
UNIT 9 : INTER-REGIONAL TRADE

Structure

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9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to explain:

- the importance of trade and commerce in the overall economic history of India, during the early medieval period (700-1300 CE),
- the historical features of trade in two broad phases: i) c.700-900 and ii) c.900- 1300,
- the role of crafts and industry in the trade operations,
- the principal trade routes and means of communication, and
- the role of political authorities in furthering the interests of traders and merchants.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Trade and commerce is an integral component of the Indian economy in the early medieval centuries. The nature and extent of the use of money, the functioning of market, the role of agricultural production, and stages in the conditions of urban settlements are interrelated developments. In this unit we will discuss the

importance of trade and commerce in the overall economic history of India, during the early medieval period (700-1300 CE).

9.2 TRADE: DEFINITION AND PHASES

The collection, distribution and exchange of goods is called trade. It is a process which depends on a number of factors such as the nature and quantity of production, facilities of transport, safety and security of traders, the pattern of exchange, etc. It also involves different sections of society including traders, merchants, peasants and artisans. In a somewhat indirect manner, even political authorities have a stake in it as taxes on the articles of commerce imposed by them constitute an important source of revenue of the state.

The historical features of trade during the early medieval times can be best understood if we divide this period into two broad phases:

- i) c.700-900 CE, and
- ii) c. 900-1300 CE.

Briefly, the two phases are marked by:

- a) relative decline of trade, metallic currency, urban centres and a somewhat closed village economy in the first phase, and
- b) reversal of most of the aforesaid tendencies in the second phase. So, one notices trade picking up momentum not only within the country but in relation to other countries as well. Metal coins were no longer as scarce as they were in the first phase. Of course, it was not a phase of deeply penetrated monetary economy as was the case in the five centuries following the end of the Mauryas (c.200 BCE-300 CE). Nor did the pattern of urban growth remain unaffected by the revival of trade and expansion of agriculture.

9.3 THE FIRST PHASE (700-900 CE)

The period from 750-1000 CE witnessed wide-spread practice of granting land not only to priests and temples but also to warrior chiefs and state officials, it led to the emergence of a hierarchy of landlords. Even graded state officials such as *mahamandaleshvara*, *mandalika*, *samanta*, *mahasamanta*, *thakkura*, etc., developed interests in land. However, they were different from the actual tillers of the soil and lived on the surplus extracted from the peasants who were hardly left with anything to trade. It resulted in the growth of rural economy where local needs were being satisfied locally through the imposition of numerous restrictions on the mobility of actual producers. The relative dearth of medium of exchange, viz., metal coins only strengthened this trend.

9.3.1 Media of Exchange

India was ruled by many important dynasties between 750 and 1000 CE. These include the Gujara Pratiharas in Western India, the Palas in Eastern India and the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan. All had the distinction of having been served by some of the most powerful kings of the day, many of whom had very long lasting reigns. It is astonishing that their available coins are very few and in no way compare either in quantity or quality with the coins of earlier centuries. Since money plays an important role in the sale and purchase of goods, the paucity of actual coins and the absence of coin-moulds in archaeological finds lead us to believe in the shrinkage of trade during the period under survey.

Tough first suggested by D.D. Kosambi, it was the publication of Professor R.S. Sharma's *Indian Feudalism* in 1965 that brought to focus the paucity of coinage in the post-Gupta times, its link with trade and commerce and consequent emergence of feudal social formation. The subject has been keenly debated in the last twenty five years. There have been different types of responses.

- i. A cast study of Orissa substantiates complete absence of coins between c. 600 and 1200 CE but argues for-trade with Southeast Asia and emphasizes the role of barter in foreign trade.
- ii. Kashmir, on the other hand, shows emergence of copper coinage from about the eighth century CE. Extremely poor quality of this coinage has been explained in terms of the decline of trade based economy and rise of agricultural pursuits in the valley.
- iii. Finally, a point of view questions not only the idea of paucity of coins but also the decline in trade. This is based on the evidence from what is described as the mid-Eastern India comprising Bihar, West Bengal and the present Bangladesh during 750-1200 CE. While it is conceded that there was no coined money and that the Palas and Senas themselves did not strike coins, it is also argued that there was no dearth of media of exchange. To illustrate, it is emphasized that there was not only a long series of Harikela silver coinage but also cowries and more importantly *churni* (money in the form of gold/silver dust) also functioned as media of exchange.

Well, there may have been some regional exceptions but the all-India perspective fits in the general hypothesis of Professor Sharma. Even with regard to the regional exceptions, the following questions require some attention:

- a) What was the nature and extent of such commercial activities?
- b) Were such activities capable of giving rise to stable commercialised class?
- c) Who took away the profits of this trade?
- d) Did this so called flourishing trade gave any incentive to the toiling, subject and immobile peasantry?

It is significant to note in this context that:

- The relevant sources cited in the context of the mid-Eastern India, are silent about the participation of indigenous people in the maritime trade of the area.
- Even the limited trading activities were confined to the ruling elite.
- The miserable conditions of the common man are reflected in the meaning of the word *vangali* (literally, a resident of Bengal) which denoted somebody "very poor and miserable".

Similarly, those who talk about India's trade with Southeast Asia may also do well to keep in view the position of metal money in that region. Detailed study of Cambodia, for example, shows that during the two centuries of post-Gupta times (600-800 CE) Southeast Asia failed to evolve any system of coinage and barter (largely based on paddy and only marginally on cloth) provided essentials of the Khmer economy. Even when such early medieval coin types as the Indo-Sassanian, Shri Vighraha, Shri Adivaraha, Bull and Horseman, Gadhaiya, etc. emerged in Western and North western India and to some extent in the Ganga valley, they could not make much dent in the overall economy. Apart from the doubts about the period of emergence of these coins, their extremely poor quality and purchasing power also indicate the shrinkage of their actual role. Further, in relation to the rising population and expanding area of settlement, the overall volume of money circulation was negligible. Hence, we can say that the case for the relative decline of metallic money during the first phase is based on convincing empirical evidence. This was bound to have an impact on India's trading activities.

9.3.2 Relative Decline of Trade

Internally, the fragmentation of political authority and the dispersal of power to local chiefs, religious grantees, etc. seem to have had an adverse effect, at least in the initial centuries of the land grant economy. Many of the intermediary landlords, particularly of less productive areas, resorted to loot and plunder or excessive taxes on goods passing through their territories. This must have dampened the enthusiasm of traders and merchants. No less discouraging were the frequent wars amongst potential ruling chiefs.

Samaraiicchakaha of Haribhadra Suri and the *Kuvalayamala* of Uddyotana Suri, refer to brisk trade and busy towns, it is rightly argued that these texts heavily draw their material from the sources of earlier centuries and, therefore, do not necessarily reflect the true economic condition of the eight century.

As regards the decline of foreign trade with the West, it is pointed out that it had greatly diminished after the fall of the great Roman Empire in the fourth century. It was also affected adversely in the middle of the sixth century when the people of Byzantine (Eastern Roman Empire) learnt the art of making silk. India thus, lost an important market which had fetched her considerable amount of gold in the early centuries of the Christian era.

The decline of foreign trade was also caused by the expansion of Arabs on the North-west frontiers of India in the seventh and eighth centuries. Their presence in the region made overland routes unsafe for Indian merchants. A story in the *Kathasaritsagara* tells us that a group of merchants going from Ujjain to Peshawar were captured by an Arab and sold. Later, when they somehow got free, they decided to leave the North-western region forever and returned to South for trade. The fights amongst the Tibetans and Chinese during these centuries also affected the flow of goods along the routes in central Asia. Even the Western coast of India suffered dislocation and disruption of sea trade as the Arabs raided Broach and Thanā in the seventh century and destroyed Valabhi, an important port on the Saurashtra coast, in the eighth century. Though as we have pointed out, later, the Arabs played an important part in the growth of Indian maritime trade after the tenth century; initially their sea raids had an adverse effect on the Indian commercial activity. There are some references in the contemporary literature to India's contact with Southeast Asia, but it is doubtful whether it could make up for the loss suffered on account of the decline of trade with the west.

