly, spreading of a taboo against sea-voyages in the orthodox Brahmanical group curbed the trading activities, it was considered to be a hindrance for the attainment of heaven (Ibid., 119-160).

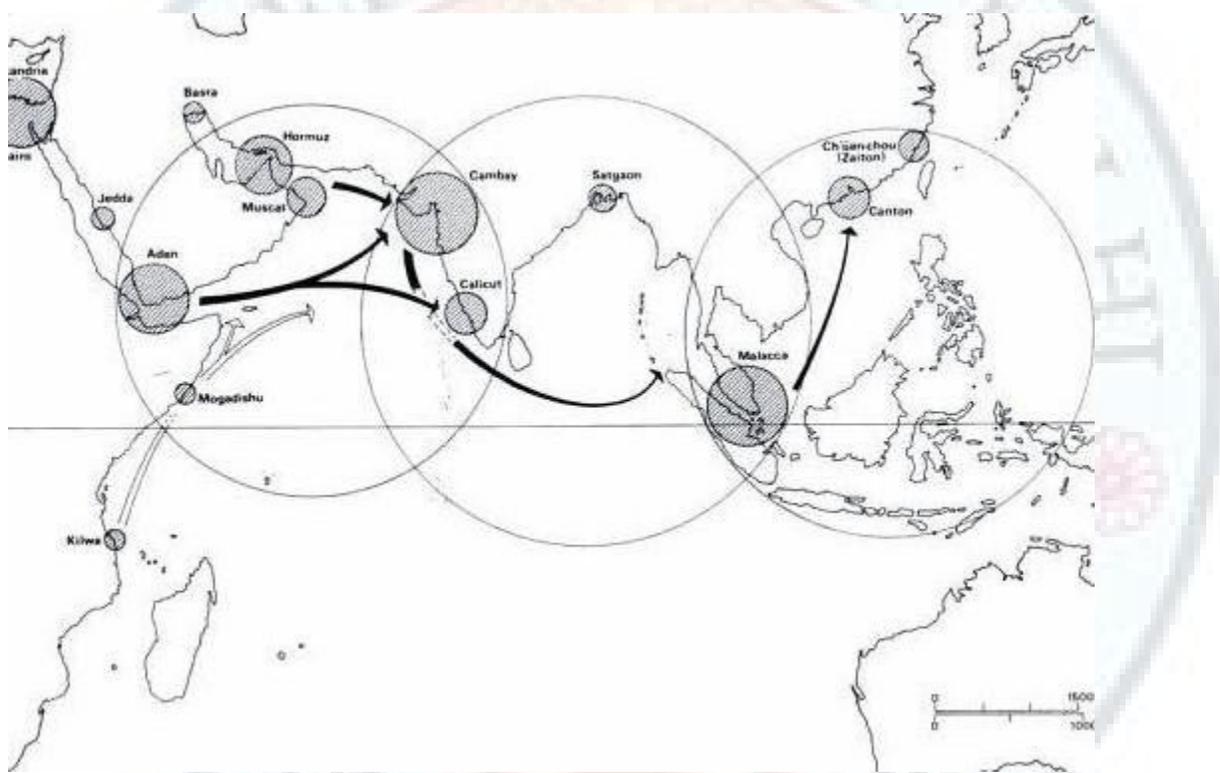
There were many besides those who actually participated in shipping of merchandise in sea trade. They were known as class of disbursing merchants who brought the goods from the foreign merchants and circulated them within the country. Gradually, it seems that Indian merchants were concentrating more on the process of distribution while the actual trade was left in the hands of foreigners (Ibid., 144).

The movement of monsoon winds made the Indian peninsula, by the Cholas the natural divide and an intersecting point between the Red Sea/Persian Gulf region and the Chinese ports. The goods exported from the Chinese markets were traded by a group of merchants engaged in trade between Western Asia and southern India, and then transhipped at south Indian ports to trading ships concentrating on the southern India-China sector. The long single voyages between the Arabian peninsula and China, were now reduced and merchants adopted safer, less time and cost consuming trips. In this pattern of trade, the Cholas facilitated the movement of merchants and commodities across the Indian Ocean by linking it to the major maritime market of the world (Sen, 2003, 158-160). India had been a trans-shipment centre between the commercial exchange of China and Rome. During the sixth and the seventh centuries Indian ports supplied Chinese silk to the markets in the Byzantine empire. With the foundation of Islam, Arab forces under the Umayyad (661-750 CE) and the Abbasid (750-1000 CE) caliphates conquered many areas in northern Africa, the Mediterranean region and even parts of northwest India and Central Asia. Slowly and gradually, these Muslim traders started to monopolize India's foreign trade in west of coast of India or in the Arabian Sea. By the ninth century they also penetrated in the maritime circuit between coastal India and China. By late tenth century, Muslim merchants were actively transporting Chinese silk and porcelain through southern Indian and Sri Lanka to the Persian Gulf and in return were carrying other goods from the Persian Gulf/Red Sea region to Chinese markets. Thus, these Muslim merchants had organized an extensive trading network spanning from the Far East to the Mediterranean region (Ibid., 160-166).

From 8th century CE onwards, maritime routes between India and China, that either crossed through the Andaman and Nicobar Islands or passed around the ports of Bay of Bengal to Sumatra and into the South China Sea, became more popular than the earlier overland routes. Several factors contributed to the change from overland to seaborne routes such as change in economic policies, developments in navigation, better understanding of monsoon (seasonal winds), ship-building technologies and political stability which boosted the seaborne trade between Indian and China (Sen, 2003, 168-176). Instability in Central

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Asia and encouragement of the commerce by the southern Indian states in the eighth and the ninth centuries helped in the rapid increase in maritime trade between India and China. K.N. Chaudhuri pointed out a significant change which was noticed in the pattern of the maritime voyages across the Indian Ocean at the end of the 10th century CE, where earlier longer, time-consuming voyages were replaced by less costly, shorter and segmented trips. He with the help of a map, tried to show that in the eleventh century the Indian Ocean trade from the Red Sea region to the East Asia was divided into three natural segments, first, 'there was the stretch from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf to the Gujarat and the Malabar. The second segment included the annual voyages from the coastal provinces of the India to the Indonesian archipelago. In the final segment lay the economic exchanges between South East Asia and the Far East. At each junction of the segments, great urban emporia had developed, providing cargo and shipping services to the merchants and offering on the part of the political rulers an element of neutrality' (Chaudhuri, 1985, 102-105).



Source : K.N. Chaudhuri's *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, p. 104.

Chaudhuri had identified major cities engaged in maritime trade as Aden, Hormuz, Cambay, Calicut, Satgaon, Malacca, Canton and Ch'uan-chou (Zaiton). To this existing emporia Tansen made addition of another city based on archeological evidence, named Nagapattinam (transshipped port between South Asia and Persian Gulf/Red Sea) on the Coromandel coast that contributed in Indian Ocean commerce, which became the port of departure for the Chola missions sailing to China (Sen, 2003, 179). There are many epigraphic references to show the regular settlements of foreign merchants on the western coast. There are also references of Indian commercial relations with several countries like China, Arabia, Egypt, partially Europe and south-east Asia also.

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10.4.1 China

In the early medieval period, India had trade relations with distinct countries. In the eighth century, references show the brisk trade between India and China. This trade expanded during the following centuries and reached its climax in the mid-11th century CE. India's share in the trade with China declined due to the competition of the Arab and Indonesian merchants. South Indian states continued to maintain trading relations with China (Gopal, 1965, 119-160). The Chola kingdom participated in the lucrative trade with China. Chola embassies were sent to China, Rajaraja I (985-1014 CE) had an interest in commercial relations with China and he also paid attention towards building the Chola navy for the purpose of naval conquests. Later, Indian trade with Tibet, Central Asia and China had to face stiff challenge with the rise of the Arabs and the Chinese. Arab and Persian merchants continued to trade along the western and eastern seaboard of India and as far as China. During the 10th to 13th century, trading ports and mercantile guilds of the Chola kingdom played a vital role in linking the markets of China to the rest of world, as the market structure and economic policies of Chola kingdom was conducive to a large-scale and cross-regional market trade. Chola court supported merchants by providing them protection in term of trade and sometimes they entered into marital relationship with the mercantile community, whereas merchant communities supported the Chola kings during the war and managing newly conquered areas (Sen, 2003, 156-57). The Chola economic structures and policies probably proved significant in the segmentation of Indian Ocean trade into profitable zone that linked China market to the rest of the world. The reign of Chola kings Rajaraja I (985-1014 CE), Rajendra I (1012-1044 CE) and Rajadhiraja (1018-1054 CE), were marked with internal stability and expansion of domestic and international trade.