9.3.3 Urban Settlements: Decay

The first phase was also marked by the decay and desertion of many towns. It is an important symptom of commercial decline because the towns are primarily the settlements of people engaged in crafts and commerce. As trade declined and the demand for craft-goods slumped, the traders and craftsmen living in towns had to disperse to rural areas for alternative means of livelihood. Thus towns decayed and townfolk became a part of village economy. Beside the accounts of Hiuen Tsang, the Puranic records too, while referring to Kali age indicate depopulation of important cities. This seems to have been the continuation of the trend already indicated by Varahamihira (5th century). The decay of important towns such as Vaishali, Pataliputra, Varanasi, etc., is evident from the archaeological excavations which reveal poverty of structure and antiquities. The pan-Indian scene is marked by desertion of urban centres or their state of decays in the period between the third and eighth centuries. Even those settlements which continued up to the eighth century, were deserted thereafter. One can mention Ropar (in Punjab), Atranjikhera and Bhita (in Uttar Pradesh), Eran (in Madhya Pradesh), Prabhas Patan (in Gujarat), Maheswar and Paunar (in Maharashtra), and Kudavelli (in Andhra Pradesh) in this category of urban settlements. Even the medieval greatness of Kanauj (in the Farrukhabad district of Uttar Pradesh) for which several wars were fought amongst the Palas, Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas, has still to be testified by the excavator's spade.

The commercial activity during the first phase of early medieval period had declined but did not disappear completely. In fact, trade in costly and luxury goods meant for the use of kings, feudal chiefs and heads of temples and monasteries continued to exist. The articles such as precious and semi-precious stones, ivory, horses, etc. formed an important part of the long distance trade, but the evidence for transactions in the goods of daily use is quite meagre in the sources belonging to this period. The

only important article mentioned in the inscriptions are salt and oil which could not be produced by every village, and thus had to be brought from outside. If the economy had not been self-sufficient, the references to trade in grains, sugar, textile, handicrafts, etc. would have been more numerous. In short the nature of commercial activity during 750-1000 CE was such which catered more to the landed intermediaries and feudal lords rather than the masses. Though there were some pockets of trade and commerce such as Pehoa (near Karnal in Haryana) and Ahar (near Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh) where merchants from far and wide met to transact business, they could not make any significant dent in the closed economy of the country as a whole.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Write in brief the important features of the economy during c. 700-900 CE.

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2) How did the Arabs influence the Indian trade between 8th-12th centuries CE?

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3) Give main reasons for the decay of towns between 7th-9th centuries CE.

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9.4 THE SECOND PHASE (900-1300 CE)

This phase is marked by the revival of trade and commerce. It was also the period of agrarian expansion, increased use of money and the re-emergence of market, economy in which goods were produced for exchange rather than for local consumption. These centuries also witnessed a substantial growth of urban settlements in different parts of the sub-continent.

The widespread practice of land grants had been a significant factor in agrarian expansion. Though it is recognised that it is not easy to quantify this development,

one can also not overlook the noticeable regional variations and disparities. However, the period from the beginning of the tenth century to the end of the thirteenth was the age of greater production of both cereals and pulses as well as of commercial crops. Naturally, it created a favourable climate for widening the scope of both internal and external trade.

9.4.1 Crafts and Industry

The growth of agricultural production was supplemented by increased craft production. In the first phase of early medieval period the decline of internal and external trade meant the narrowing down of markets for industrial products. The production remained largely confined to local and regional needs. In the second phase, however, we notice a trend towards increased craft production which stimulated the process of both regional and inter-regional exchange.

Textile Industry, which had been well established since ancient times, developed as a major economic activity. Coarse as well as fine cotton goods were now being produced. Marco Polo (1293 CE) and Arab writers praise the excellent quality of cotton fabrics from Bengal and Gujarat. The availability of *madder* in Bengal and indigo in Gujarat might have acted as important aides to the growth of textile industry in these regions, *Manasollsa*, a text of the twelfth century, also mentions Paithan, Negapatnam, Kalinga and Multan as important centres of textile industry. The silk weavers of Kanataka and Tamil Nadu also constituted a very important and influential section of the society.

The oil industry acquired great importance during this period. From the tenth century onwards, we get more references to the cultivation of oilseeds as well as to *ghanaka* or oil mills. An inscription from Karnataka refers to different types of oil mills operated both by men and bullocks. We also notice the affluence of oilmen (tellikas) because some of them undertook the construction of temples and other public works. This indicates that the oil industry offered profits to its members. Similarly, reference to sugarcane cultivation and cane crushers in this period also indicate large scale production of *jaggery* and other forms of sugar. Besides the agro-based industry, the craftsmanship in metal and leather goods too reached a high level of excellence. The literary sources refer to craftsmen connected with different types of metals such as copper, brass, iron, gold, silver, etc. A number of large beams at Puri and Konarka temples in Odisha indicate the proficiency of the iron smiths of India in the twelfth century. Iron was also used to manufacture swords, spearheads and other arms and weapons of high quality. Magadha, Benaras, Kalinga and Saurashtra were known for the manufacture of good quality swords. Gujarat was known for gold and silver embroidery. The *Ginza* records of the Jewish merchants belonging to the twelfth century reveal that Indian brass industry was so well known that the customers in Aden sent broken vessels and utensils to India to refashion them according to their own specifications. The existing specimens of Cola bronzes and

those from Nalanda, Nepal and Kashmir display the excellence of the Indian metal workers.

In the field of leather industry Gujarat occupied an enviable position. Marco Polo mentions that the people of Gujarat made beautiful leather mats in red and blue which were skilfully embroidered with figures of birds and animals. These were in great demand in the Arab World.

9.4.2 Coins and other Media of Exchange

The revival of trade received considerable help from the re-emergence of metal money during the centuries under discussion. There is, however, substantial discussion about the degree and level of monetization. Very often the contenders of the penetration of money in the market invoke literary and inscriptional references to numerous terms purporting to describe various types of coins of early medieval India. Thus texts such as *Prabandhachintamani*, *Lilavati*, *Dravyapariksha*, *Lekhapaddhati*, etc., mention *bhagaka*, *rupaka*, *vimshatika*, *karshapana*, *dinar*, *dramma*, *niishka*, *gadhaiya-mudra*, *gadyanaka*, *tanka*, and many other coins with their multiples. No less prolific are inscriptional references. For example the Siyadoni inscription alone refers to varieties of *drammas* in the mid-tenth century. The Paramara Chalukya, Chahmana, Pratihara, Pala, Candella and Cola inscriptions corroborate most of the terms found in contemporary literature. There has also been considerable speculation about the value of these coins, their metal content and their relationship with one another. Nothing could be more simplistic than to suggest the penetration of money in the market simply on the basis of listing of numismatic gleanings from a mixed bag of inscriptions and literature. We need to scrutinize the contexts of such references. Aspects requiring detailed exploration are:

- i. Whether references to coins are in the context of exchanges in the rural area or in the urban setting?
- ii. the types of exchange centres and the nature of “market” where such transactions take place,
- iii. the personnel involved in these transactions, and
- iv. how far are the inscriptional references to coins only notional? etc.

As far as the actual specimens of coins are concerned, one can say that the practice of minting gold coins was revived by Gangeyadera (1019-1040 CE); the Kalacuri King of Tripuri (in Madhya Pradesh) after a gap of more than four centuries. Govindachandra, the Gahadavala King near Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, the Chandella rulers Kirtivarman and Madanavarman in Central India, King Harsha of Kashmir and some Chola Kings in Tamil Nadu also issued gold coins. Reference has already been made above to certain early medieval coin types in Western and North-western India. According to one estimate, about nine mints were founded in different parts of Karnataka during the twelfth and thirteenth century. An important mint functioned at Shrimol (near Jodhpur) in Rajasthan.