In regard to South Indian trade, Meera Abraham in her book *Two Medieval Merchants Guilds of Southern India* (1988) tried to highlight that merchant guilds provided the institutional framework for organized commerce internally and overseas. The encouragement by the Chola court promoted the expansion of Tamil merchant associations, such as the Manigramam and Ayyavole (two powerful medieval merchant guilds), into Southeast Asia and China. She stated that Tamil merchants were engaged in the transport and disbursement of a variety of commodities along the Indian Ocean trade routes, and also controlled trade on both the Coromandel and Malabar coasts in south India. The development of intimate association among the Chola state, merchant guilds and religious institutions became important features of Chola state synthesis (Abraham, 1988, 87). On the basis inscriptional records, Abraham highlights the import of large quantities of goods into South India from West-Asia, Southeast Asia and China in the mid 12th century while from the 13th century CE there was shift of importance towards western ports of South India and Sri Lanka reflecting probably the rise in Indian trade with Egypt and West Asia. After the decline of Chola state during the 12th century CE, the merchant guilds of South India became increasingly independent and less dependent on royal support. It was reflected as trading caravans started to move with armed protection whereas merchant guilds jointly began to fix tolls and cesses, and also made joint donations to temples (Singh, 2009, 603).

Xinru Liu in her book *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People AD 600-1200* (1996), stated that bilateral trade was a significant factor for Sino-Indian relations and it was linked by the fate of Buddhist interactions, as during first millennium, Buddhist doctrine helped in creating a demand for the Buddhist-related items in China which, played a substantial role in nourishing the commercial exchange between China and India. In the similar vein, Tansen Sen in his book *Buddhism,*

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Diplomacy and Trade (2003), stated that Sino-Indian relations between the 7th-15th centuries CE reflect major changes in the nature and of Sino-Indian relations, from Buddhist dominated to commerce centered exchanges. He stated during the early medieval period, due to 'fading role of Buddhist doctrines had significantly reconfiguration the pattern of commercial exchange between the trade of India and China, including, (i) the infiltration of non-Buddhist traders in Sino-Indian commerce; (ii) shifts in trade routes, with an enlarged role for the Islamized maritime trade; (iii) the growing prevalence of nonreligious luxury and bulk products' (Sen, 2003, 142-43). He has divided the Sino-Indian trade relations in early medieval period into three phases.