Despite the plethora of references to coins, the evidence of overall volume of money in circulation is almost negligible. Nor can one overlook the poor purchasing power of early medieval coins, irrespective of the metal used. All coins of the period were highly debased and reduced in weight. Also, in terms of the rising population and expanding area of settlement, the use of money seems to have been highly restricted. The case study of early medieval Rajasthan shows that the revival of trade, multiplication of exchange centres and markets and prosperity of merchant families took place only with the help of "partial monetization". Similarly, the cash nexus on the Western coast (Konkan area) under the Shilaharas (850-1250 CE) was also marked by limited use of money. The types and denominations of coins remained not only extremely localised but could not penetrate deep into the economic ethos. Masses were far away from handling of coins. The currency system of South India during 950-1300 CE also shows that transactions at all levels of the society were not equally affected by coined money. For example, the fabulous expenses reported to have been incurred by the Pandyas as regular buyers of imported horses cannot be thought in terms of what we know as very poor Pandyan currency. Barter was still an important means of exchange in local inter-regional and perhaps even in inter-national commerce. There are references which indicate that carvanas of merchants exchanged their commodities with those of other regions. According to one account, horses imported from abroad were paid for not in cash but in Indian goods which may have been silk, spices or ivory. These Indian goods enjoyed constant demand in the markets all over the world.

Though the revival of even "partial monetization" was contributing to economic growth, yet no less significant was the parallel development of credit instrument by which debits and credits could be transferred without the handling of cash money. In the texts of the period we find references to a device called *hundika* or the bill of exchange which might have been used by merchants for commercial transactions. Through this device credit could be extended by one merchant to another and thus, the obstacle to commerce due to shortage of coined money could be overcome. The *Lekhapaddhati*, a text which throws light on the life of Gujarat in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, refers to various means of raising loan for consumption as well as commercial ventures through the mortgage of land, house and cattle.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Briefly comment on the variety and quality of textiles produced in India between 9th-13th centuries.

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2) List the main metal works of Indian artisans between 9th-13th centuries.

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3) Can we describe the economy between 9th-13th CE centuries as fully dependent on minted coins?

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9.5 ASPECTS OF TRADE

The increased agricultural production and the momentum picked by industrial and craft production were responsible for giving rise to a hierarchy of exchange centres. The inter-regional and intra-regional exchange networks were creating cracks in the relatively closed village economy and a large variety of commodities were carried for trading through a network of trade routes in the country.

9.5.1 Commodities of Inland Trade and their Consumers

There are numerous inscriptions which refer to merchants carrying food grains, oil, butter, salt, coconuts, arecanuts, betel leaves, madder, indigo, candid sugar, jaggery, thread cotton fabrics, blankets, metals, spices, etc. from one place to another, and paying taxes and tolls on them. Benjamin Tudela, a Jesuit priest from Spain (twelfth century) noticed wheat, barley and pulses, besides linsed fibre and cotton cloth brought by the traders to the island of Kish in the Persian Gulf on their way home from India. Al Idrisi also refers to the transshipment of rice from the country of Malabar to Sri Lanka in the twelfth century. The export of palm sugar and coir for ropes is noted by Friar Jordanus who wrote in about 1330 CE. Marco Polo refers to the export of indigo from Quilon (on the Malabar Coast) and Gujarat. Besides, cotton fabrics, carpets, leather mats, swords and spears also appear in various sources as important articles of exchange. High value items such as horses, elephants, jewellery, etc. also came to various exchange centres.

The chief customers of Indian goods were of course the rich inhabitants of China, Arabia and Egypt. Many of the Indian goods might have found their way to Europe as well as via Mediterranean. While the aspects of foreign trade will be discussed at length later, it needs to be highlighted that the domestic demand was not insignificant. A new class of consumers emerged as a result of large scale landgrants from the eighth century onwards. The priests who earlier subsisted on a meagre fees

offered at domestic and other rites were now entitled to hereditary enjoyment of vast landed estates, benefices and rights. This new land-owning class, along with the ruling chiefs and rising mercantile class, became an important buyer of luxuries and necessities because of their better purchasing power.

The *brahmanical* and non-*brahmanical* religious establishments, which commanded vast resources in the form of landed estates and local levies, developed as important consumers of almost all marketable goods. They required not only such articles as coconuts, betel leaves and arecanuts, which had acquired great ritual sanctity, but also increased quantity of food for presentation to gods or for distribution as *prasadau*. The personnel of religious establishments, which numbered up to many hundreds in case of big and important temples, constituted an important consuming group to be fed and clothed by peasants, artisans and merchants. Thus big temples with their vast resources and varied requirements also helped in generating commercial activity. This phenomenon was more marked in South India where many temple sites became important commercial centres.

9.5.2 Trade Routes and Means of Communications

A vast network of roads connected different ports, markets and towns with one another and served as the channel of trade and commerce. The overland connections amongst different regions is indicated by the itinerary of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang who came to India in the seventh century from across the Hindukush and visited various towns and capitals from Kashmir in North to Kanchi in South and from Assam in East to Sindh in West. An inscription of 953 CE refers to merchants from Karnataka, *Madhyadesha*, South Gujarat and Sindh coming to Ahada in Rajasthan for mercantile activities. Bilhana, an eleventh century poet from Kashmir tells us about his travels from Kashmir to Mathura, and how he reached Banaras after passing through Kannauj and Prayaga. From Banaras he proceeded to Somanatha (on the Sautashtra coast) via Dhar (near Ujjain) and Anahilavada (in North Gujarat). From Somanatha, he sailed to Honavar (near Goa), and then went overland to Rameshwadm on the Eastern coast. Finally, he came to Kalyani in Arabic and Persian accounts provide us a more detailed information on the contemporary trade-routes. Albiruni (1030 CE) mentions fifteen routes which started from Kannauj, Mathura, Bayana, etc. The route from Kannauj passed through Prayaga and went eastward up to the port of Tamralipti (Tamluk in the Midnapur district of West Bengal), from where it went along the Eastern coast to Kanchi in South. Towards the Northeast, this route led to Assam. Nepal and Tibet, from where one could go overland to China. Kannauj and Mathura were also on the route to Balkh in the North-west. This also joined Peshawar and Kabul and ultimately the Grand Silk route connecting China with Europe. This North-western route was the chief channel of commercial intercourse between India and Central Asia in the pre-Gupta centuries. But in the early medieval period, it was largely under the control of Arab and Turkish traders who used it primarily to bring horses from Persia, Balkh and other regions. The route starting from Bayana in Rajasthan passed through the

desert of Marwar and reached the modern port of Karachi in Sindh. A branch of this route passed through Abu in the Western foot of the Aravali Hills, and connected ports and towns of Gujarat with Bayana. Mathura and other places in North and North-western India. Another route from Mathura and Prayaga proceeded to the port of Broach on the Western coast via Ujjain. These routes played an important role in opening the interior of India to the international sea trade which acquired a new dimension in the post-tenth centuries. Besides roads, the rivers in the plains of Northern India, and the sea route along the Eastern and Western coasts in South India also served as important means of inter-regional contacts.

The pleasures and pains of travel in ancient times depended on the geographical conditions of the trade routes. The routes through desert and hilly areas were certainly more arduous and difficult. In the plains, bullock-carts were the chief means of conveyance but where they could not ply animals, human carriers were employed to transport goods from one place to another. In the contemporary literature, there are references to different types of boats which must have been used in river traffic whereas big ships plied on the high seas.

A significant development in the post-tenth centuries was the keen interest shown by rulers to keep the highways in their kingdoms safe. They took measures to punish thieves and robbers and provided military as well as monetary help to villagers to protect the traders and travellers passing through their region. The Chalukya kings of Gujarat had a separate department called the *Jiala-patha-karana* to look after highways. They also built new roads to connect important ports and markets in their state and excavated tanks and wells for the benefit of travellers. Trade being an important source of revenue, political authorities had to be concerned about the safety and well-being of traders and merchants. Marco Polo's reference to Cambay as a place free from pirates indicates that Indian kings also took steps to safeguard their ports against piracy which was a major threat all along the sea route from South China to the Persian Gulf.

Check Your Progress 3

1) List the main items of land trade which find mention in inscription.

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2) How did the religious-establishments help in trading activities?

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3) Describe-briefly the main land routes used for trading purposes.

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9.6 LET US SUM UP

The present study of trade and commerce during c. 700-1300 CE has focussed on:

- the two phases of inland and foreign trade,
- the nature and extent of the use of metal coins and. the role of other media of exchange in the trade network,
- contribution of expansion of agriculture and increased agricultural production in furthering interests of trade, and
- impact of trade and commerce on the condition of towns through the centuries.