In first phase between 7-9th centuries, Buddhist doctrines and institutions sustained Sino-Indian cultural, diplomatic and commercial relations. The interdependence network of long-distance trade and the transmission of Buddhist doctrines from India to China continued to flourish in this phase. A network of interdependence developed between urbanized towns, long distance trade, and the spread of Buddhist theology. It fostered the establishment of inter-regional and inter-cultural links, and also developed ties between different groups of people. The nexus between the spread of Buddhist doctrines and Sino-Indian trade flourished and strengthened due to the frequent use of Buddhist doctrines and political rulers (Sen, 2003, 236). The second phase from 9-10th centuries, showed a decline in the overland trade between India and China due to disturbing political conditions in central Asia and Myanmar. According to him, the emergence of China as a centre of Buddhism had profound implications on religious interaction, as it weakened the China's spiritual attraction towards India. Simultaneously, Chinese Buddhist schools and teaching retrenched the need for doctrinal input from India. There were political upheavals along overland routes and the Islamization of maritime channels which altered the Buddhist-centered trading exchanges between India and China. Buddhist exchanges and translation of Indian texts continued in the late 10th and the early 11th centuries CE. In spite of these activities, the interdependent network of long-distance trade and the transmission of Buddhist doctrines from India to China had disintegrated. The Buddhist ideas failed to inspire the flow of cultural elements and commercial items between India and China during this phase. In the last phase from late 10th century CE, commercial relations revived and both overland and maritime trade flourished. The growing interest in international commerce shared by Indian and Chinese rulers acted as a stimulus for Sino-Indian trade. Other factors were the 'linking of local economy to external trade in the two countries, the vibrant Islamic trading diasporas across the Indian Ocean kingdoms, and the emergence of a well-organized and large scale trading network extending from coastal China to the ports of the Mediterranean Sea all of which facilitated the successful transition of Sino-Indian relations from Buddhist-dominated to trade-centered exchanges' (Ibid., 237). Further, the establishment of new trading diasporas, the military efforts of the Cholas to establish trading links with the Chinese markets promoted their trade. The pre existing maritime and overland channels between India and China facilitated the large-scale commercial operations across the Indian Ocean and the Central Asian Silk road. During this phase the Buddhist doctrine lost its spirit in Sino-Indian commercial interactions, as the exchanges between the coastal regions of Indian and China were motivated by commercial concerns, operated mostly by non-Buddhist Tamil and Muslim traders and the goods exchanged were mostly non-religious luxuries and bulk commodities (Ibid., 237-41).

Chinese silk was the main Chinese commodity which was exported to India. Variety of Chinese silk forms was used by aristocratic and wealthy families so it reached to India. Sometimes this was brought as gift item by the Chinese diplomatic missions for Indian rulers and abbots. Chinese silk continued to be of great demand among Indian elite and religious groups because it had a special value and prestige attached to the commodity a

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(Ibid., 183). There are references of Chinese monks making pilgrimages to India during the Tang period [618-907], carrying silk fabric for either travel-related expenses or for donations to Buddhist monasteries. There was a decline of Chinese silk in India only during the eleventh century when Islamic Turks introduced silk and sericulture technology into the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, by the eleventh century, Chinese porcelain had replaced silk as main commodity of import to India. Although, porcelain was demanded by few Indians nevertheless it was an important item in Sino-Indian trade because Indian merchants profited from re-exporting these commodities to the Islamic markets. Tansen said that the demand for Chinese porcelain in the Persian Gulf/Red Sea markets and the capacity of the Chola traders and ports to transship the commodity across the Indian Ocean' were the key factors for the rise of Indian peninsular trade. Several other Chinese commodities besides silk and porcelain was imported in India, such as Chinese hides, vermilion, fruits, camphor, lacquer and mercury. There are references of Chinese metals such as gold, silver and copper which were imported to India (Ibid., 182-85).

10.4.2 Sri Lanka

The Cholas tried to subjugate and annex Sri Lanka for political and economic reasons. Politically, they became the predominant power in south India after defeating the Pandya Kings who took refuge in Sri Lanka and made it a centre to counterattack the Cholas. Curbing their power was a political necessity of the Cholas, besides there were several economic reasons which motivated the Cholas to establish their influence in Sri Lanka, such as gaining booty; establishing control over the pearl fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar; exploitation of gems and precious stones; and utilised this prime location as entrepot for maritime trade (Chakravarti & Majumdar, 2008, 762). Besides Sri Lanka, the Cholas also led military expeditions against ports of Malaysian peninsula and Indonesian Island to loot and also to control the trade. The Cholas and the Pandyas established commercial links with Sri Lanka for more than 300 years. Indian sailors and merchants visited the ports of east and west coast to sell their local products or those brought from the foreign lands by foreigners. That they even traded in Ceylon is evident from the eighth century Ceylonese inscription (Gopal, 1965, 143-45).

During the 5th century CE, Sri Lanka became the entrepot for the Indian Ocean trade, while many Tamil merchants settlement continued to exist in Anuradhapura and Mahatittha that became significant port in the trade of the Indian Ocean 7th century CE onwards. This resulted in Indian political intervention and temporary annexation of Sri Lanka. Economic exploitation of this island by India in respect of their internal trade was also evident. Between 10th and early 13th century CE, various changes in the relationship between Sri Lanka and Cholas and their contemporaries could be witnessed.

10.4.3 South East Asia

There are many literary references of Indian trade with Southeast Asia which show that in the Southeast Asia, Indian sailors and merchants extended their trade mostly to Indonesia. The farthest limits of the ships from the west were the ports of Malaya, Java or Sumatra. Tamralipti in Bengal was probably the chief port for sailing to Indonesia In the late 8th century, Pala dominions of northern India became predominant in the culture of Southeast Asia. Later in the beginning of 11th century CE, Cholas came to power in south India and established their influence in Indonesian trade. Vijayanti was another port from where ships sailed to Indonesia. Several references are present to suggest the long and continuous intercourse between the Tamil country and Southeast Asia. It was not only the eastern India but also western Indian states which had trade relations with Southeast Asia.

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Gujarati traders had trading relations with Java. There were many Muslim merchants who dominated the western coast of India (Gopal, 1965, 119-160).

10.4.3.1 Srivijaya

During the beginning of the 10th century CE, Srivijaya (in a port named Palembang in eastern part of Sumatra) rulers developed close relations with both China and India. When the rulers of Java threatened to subordinate Srivijaya, it tried to develop friendly relations with China and the Cholas of south India, as both were keenly interested in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. The Cholas made great commercial ties with Srivijaya (Palembang) in South-east Asia, which is reflected by the cultural patronage of Srivijaya king to the Buddhist monasteries at Nagapattinam (in Coromandel coast). The Chola King Rajaraja also gave huge land grant for the maintenance of the monastery. Besides cultural exchanges there were brisk maritime trading activities between these two regions. Since the beginning of the 11th century, there are many references of brisk trade between Srivijaya and south India. The Cholas undertook the maritime expeditions to the Southeast Asia not for short term plunder motive, but with the goal of minimizing the role of Srivijaya as the intermediary between the Cholas and Sung China (Chakravarti, 2010, 333). During the early phase in 11th century CE, Rajendra Chola made campaigns against Srivijaya and reduced his empire. The Javanese inscriptions give references of brisk trade in the Malacca strait region in which merchants from different parts of north, south and east India participated. In late twelfth century Srivijaya could retain control over trade passing through the straits with the help of pirates but it lost the status of entrepot in the Asian trade by the late 13th and early 14th century CE as it was overtaken by establishment of northern Sumatran trading centres (Chakravarti & Majumdar, 2008, 765-771).

10.4.3.2 Java, Bali, Burma, Malya, Sumatra, Kambuja, Campa

The relations between Java and India were mainly based upon commercial exchanges. They and also had contacts through art and literature. The flourishing trade of Java with India and other countries was noticed by the fact that Arab and Indian merchants from Cambay travelled to Java to purchase several commodities such as pepper, spices and precious goods (Chakravarti & Majumdar, 2008, 771-773). Throughout early medieval period and especially in the 12th century, many traders from Cambay region of Gujarat were actively involved in the trade in archipelago. There were evidences of some commercial, cultural or political relations with one or other south-east Asian states during different periods in the early medieval era, most prominent among them being Bali, Burma, Malaya and Sumatra. There are references of two way traffic between India and Kambuja by merchants, fortune seekers, scholars and pilgrims. Some inscriptions also highlight the trading activities between Indian and Khmers at ports of the Gulf of Surabaya. At this port, the people of Campa also participated in maritime activities, directly between China and west involving India also (Ibid., 775-782). Similarly there are also references of brisk trade between Orissa coast, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia and East Africa.