The overall picture of trade and commerce during the six centuries under discussion is that of feudalisation. The way in which money transactions took place, the manipulations of landed interests including those of state officials and ruling chiefs, functioning of the ruling elite in the interests of big traders and merchants and putting restrictions on artisans and craftsmen are indicators of the process of feudalisation.

9.7 KEY WORDS

Ghanaka : Oil mill

Jalapathakarana : Department/Officer for looking after highways

Market : Space where buying and selling of goods take place as a regular activity.

Tellika : Oilman

Velakula-Karana : Department/Officer for harbours.

9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See section 9.2,
- 2) See Sub-section 9.3.2,
- 3) See Sub-section 9.3.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See section 9.4.1,
- 2) See Sub-section 9.4.2,
- 3) See Sub-section 9.4.2

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See section 9.5.1,
- 2) See Sub-section 9.5.1,
- 3) See Sub-section 9.5.2

UNIT 10 : MARITIME TRADE AND FORMS OF EXCHANGE

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 The Chief Participants
- 10.3 Commodities Exchanged
- 10.4 China
- 10.5 Sri Lanka
- 10.6 South East Asia
 - 10.6.1 Srivijaya
 - 10.6.2 Java, Bali, Burma, Malya, Sumatra, Kambuja, Campa
- 10.7 West
- 10.8 Indian Ports
- 10.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.10 Key Words
- 10.11 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

10.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to explain:

- the importance of maritime trade during the early medieval period,
- the historical features of maritime trade, and
- the principal maritime trade routes and means of communication.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

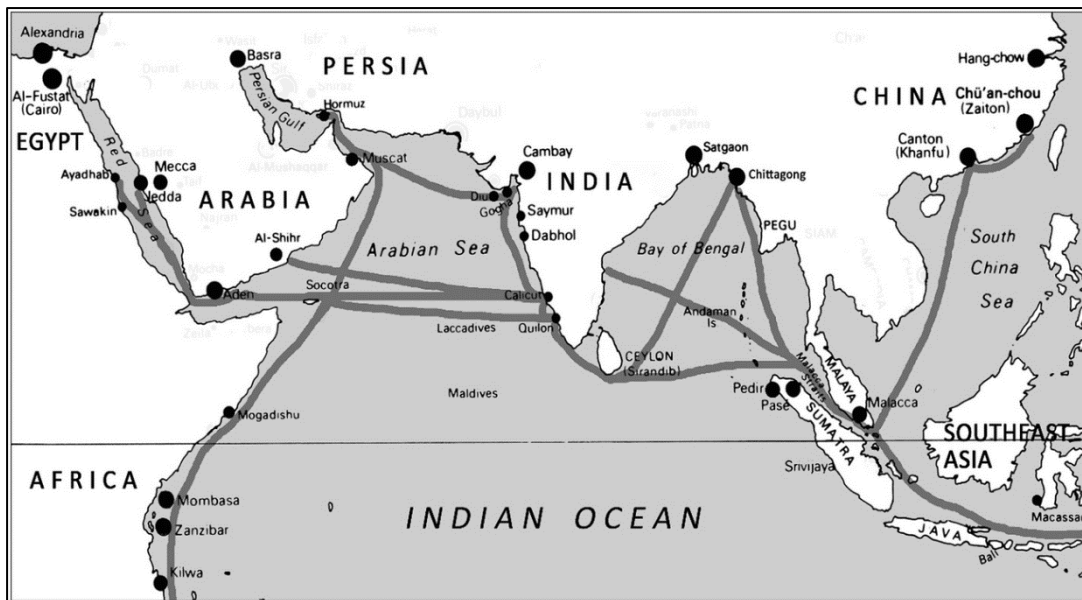
Besides inter-regional trade, there are several references of Indian foreign trade via sea during the early medieval period. Initially this oceanic trade was shared between Persians, Indians, Indonesians and Ceylonese but after their rise, the Arabs established their dominance by replacing Persians who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

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.

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. 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.

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. Instability in Central 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'.



Maritime Trade Routes of India during Early Medieval Period (Source Google)

K.N. 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 (transhipped 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. 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.

10.2 THE CHIEF PARTICIPANTS

The period under survey was marked by great expansion of sea trade between the two extremities of Asia, *viz.* the Persian Gulf and South China. India which lay midway between the two extremities greatly benefitted from this trade. The hazards of long sea voyages were sought to be curtailed by anchoring on the Indian coasts. The Asian trade during these centuries was largely dominated by the Arabs. After having destroyed the important port and market of Valabhi on the Saurashtra coast in the eighth century, they made themselves the chief maritime force in the Arabian Ocean.

Fragmentary information in indigenous sources and notices in foreign accounts suggest that despite the forceful competition of the Arabs, Indians were going to the lands beyond the seas for trade from the tenth century onwards.

Abu Zaid, an Arab author of the tenth century refers to Indian merchants visiting Siraf in the Persian Gulf. In South India, the Colas, took keen interest in maritime trade. The Tamil inscriptions found in Malaya and Sumatra indicate the commercial activities of Tamil mercantile community in these regions. The Colas also sent a number of embassies to China to improve economic relations with her. They even sent naval expedition against the Srivijaya empire in the eleventh century to keep the sea route to China safe for their trade. However, by and large the references to the physical participation of Indian merchants are quite limited. This did not affect the demand for Indian products which reached the outside world through the Arabs and the Chinese.

10.3 COMMODITIES EXCHANGED

As regards the articles involved in the Asian trade, the Chinese texts indicate that the Malabar coast received silk, porcelain-ware, camphor, cloves, wax, sandalwood, cardamom, etc. from China and South-east Asia. Most of these may have been the items of re-export to the Arabian world, but some were meant for India, particularly the silk which was always in great demand in local markets. Marco Polo informs us that the ships coming from the East to the ports of Cambay in Gujarat brought, among other things, gold, silver and copper. Tin was another metal which came to India from South-east Asia.

In return-for eastern products, India sent its aromatics and spices, particularly pepper. According to Marco Polo pepper was consumed at the rate of 10,000 pounds daily in the city of Kirisay (Hang-Chau) alone. Chao Ju Kua, a Chinese port official of the thirteenth century, tells us that Gujarat, Malwa, Malabar and Coromandel sent cotton cloth to China. India also exported ivory, rhinoceros horns, and some precious and semiprecious stones to China.

A number of Arabic inscriptions found at Cambay, Samaratha and Junagadh reveal that merchants and shippers from the Persian Gulf visited Western India in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The ships coming to the Gujarat coast from Hormuz in the Persian Gulf are also mentioned in the *Lekhapaddhati*.

As regards the articles of trade with the Arab and the Western World, thy Jewish merchants carried many goods from the West coast of India to the Egyptian markets. These included spices, aromatics, dyes, medicinal herbs, bronze and brass vessels, textiles, pearls, beads, coconuts, etc. India also exported teakwood which was required for ship-building and house construction in the almost treeless areas of Persian Gulf and South Arabia. Some surplus food-grains, mainly rice, were also sent out from the Indian ports to the communities in other coastal regions which did not produce enough foodstuffs to meet their needs. The fine and embroidered leather mats of Gujarat were according to Marco Polo highly priced in the Arab world. India was also known for its iron and steel products, particularly the swords and spears, which enjoyed a wide market in Western countries.

As far as imports from the West are concerned, the most significant item was the horse. As the number of feudal lords and chiefs increased in the early medieval period, the demand for horses also increased manifold. Horses were brought both by land and sea from such places as Bahrein, Muscat, Aden, Persia, etc. Besides horses, dates, ivory, coral, emeralds, etc. were also brought to India from the West.

10.4 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. 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. 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. 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.

Xinru Liu in her book *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People A.D. 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, 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'. He has divided the Sino-Indian trade relations in early medieval period into three phases.

In first phase between 7th-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. 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. Instead 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'. 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.

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. 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.

10.5 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. 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.

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.

10.6 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. Gujarati traders had trading relations with Java. There were many Muslim merchants who dominated the western coast of India.

10.6.1 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. 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.

10.6.2 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. 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. Similarly there are also references of brisk trade between Orissa coast, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia and East Africa.

10.7 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 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. 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 eight 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'. 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.

10.8 INDIAN PORTS

There were a number of ports on the Indian coasts, which not only served the inland trade network but also acted as a link between the eastern and western trade. In fact; almost every creek that could provide facility for a safe anchorage of ships, developed into a port of some national or international significance. On the mouth of the Indus, Debal was an important port which according to Al Idrisi (twelfth century), was visited by vessels from Arabia as well as from China and other Indian ports. Chief ports on the Gujarat coast were Somanatha, Broach and Cambay. Somanatha had links with China in the East and Zanzibar (in Africa) in the West, Broach or ancient Bhrigukachha has had a very long history. Cambay is known as Khambayat in Arabic sources, and *Stambhatirtha* in Sanskrit sources. Its earliest reference goes back to the ninth century CE. Sopara and Thana were other important ports on the Western coast of India. On the Malabar coast, Quilon had emerged as the most important port. The Arab Writers tell us that ships coming from the West called at the port of Quilon for collecting fresh water before sailing for Kedah in South-east Asia. Similarly, the Chinese sources of the thirteenth century also state that Chinese traders going to the country of the Arabs had to change their ships at Quilon. During the three centuries between the tenth and thirteenth, the Coromandel coast developed into a virtual clearing house for the ships coming from the East and West. The Arab author, Wassaf, tells us that the wealth of the isles of the Persian Gulf and the beauty of other countries as far as Europe is derived from the Coromandel coast The most important port in this region was Nagapattinam. Puri and Kalingapattam were important ports on the Orissa coast. In Bengal the fortunes of Tamralipti were reviving though according to some scholars, it was being superceded by another port of Saptagrama.

Check Your Progress

1) Write a note on important articles involved in the Indian maritime trade.

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2) List the important ports of India during the period under study

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10.9 LET US SUM UP

During this period large scale trading activities were carried through sea. The foregoing discussion was based on the main countries engaged in sea trade, the commodities of trade, main ports and security of the sea routes.

10.10 KEY WORDS

Entrepot : a port, city, or other centre to which goods are brought for import and export, and for collection and distribution.

10.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress

- 1) See Section 10.3
- 2) See Section 10.7

UNIT 11 : PROCESS OF URBANIZATION

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Form and Substance of Urban Centres
- 11.3 The General Pattern
- 11.4 Regional Variations and Types
 - 11.4.1 Rural Centres Transformed into Urban Centres
 - 11.4.2 Market Centres. Trade-network and Itinerant Trade
 - 11.4.3 Sacred/ Pilgrimage Centres
 - 11.4.4 Royal Centres or Capitals
- 11.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.6 Key Words
- 11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises.

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to explain the:

- factors responsible for the rise of urban centres,
- various phases in the history of urbanism,
- criteria for identifying settlements as urban,
- general pattern of the post-Gupta urban growth, and
- regional variations in urban settlements.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation in the early medieval period (600-1300 CE) of Indian history was connected with the growth of regional kingdoms and an expansion of Indian Ocean trade. Macro level changes took place which produced new patterns of interaction. *Agrahara* system of land grants by the royalty created a new class of land holders which was a new socio-economic formation based on land grants. There was a substantial change in the material milieu from the earlier period as a result of these land grants. Expansion of agrarian economy could be perceived along with state formation and expansion of state societies in the periphery. Villages were neither isolates nor undifferentiated, and were connected with the apex or supra-local political centres through administrative tiers at locality levels. Agrarian economy gave fillip to non-agrarian sector thereby leading to a process of urbanisation. Thus early medieval urbanisation could be characterised by changes in the agrarian economy, greater complexities in the political sphere and an expanding Indian Ocean

trade network. However to locate the urban centres and then to explain their growth remain a vexed problem and sifting through the vast epigraphic and other types of textual data and looking for a *pura*, *nagara* or *pattana*, different terms denoting urban centres, would be a preliminary way of approaching the problem.

Epigraphic and textual sources are generally used for understanding early medieval urbanisation. Many epigraphs describe towns, exchange centres and commercial networks. Texts like travel accounts, *kavya* literature, secular texts etc. are often replete with descriptions of a city. Archaeology is not always very helpful in this regard as it is, in the case of early historic urbanism, due to lack of excavations in early medieval sites. Past studies that talked of urban centres, in general, relied heavily on textual sources. Arab Geographers' accounts, Alberuni's evidence or normative, prescriptive treatises like *Manasara*, *Mayamata* or *Samarangasutradhara* were used to discuss the presence or absence of urban centres in India in the early medieval period. Thus Pushpa Niyogi writes, "Towns and Cities along the main or subsidiary trade routes easily developed into commercial centres. Innumerable references to cities flourishing along such routes are found in the writings of Muslim historians".

In a section on instances of planned towns, Niyogi states on the basis of *Kumarapalacharita* that there were eighty four market at Anahilapura in the 12th century and therefore it was a great emporium of trade. Stress is laid on texts like *Mayamata*, *Aparajitaprachhha* or *Sukranitisara* to understand town planning. According to B.B. Dutt, whose work is largely based on *Manasara*, *Mayamata*, etc., "the streets of India were arranged and planned according to what is known as rectangular chess board system of planning". The existence of urban centres is taken for granted in such works and no reference is usually made to the historical context in which they may have emerged. Therefore these works finally appear as compilations of urban place names from literature and epigraphs. The problem with the use of text for understanding urban planning is that in most cases the date of a text cannot be ascertained with certainty.

B.N.S. Yadav argued that, though the description of cities in the texts belonging to post-Gupta period became conventional in nature, yet it was possible to deduce some broad features of city life from these texts. The texts mainly discussed by him were the description of Ujjayini in *Padataditakam* (c. 6th-7th century CE), the *Kadambari* (7th century CE) and the *Navasahasankacharita* (10th century CE), of Kundinapura in the *Nalachampu* (10th century CE) and the *Naisadhiyacharita*; of Pravarapura in the *Vikramankadevacharita*, etc. The urban features in these texts are in the first place, strong fortifications of cities consisting of ramparts and moats, localisation of trading community or professional/occupational groups within the precincts of a city, presence of magnificent mansions and bustling trading activities. These works thus refer to urban centres without attempting to understand the process of urbanisation.

11.2 FORM AND SUBSTANCE OF URBAN CENTRES

Study of urban centres is an important aspect of socio-economic history. Urban centres in early medieval India have generally been studied in two ways:

- i. As a part of economic history i.e. history of trade, commerce and craft production, etc., and
- ii. as a part of administrative or political history, *i.e.* as capitals, administrative centres, centres of major and minor ruling families and fort towns.

Hence the focus of urban studies has so far been mainly on types of urban centres. Accordingly towns or cities have been listed under various categories such as market, trade or commercial centres, ports, political and administrative centres, religious centres, etc. However, there has been no sufficient attempt to explain the causes behind the emergence of towns. In other words the form of an urban centre is studied but not its meaning or substance. In order to understand both the form and substance of urban centres, and to define their nature and meaning it is necessary to study the processes of urban growth as a part of the broader socio-economic changes.

Phases and Definition

How do we define an urban centre and what are its essential trends; are some of the questions that we take up here. Prior to the coming of the Turks, the Indian sub-continent experienced at least three phases of urban growth:

- 1) During the Bronze Age Harappan civilization (fourth-second millennium BCE),
- 2) Early historic urban centres of the Iron Age (c. sixth century BCE to the end of the third century CE),
- 3) Early medieval towns and cities (c. eighth/ninth to twelfth centuries CE).

Amongst the earliest attempts, to define an urban centre one can easily mention Gordon Childe's notion of 'Urban Revolution'. He listed monumental buildings, large settlements with dense population, existence of such people who were not engaged in food production (rulers, artisans and merchants) and cultivation of art, science and writing as prominent features to identify an urban centre. Further, Childe laid great stress on the presence of craft specialists and the role of agricultural surplus which supported non-food producers living in cities. Not all these traits, which were spelt out in the context of Bronze Age cities, are to be seen in the towns of Iron Age. There has been no dearth of urban centres with sparse population and mud houses.

Though agrarian surplus collected from rural areas is almost indispensable for the existence of a town, merely a settlement of non-agriculturists cannot be regarded as an urban centre. Early medieval literary texts refer to towns inhabited by people of all classes surrounded by a wall and moat and marked by the prevalence of the laws and customs of the guilds of artisans and merchants. A recent study based on excavated data from 140 sites spread over the entire Indian subcontinent focusses on:

- Quality of material life and the nature of occupations, and
- need to study urban centres not as parasites thriving on agricultural surplus but as centres integrally linked with rural hinterland.