10.4.4 West

States of western coast of India played a prominent role in the sea-trade with Muslim countries in comparison to the states situated in the eastern coast. Indian merchants in large number visited Siraf and had friendly relations with the Muslim

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merchants of that place. Some references show that some of them had Indian agents at Hormuz. They maintained regular trade relation with Persia and transported goods in their own ships (Gopal, 1965, 119-160). The centre of Indian trade continued to shift, in the seventh century, it was Basra, then it was transferred to Siraf (in Persian Gulf) and later to Kish and Hormuz. But the rise of the Arab merchants did not leave much space for Indian ships to proceed further to the west. After capturing the major port and market of Valabhi on the Saurashtra coast during the eighth century, the Arabs became the major maritime force in the eastern side of India as the trade with Mesopotamia, Egypt or Eastern coast of Africa was mostly dominated by Persian and Arab merchants. There were mercantile links between India and the Islamic world, 'as there were historical references of routes connecting Khurasan, trans-Indus and cis-Indu regions and Sind to the interior parts of India' (Chakravarti & Majumdar, 2008, 761). The Arab traders traded with the kings of the western coast, especially with the Rastrakutas (probably due to their religious toleration) who patronized them and wanted to enjoy the monopoly of products brought by them.

Many Indian coastal powers tried to attract the Arab merchants to their ports. The Chalukyas played an active role in the coastal trade and had control over three ports of Cambay, Broach and Somanatha. The Paramaras also tried to control ports of the western coast which they succeeded only temporarily. The states of the western coast tried earnestly to regulate the sea-trade and make commercial benefits. Many Jains traders and merchants of Gujarat played important role in western India. These merchants of Gujarat, besides engaging in commercial activities, also became patrons of learning; they patronised the works of *kavya*, poetics, philosophy and grammar; and also gave generous grants to support the buildings of temples, wells and tanks (Singh, 2009, 586).

10.5 Indian ports

Many historical sources refer to number of ports on the east and west coasts of India. At the end of Indus was an important port of Debal which was visited by ships from Arabia, China and other ports. Important port of Gujarat coast were Somanatha, Cambay and Broach. Sopara and Thana were also major ports in western coast of India. In Bengal, earlier Tamralipti and later Saptagrama port gained prominence with the trade with South-East Asia. Other important ports of eastern coast were Puri, Kalinga, Cikaculi (Chicacole), Banpur and Ramesvara. Tamil merchants continued to establish their commercial activities in the Indian Ocean, especially in the ports of Anuradhapura and Mahatittha. Malabar or the Coromandel Coast also appeared to the commercial centres where huge ships sailed and brought merchandise for trade. In Malabar Coast, the most important port was Quilon where large number of trading activities took place by the foreign merchants. Arab writers mentioned about other ports of lesser importance of the western coast such as Kudafarid (Alimukam), Sinjili (Kodungallur), Tandiur (Kadalundi), Manjarur (Mangalore) and others. The significant ports of Gujarat were Bhrgukaccha, Broach, Cambay, Somnath (Gopal, 1965, 143-152) and Sthanaka (Thanna), Samyana (Sajan), Surparaka (Surbara), whereas Chemuliya (Chaul to the south of Bombay), Chandrapura (near Goa) The port of Debal at the mouth of Indus river was significant for Arab and Chinese traders. In the Coromandel Coast were several premier ports for overseas trade i.e Mamallapuram in the Pallava's reign and Nagapattinam under the Chola rule. Puri and Kalingapattam were chief ports on the Orissa coast. In Bengal coast was an important port which was called Samandar (near Chittagong in Bangladesh) by Arabs. Many references suggest that this port had commercial interactions with many neighborhood regions and countries.

10.6 Indian Exports and Imports

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India exported to Arab, many valuable merchandise which made them earn huge profits. India exported several articles such as perfumes like musk, aloes, amber and camphor, pearls of various varieties and sizes, diamonds, corals and innumerable kind of medicinal herbs. (Gopal, 1965, 149-152). Another source mentioned other items of exports such as diverse species of aloe-wood, sandalwood, camphor, nutmeg, clovepink, cubeb, coconut, vegetable stuffs, textiles of velvety cotton and ivory. Spices were the chief merchandise to export from India. Foreign accounts give details of merchandise exported by different Indian ports such as Sind exported costus, canes and bamboos; Gujarat exported to Arabia a great quantity of indigo, red kino, myrobalans and foreign cotton stuff of all colours; the Rastrakuta kingdom exported teak; several slaves were exported to Persia from Gujarat Coast. India also seems to have exported varied kind of textiles, aloe wood, teak for shipbuilding, coconut coir, grains specially rice of various type, spices both indigenous and those brought from the South-east Asia.