Accordingly, some prominent traits of urban centres which can be applied to early medieval settlements as well, are identified as:

- i. Size of a settlement in terms of area and population.
- ii. Proximity to water resources-river banks, tanks, ring wells, etc.
- iii. Presence or absence of artefacts representing activities of artisans, e.g. axes, chisels, plough-shares, sickles, hoes, crucibles, ovens, furnaces, dyeing vats, moulds for beads, seals, sealings, jewellery, terracotta, etc.
- iv. Evidence of coin moulds signifying mint towns. The discovery of metallic, money, when listed with the presence of artisans and merchants, certainly lends a clear urban character to such sites.
- v. Presence or otherwise of luxury goods such as precious and semi-precious stones, glassware, ivory objects, fine pottery etc. The possibility is not ruled out that luxuries of ancient towns might become necessities for superior rural classes of early medieval times.
- vi. Considering the moist, rainy climate of many alluvial plains such as the middle Ganga plain, baked brick (not just burnt bricks) structures on a good scale assume special importance. Though in Central Asia towns consisting of mud structures are also not unknown.
- vii. Streets, shops, drains and fortifications also give a good idea of the nature of the urban settlement. At several places in the Deccan and elsewhere silos and granaries occur at historical sites, like at Dhulikatt in Andhra Pradesh.

Check Your Progress 1

1) List the three main phases of urban growth in India prior to the coming of the Turks.

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2) What are the important features of a town spelt by Gordon Childe?

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3) List the important traits of urban centres applicable to early medieval India.

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11.3 THE GENERAL PATTERN

The post-Gupta centuries witnessed a new socio-economic formation based on the system of land grants. The gradual expansion of cultivation and agrarian economy through land grants had an impact on the growth of towns and cities between the eighth and twelfth centuries. Though the overall picture of the Indian sub-continent is that of revival, of urban centres, there are some regional variations as well. Such variations are seen in the nature, category and hierarchy of such centres due to operative economic forces, ecological and cultural differences and the nature of political organisation. Regional studies of urban centres are, therefore, essential for providing the correct perspectives. Such studies are available only for a few regions like Rajasthan, Central India and South India.

11.4 REGIONAL VARIATIONS AND TYPES

In a vast country like India there are a lot of regional variations in the pattern of emergence and growth of urban centres. In this section we will discuss some important variations.

11.4.1 Rural Centres Transformed into Urban Centres

The *brahmadeyas* and *devadanas* which are seen as important sources of agrarian expansion of the early medieval period, also provided the nuclei of urban growth. The *Brahmana* and temple settlements clustered together in certain key areas of agricultural production. Examples of such centres of urban growth are datable from the eighth and ninth centuries and are more commonly found in South India. The Cola city of *Kumbakonam (Kudamukku-Palaiyarai)* developed out of agrarian clusters and became a multi-temple urban centre between the ninth and twelfth centuries. Kanchipuram is a second major example of such an urban complex. While Kumbakonam's political importance as a residential capital of the Colas was an additional factor in its growth, Kanchipuram too had the additional importance of being the largest craft centre (textile manufacturing) in South India.

11.4.2 Market Centres. Trade-network and Itinerant Trade

Early medieval centuries also witnessed the emergence of urban centres of relatively modest dimensions, as market centres, trade centres (fairs, etc.) which were primarily points of the exchange network. The range of interaction of such centres

varied from small agrarian hinterlands to regional commercial hinterlands. Some also functioned beyond their regional frontiers. However, by and large, the early medieval urban centres were rooted in their regional contexts. This is best illustrated by the *nagaram* of South India, substantial evidence of which comes from Tamil Nadu and also to a limited extent by the existence of *nakhara* and *nagaramu* in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh respectively. The *nagaram* served as the market for the *nadu* or *kurram*, an agrarian or peasant region. Some of them emerged due to the exchange needs of the *nadu*. A fairly large number of such centres were founded by ruling families or were established by royal sanction and were named after the rulers, a feature common to all regions in South India. Such centres had the suffix *pura* or *pattana*.

Nagarams located on important trade routes and at the points of intersection developed into more important trade and commercial centres of the region. They were ultimately brought into a network of intra-regional and inter-regional trade as well as overseas trade through the itinerant merchant organisations and the royal ports. Such a development occurred uniformly throughout peninsular India between the tenth and twelfth centuries. During these centuries South India was drawn into the wider trade network in which all the countries of South Asia, South-east Asia and China and the Arab countries came to be involved. The *nagarams* linked the ports with political and administrative centres and craft centres in the interior.

In Karnataka *nagarams* emerged more as points of exchange in trading network than as regular markets for agrarian regions. However, the uniform features in all such *nagarams* is that they acquired a basic agricultural hinterland for the non-producing urban groups living in such centres. Markets in these centres were controlled by the *nagaram* assembly headed by a chief merchant called *pattanasvami*.

A similar development of trade and market centres can be seen in Rajasthan and western parts of Madhya Pradesh. Here, the exchange centres were located in the context of the bases of agrarian production i.e. where clusters of rural settlements occur. In Rajasthan these centres were points of intersection for traffic of varying origins, giving rise to a certain measure of hierarchy. The network was further elaborated with the growth of generations of well-known merchant families in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They are named after their places of origin such as Osawala (Osia), Shrimalis (Bhinmal), Pallivalas and Khandelvalas, etc. The resource bases, the main routes for the flow of resources and the centres of exchange were integrated through the expansion of these merchant families. Rajasthan provided the main commercial links between Gujarat, Central India and the Ganga valley. Such links were maintained through towns like Pali, which connected the sea coast towns like Dvaraka and Bhrigukachcha (Broach) with Central and North India. Gujarat, with its dominant Jain merchants, continued to be the major trading region of Western India where early historic ports or emporium like Bhrigukachcha (Broach) continued to flourish as entrepots of trade in early medieval times. Bayana, another notable town in Rajasthan was the junction of different routes from different

directions. The range of merchandise started probably with agricultural produce (including dairy products) but extended to such high-value items as horses, elephants, horned animals and jewels.

In the trade with the West i.e. Arabia, Persian Gulf and beyond, the West Coast of Peninsular India played a consistently dominant role from the early historic period. Several ports such as Thana, Goa, Bhatkal, Karwar, Honavar and Mangalore developed during the revival of long distance trade, between the tenth and twelfth centuries, with evidence of coastal shipping and ocean navigation. Surprisingly, this commercial activity was taking place (see also Unit 3) only through limited monetization. Incidentally, the Konkan coast (under the Shilaharas) does not even show any signs of rise of markets and their network.

Wider trade networks also existed between Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil Nadu, for the presence of Kannada, Tamil and Telugu merchants is well attested in several towns such as Belgaun (Karnataka), Peruru in Nalgonda district (Andhra Pradesh) and coastal towns of Visakhapatnam and Ghantasala. The Andhra coast turned to the south eastern trade with Motupalli, Visakhapatnam and Ghantasala acting as the major outlets. Market centres of inter-regional importance are represented by places like Nellore, Draksharama, Tripurantakam and Anumakonda in Andhra Pradesh. On the northern and southern banks of Kaveri in its middle reaches arose a number of exchange points between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu such as Talakkad and Mudikondan.

Kerala developed contracts with the West and foreign traders such as the Jews, Christians and Arabs who were given trading towns under special royal charters. Coastal towns such as Kolikkodu, Kollam etc., became entrepots of South Asian trade. The location of such trading groups as the Anjuvannan and Arab horse dealers enhanced the importance of coastal towns in Karnataka and Kerala.

Major craft centres which developed in response to inter-regional trade were weaving, centres in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Some of the craft and commercial centres of the early historic urban phase survived till the early medieval period and were brought into the processes of re-urbanisation which linked them with the new socioeconomic institutions like the temple. Kashi (Varanasi) in the north and Kanchipuram (near Madras) in the south are two very prominent examples of such processes.

11.4.3 Sacred/ Pilgrimage Centres

The idea of pilgrimage to religious centres developed in the early medieval period due to the spread of the cult of Bhakti. Its expansion in different regions through a process of acculturation and interaction between the *Brahmanical* or Sanskritic forms of worship and folk or popular cults cut across narrow sectarian interests. As a result, some local cult centres of great antiquity as well as those with early associations with *brahmanical* and non-*brahmanical* religions, became pilgrimage

centres. The pilgrimage network was sometimes confined to the specific cultural region within which a cult centre assumed a sacred character. However, those cult centres, which became sacred *tirthas* attracted worshippers from various regions. Both types of pilgrimage centres developed urban features due to a mobile pilgrim population, trade and royal patronage. The role of emerging market in the growth of *tirthas* is now being recognised by historians in a big way.

Pushkara near Ajmer in Rajasthan was a sacred *tirtha* of regional importance with a dominant Vaishnava association. Kasi (Banaras) acquired a pan-Indian character due to its greater antiquity and importance as a *brahmanical* sacred centre. In South India, Srirangam (Vaishnava), Chidambaram (Shaiva) and Madurai (Shaiva) etc. developed as regional pilgrimage centres, while Kanchipuram became a part of an all India pilgrimage network. While Melkote was a regional sacred centre in Karnataka, Alampur, Draksharama and Simhachalam show a similar development in Andhra Pradesh. Tirupati was initially an important sacred centre for the Tamil Vaishnavas but acquired a pan-Indian character later in the Vijayanagara period.

Jain centres of pilgrimage emerged in Gujarat and Rajasthan where merchant and royal patronage led to the proliferation of Jain temples in groups in centres such as Osia, Mount Abu, Palitana, etc.

In South India the elaboration of temple structures in sacred centres show two types of urban growth.

- First, it was organised around a single large temple as in Srirangam, Madurai, Tiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu), Melkote (Karnataka), Draksharama and Simhachalam (Andhra Pradesh).
- The second type involves the growth around several temples of different religions such as Shivaism. Vishnuism and Saktism.

11.4.4 Royal Centres or Capitals

Royal centres of the seats of power of the ruling families were a major category of urban centres in early medieval India. Some of them had been the seats of royal power even in the early historic period, for example, in the Janapadas of North India or in the traditional polities of South India. Royal families also developed their own ports, which were the main ports of entry into their respective territories and which also linked them with international commerce. Thus, the commercial needs of royal centres created new trade and communication links and built up much closer relationships between the royal centre and their agricultural hinterlands or resource bases. In all the region south of the Vindhyas, where *brahmanical* kingdoms came to be established by the eighth century CE there is substantial evidence of the growth of such royal centres. Some representative examples are:

- Vatapi and Vengi of the Chalukyas in the northern Karnataka and Andhra,

- Kanchipuram of the Pallavas with their royal port at Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram),
- Madurai of the Pandyas with Korkai as their port,
- Tanjavur of the Colas with Nagappattinam as their port,
- Kalyana of the Western Chalukyas, Dvarasamudra of the Hoysalas, and
- Warangal of the Kakatiyas with Motupalli at their port.

Warangal was a rare example of a fortified royal city in South India.

Examples of royal centres in North India are:

- the Gurjara Partihara capital at Kanyakubja (Kanauj),
- Khajuraho of the Candellas,
- Dhara of the Paramaras, and
- Valabhi of the Solankis.

A fairly large number of cities emerged under the powerful Gurjara-Pratiharas, Chahamanas and Paramaras in Rajasthan. Most of them were fortified centres, hill forts (garhkila and durga). Examples of fort-cities in Rajasthan are:

- Nagara and Nagda under the Guhilas,
- Bayana, Hanumanghrh and Chitor under the Gurjara-Pratiharas, and
- Mandor, Ranathambor, Sakambhari and Ajmer under the Chauhans and so on.

On the basis of various sources, a list of 131 places has been compiled for the Chauhan dominions, most of which seem to have been towns. Nearly two dozen towns are identified in Malwa under the Paramaras. Gujarat under the Chalukyas was studded with port towns. The number of towns, however, does not seem to be large in Eastern India although all the nine victory camps (jayaskandavars) of the Palas (Pataliputra, Mudgagiri, Ramavati, Vata Parvataka, Vilaspura, Kapilavasaka, Sahasgand, Kanchanapura and Kanau) may have been towns. The Palas and the Candellas also account for nearly twenty and twenty four fortresses respectively.

Sometimes, important trade and market centres were also conferred on feudatory families. Examples of such minor political centres are numerous in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What led to the transformation of some rural centres in to urban?

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2) How did the trading activities help in the growth of towns?

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3) Did religious centres play a role in the process of urbanisation?

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4) Write five lines on "administrative centres as towns".

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11.5 LET US SUM UP

The changes introduced by the system of land grants in the post-Gupta centuries were not confined to a new agrarian economy. Urban settlements, which had been in the state of decay in the few centuries after the arrival of the Guptas, saw a new life infused into them. The revival of trade, rise of new markets, dispersal of political authority and consolidation of economic power by religious establishments had given rise to numerous towns and cities in different regions of the Indian sub-continent with only minor variations noticeable in the relative importance of causative factors.

11.6 KEY WORDS

Kurram : sometimes the same as nadu but sometimes only a part of a nadu.

Nadu : a district or a subdivision.

Nagaram/Nakhara/Nugarama : a sort of merchant assembly located in market towns with wide ranging commercial interests.

Skandhavar : military camps-functioning as mobile capitals.

Tirtha : sacred/ pilgrimage centre.

11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 11.2
- 2) See Section 11.2
- 3) See Section 11.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-section 11.4.1
- 2) See Sub-section 11.4.2
- 3) See Sub-section 11.4.3
- 4) See Sub-section 11.4.4

UNIT 12 : MERCHANT GUILDS OF SOUTH INDIA

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Position of Merchants
- 12.3 Organisation of Traders
 - 12.3.1 Guilds: Definition and Functions
 - 12.3.2 Organisation of Trading Guilds in South India
- 12.4 Relationship between Merchants and Craftsmen
- 12.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.6 Key Words
- 12.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to explain the:

- relative position of traders and merchants in the society of early medieval South India,
- regional characteristics of trading communities,
- major activities of traders,
- types of traders and merchants,
- character and conduct of traders,
- trading guilds and their functioning in the South India, and
- control of merchants on artisans and craftsmen.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

The present unit ought to be seen as a complementary facet. An attempt has been made here to demarcate the role of traders and merchants in the society with reference to their organised economic activities in South India. The fluctuations in their relative position through centuries have also been shown. The unit also draws special attention to the overawing influence of big merchants on petty artisans and craftsmen.

12.2 POSITION OF MERCHANTS

The expansion of agriculture and the availability of surplus from the 8th/9th century onwards led to increase in commercial exchanges in South India. It resulted in the

emergence of a full time trading community looking after the local exchange. This community also participated in wider inter-regional and inter-oceanic trade. South Indian merchants specialised in the trade of specific commodities such as textiles, oil or ghee, betel leave, hones, etc. At the local regional markets called *nr-m* were the centres of exchange. They were situated in a cluster of agrarian settlements, and they integrated not only collection from hinterland but also commercial traffic from other areas.

The numbers of these *nagarams* increased considerably during the Cola period in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the term *nagarattar*, i.e. member of the *nagaram* assembly, became a generic term for all Tamil merchants (See also Unit 11: Sub-section 11.4.2 of this course).

12.3 ORGANISATION OF TRADERS

The merchants derived their power and prestige not only from wealth but also from the guilds or associations formed by them to protect their interests. In the first phase the decline of trade weakened the corporate activity of merchants, and many of the guilds were reduced to mere regional or occupational sub-castes. But as trade revived in the second phase, merchant guilds reappeared as an important feature of the contemporary economic life.

12.3.1 Guilds: Definition And Functions

What was a merchant guild? How did it function? What were the benefits which accrued to its members? These are important questions to be answered. Well the guilds were voluntary associations of merchants dealing in the same type of commodity such as grains, textiles, betel leaves, horses, perfumes, etc. They were formed by both local as well as itinerant merchants. The association of local merchants having permanent residence in town was more permanent in nature than the association of itinerant merchants which was formed only for a specific journey and was terminated at the end of each venture.