In the eleventh century the main items exported from India to China in return, were horses, sandalwood, gharuwood, sulphur, frankincense, sandalwood, elephant tusks, sapanwood, rosewater, rhinoceros horn, spices, camphor, ivory, patchouli and cinnabar. There were three changes witnessed by Tansen in the composition of products traded between India and China through the maritime routes, 'first the proportion of Buddhist-related items marked by the seafaring traders seems to have dropped drastically. Second, the export of non-luxury Indian products increased in the tenth and the eleventh centuries whereas...by the twelfth century, third-country products, such as frankincense or products destined only for markets in the third country became essential components of Sino-Indian maritime trade' (Sen, 2003, 192-93). Some products like frankincense and rosewater, originated in the Persian Gulf and transshipped to China through the south Indian ports. Most of these products were shipped to China from ports of Malabar and Coromandel. During the latter half of 13th century CE, cotton fabric from Bengal, Coromandel and Malabar became one of the most prominent Indian exports to Chinese markets.

India imported several commodities in exchange of its exports, the main merchandise were incense from the Middle East, copper and lead from the west, ivory came through the route of Oman to India; dye came from Persia and horses from the Arabia; Chinese silk, gold, silver and some amount of iron metal from China; several commodities were imported from Southeast Asia such as porcelain-ware, camphor, rhubarb, bees wax, cloves, lump-camphor, sandalwood, cardamoms and gharu-wood, spices (cloves, spikenard and other fine spices reached Malabar from Java and Sumatra), silk and metals such as gold, silver, copper and blue vitriol (Gopal, 1965, 149-155). India received pearls, dry ginger, tin and fine fabric from Ceylon. Many of these items were re-exported to Arabian world while others were consumed in India. The demand of war horses in India was huge, so during 600 CE from Central Asian steppes came the horses via land to the northwestern borderlands. Later these horses were imported to India preferably via sea-trade. The proliferation of regional powers and their expanding military plans created a huge increase in demand of the martial quality of war horses from Arabia, Persia and Syria, which cost huge sums of money and were generally called *bahri* (sea-borne) (Chakravarti, 2010, 233-34). Early medieval Bengal was also famous for trade in horses, as the Pala inscriptions from the 8th to 12th century CE also give reference of supply of best quality horses from the northern quarters. There are also references that Bengal during the Sena rule, received supply of horses from the mountainous north-eastern parts (Chakravarti, 2010, 233-34). Varied kind of trade commodities and links related to Indian trade were established in the early medieval period. Meera Abraham made a detailed research on the list of commodities based on inscriptions of the Ayyavole guild that shows the shift from luxury goods to commonly needed goods such as textiles, dyes, processed iron, yarn, pepper and horses.

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Summing Up

Several contradictory arguments have been given in the preceding discussion regarding the presence of trade in the early medieval period. The Indian feudal model reflected languishment of trade while others negated this by citing several evidences of the presence of inland and sea-borne trade in India. The latter believe that there was no dearth of trade within the subcontinent and also there was no decay in India's role in the maritime commerce of the Indian Ocean. The argument put forward by the Feudal model was the existence of trade in only luxury items while the other group stressed the existence of trade in daily commodities as well. One needs to take both the arguments into consideration before making any judgment regarding the nature of trade in the early medieval period. This theme requires further study, rethinking and revision to discern the changing contours in the economic historiography of the concerned period.

Exercises

Essay questions

- 1) The debates surrounding condition of trade in early medieval India.
- 2) Discuss the state of inter-regional and maritime trade?
- 3) Which were the famous Indian ports, and major commodities of imports and exports in early medieval India?

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