The guilds framed their own rules and regulations regarding the membership and the code of conduct. They fixed the prices of their goods and could even decide that specific commodity was not to be sold on a particular day by its members. They could refuse to trade on a particular day by its members. They could refuse to trade in a particular area if they found the local authorities hostile or uncooperative. The guild merchants also acted as the custodians of religious interests. The inscriptions refer to numerous instances when they collectively agreed to pay an additional tax on the sale and purchase of their goods for the maintenance of temples or temple functions.

The guild normally worked under the leadership of a chief who was elected by its members. He performed the functions of a magistrate in deciding the economic affairs of the guild. He could punish, condemn or even expel those members who

violated the guild rules. One of his main duties was to deal directly with the King, and settle the market tolls and taxes on behalf of his fellow merchants. The growth of corporate activity enabled guild-chiefs to consolidate their power and position in society, and many of them acted as the representative of their members on the local administrative councils.

A member of the guild worked under a strict code of discipline and was also robbed of some initiative or action but still he enjoyed numerous benefits. He received full backing of the guild in all his economic activities and was, thus, saved from the harassment of local officials. Unlike a hawker or vendor, he had greater credibility in the market on account of his membership of the guild. Thus, instead of the fact that guild-chiefs tended to be rude and authoritative at times, the merchants found guilds an important means of seeking physical and economic protections.

The digests and commentaries of the period refer to the corporate body of merchants by various terms, such as *naigama*, *shreni*, *samuha*, *sartha*, *samgha*, etc. The *naigama* is described as an association of caravan merchants of different castes who travel together for the purpose of carrying on trade with other countries. *Shreni*, according to Medhatithi, was a group of people following the same profession such as that of traders, moneylenders, artisans, etc. though some authors considered it to be a group of artisans alone. The *Lekhapaddhati* indicates that a special department called the *Shreni-karana* was constituted by the kings of western India to look after the activities of the guilds of merchants and artisans in their region. Another text *Manasollasa* reveals that many merchant guilds maintained their own troops (*shrenibala*) for personal safety. Inscriptions too refer to the corporate activity of merchants. An inscription from western India refers to *vanika-mandala* which was probably a guild of local merchants.

12.3.2 Organisation of Trading Guilds in South India

The expansion of agriculture and the growth of trade from the tenth century led to the emergence of many merchant guilds or organisations in South India too. The inscriptions refer to these organisations often as *samaya*, *i.e.* an organisation born out of an agreement or contract among its members to follow a set of rules and regulations.

The two most important merchant guilds of South India were known as the *Ayyavole* and the *Manigraman*. Geographically, the area of their operation corresponded to the present day state of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and South Andhra Pradesh. The Cola kings from the tenth century onwards made a concerted effort to trade and commerce through trade missions, maritime expeditions, abolition of tolls, etc. It greatly increased the activities of these guilds which were involved in not only inter-regional but also inter-oceanic trade across the Bay of Bengal.

The merchant guild called *Ayyavole* was also known as the guild of "the 500 Swami of Aihole" *nanadeshi*. The organisation might have had an initial membership of

500. But there is no denying the fact that with the growth of trade and commerce, the Vira Bananjas (representing the trading guild of *Ayyavok*) operated on a trans-regional plane and had developed deep socio-economic interests between the ninth and fifteenth centuries. They spread from Bhalvani (in Sangli district in Maharashtra) in the north to Kayalpattinam (in Tamil Nadu) in the South. The number "five hundred" also became conventional as the guild became a much larger body and drew its members from various regions, religions and castes. It is in this context that the term *nanadeshi* came to be used for this organisation.

In course of outward expansion, the members of the *Ayyavole* guild interacted with the local markets called *nagaram*, and promoted commercial activity by collecting agricultural goods from the hinterland and distributing the goods brought from elsewhere. The commercial influence of *Ayyavole* spread even beyond South India. It is indicated by the inscriptions found at Burma, Java, Sumatra and Sri Lanka. As the mercantile activities of *Ayyavole* increased, some of its members became quite rich and powerful, and acquired the title of *samaya chakravarti* i.e. the emperor of the trading organisation.

Another important merchant guild of South, India was the *Manigraman*. It first appeared along the Kerala coast in the ninth century CE. However, as it gradually came into close contact, with the *Ayyavole*, it greatly improved upon its inter-regional activities and covered a large part of the peninsula. A ninth century Tamil inscription found at Takua pa on the West coast of Malaya indicates that it was engaged in the long distance sea trade from the very beginning.

Anjuvannam was another body of merchants in South India, which probably represented an association of foreign merchants, and not a group of five communities or castes as some scholars believe. Like the *Manigramam*, it also began its commercial activity along the Kerala coast in the eighth or ninth century, and gradually spread out to other coastal areas of South India by the eleventh century. It interacted both with local merchants as well as the *Ayyavole* and *Manigramam* organisations.

The importance acquired by trading guilds is apparent in the conscious attempt to trace exalted genealogies of traders of various corporations. The Vira Bananjas of the *Ayyavole*, for instance, are said to have been born in the race of Vasudeva and their qualities are compared with those of various epic heroes. A typical prashasti (panegyric) of the Vira Bananjas may be seen in the following description found in the Kolhapur stone inscription of the Shilahar King Gandarditya dated in 1130 CE:

"Hail! They who are adorned by a multitude of numerous virtues obtained by following the religion of the Five hundred Heroic Men renowned in the whole world; who are virtuous by reason of the maintenance of the code of the heroic Bananjas consisting of truthfulness, pure conduct, agreeable behaviour, political wisdom,

courtesy and mercantile knowledge who are exalted with their unfailing adventurous spirit who are born in the race of Vasudeva, Khandali and Mulabhadra ... who are invincible when they fight; who are like Brahma in respect of proficiency of the sixty-four arts; like Narayana in the possession of Chakra (discuss); like Rudra, who is the fire of the world destruction in slaying their opponents by their gaze who are like Rama in perseverance; like Arjuna in valour; like Bhishma in purity of conduct; like Bhima in adventurous spirit; like Yudhishtira in righteousness like Karna in charity and like the sun in brilliance"

In short, the vast trading network in South India was controlled by a number of merchant organisations which worked in close cooperation and harmony with one another. The guild-chiefs, on account of their control on trade and trading organisations, established close links with the royal houses and enjoyed great name and fame in the society.

12.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MERCHANTS AND CRAFTSMEN

The exact nature of relationship between the merchants and craftsmen, the two interdependent sections of commercial world, is not recorded in the contemporary sources. It is, therefore, not known whether craftsmen such as weavers, metal-workers, etc., acted independently or worked under the command of merchants who supplied them money or raw material or both. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that as merchants came to exert greater control on the mobilisation of raw material and finished products, their influence on the activities of artisans increased considerably. An inscription of the 11th century from Erode in Tamil Nadu refers to an asylum given by merchants to the craftsmen, and thus indicates the dependence of the latter on the merchant organisations. As trade and commerce developed merchants tended to ability of artisans to market their goods personally. There are references to some oilmen and weavers who sold their goods themselves and became rich enough to make endowments to temples and priests. In general, the artisans and craftsmen during the early medieval period were economically dependent on big merchants.

Check Your Progress

1) Define the Guilds d merchants. List their main functions.

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2) What was the role of *Ayyavole* in the expansion of trading activities in South India?

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12.5 LET US SUM UP

Seeing trader as an important link between the producer and consumer, this unit underlined :

- the ups and downs in The relative position of traders and merchants in early medieval South India,
- emergence of regional merchant groups;
- organisations of traders, viz. guilds, which regulated corporate activity of merchants;
- trans-regional and inter-oceanic activities of guilds in South India;
- the role of itinerant traders; and
- growing hold of big merchants over artisans and craftsmen.

12.6 KEY WORDS

Nagarattar : member of nagaram.

Nalgama : trading guild.

Nandeshi : guild of traders having a membership from different regions and castes.

Prashasti : descriptions of exaggerated praise.

Sathavasha : carvan leader.

Shreni : general term for guild of traders, artisans and craftsmen.

Shrenibala : fighting force maintained by guilds.

Shreshthi : general term for trader.

12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress

- 1) See Sub-section 12.3.1
- 2) See Sub-section 12.3.2

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