UNIT 12 TRADE, TRADE ROUTES AND MARITIME TRADE[1]

Structure

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about:

- the theory of urban decline in the early medieval period;
- arguments and data on urbanization that belie a picture of urban decay;
- trade and trade routes in north and south India; and
- long-distance maritime linkages between India and ports overseas.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

The extensive Gupta Empire and the proliferation of monarchical states in many new areas in north India in the early medieval period was based on a strong agrarian

[1] This Unit has been taken from MHI 05, Block 3, Units 14 and 15.

base. In fact the immense spread of agrarian economy during the period from CE 300 to 1300 has led to an impression that the economy was greatly ruralised; the non-agrarian sector of the economy, on the other hand, underwent a decline from CE 600-1000. It is after CE 1000 that crafts, commerce and urban centres seem to have revived again. This perception has generated a considerable scholarly controversy.

In this Unit we will be looking at the arguments which have been offered in favour of the thesis on the decline in trade and commerce in the early medieval period in India. We will also see how the data that has emerged on trade, trade routes and extensive maritime commercial linkages proves the above contention as a fallacy. In the following pages substantial information is provided on trade and coastal links both in north and south India.

12.2 SOURCES

The period under survey was marked by many shifts from the previous period. This is also indicated by new types of source materials and documents which themselves were a witness to changing conditions. The most important source material for the study of this period is the huge number of inscriptions. Most inscriptions after the fourth century belonged to the category of copper plates (*tamrasasana/tamrapatta*). These copper plates recorded transfer of revenue-free landed property by royal orders to different kinds of donees. Though this practice probably appeared first in the Deccan around second century CE, the practice of issuing land grants became fully established from the fourth century onwards and assumed an all-India proportion after CE 600. Most of the copper plates record the creation of revenue-free grant of land to a brahmana, a group of brahmanas or a religious institution (a Buddhist monastery, a Brahmanical temple or a *matha* or a Jaina establishment). Such grants of land to religious donees (recipients of endowments) were known as *agraharas*.

Being official records of grants of land, the copper plates are invaluable for understanding the rural economy, especially for understanding the process of the transfer of landed property, rural settlement patterns, crops, irrigation projects, peasants and agrarian revenue demands etc. However, on some occasions the grant may also throw light on important merchants and craftsmen whose presence as important witnesses to the pious act of donation of land was recorded.

Merchants also figure in copper plate grants as a group or as an assembly on certain auspicious days when the merchants decided to voluntarily offer some cesses on the commodities they dealt in in favour of a deity or temple. In such grants not only merchants but also various types of commodities naturally appear. These inscriptions also inform us about various types of market places from some of which tolls and customs (*sulka*) were collected, thereby indicating the revenue bearing potential of trade. Also known are inscriptions recording individual donations by merchants, either in favour of a deity or for some works of public benefactions.

Information on trade and urban centres is available from voluminous legal or theoretical treatises (*sastras/Dharmasastras*). Theoretical treatises (S*mritis*) by

Vishnu, *Vasishtha*, *Brihaspati* and *Narada* will be useful for our purpose. Commentaries on these texts (e.g. the commentaries on the *Manusmriti* and *Yajnavalkyasmriti*) also offer some data on this subject. Relevant data can be gleaned from technical treatises like the famous lexicon, *Amarakosa* by Amarasimha (fifth-sixth centuries CE), the *Abhidhanachintamani* and the *Desinamamala* by Hemachandra (eleventh-twelfth century) and the *Lekhapaddhati*. Some impressions of commercial activities are available in the vast creative literature, e.g. the works of Kalidasa, the *Mricchakatikam* of Sudraka, the *Dasakumaracarita* of Dandin and various types of Jain texts. It is important to take note of the fact that two well-known Jaina texts *Jagaducarita* and *Vastupalamahatmyam* were biographies of two premier merchants of early medieval Gujarat.

Non-indigenous textual materials are of particular importance as source materials for the history of trade, especially the external trade of India. The Chinese accounts of Fa-hsien (early fifth century AD), Huien Tsang (first half of the 7th century), I-tsing (late seventh century) and Chau ju Kua (AD 1225) are invaluable sources for the understanding of trade in India. Arabic and Persian texts on geography and travel (those by Sulaiman (CE 851), ibn Khordadbih (CE 882), al Masudi (CE 915), Buzurg ibn Shahriyar (CE 995), the anonymous author of Hudud al Alam (CE 982), Al Biruni (CE 973-1048), and Al Idrisi (CE 1162) are replete with information on Indian commodities and India's trade linkages with West Asia, though these accounts are occasionally stereotyped as many of the Arab authors did not visit India. To this may be added the late sixth century CE accounts of the Syrian Christian monk Cosmas Indicopleustes and the famous descriptions of India by the Venetian traveller Marco Polo (late thirteenth century). An unusual type of source is the letters of medieval Jewish traders, who regularly traded between the west coast of India and the Red Sea. Though the main point of their contacts was the Karnataka and Malabar coasts, these unique business letters, recording the impressions of the actual participants in long-distance trade, furnish significant data on trade in the Gujarat coast.

In sharp contrast to the wealth of field archaeological data for the period from 600 BCE to CE 300, the subsequent period of one millennium has yielded only handful of excavated and explored materials. Unlike the early historical settlements, the early medieval ones have not been systematically explored and excavated and therefore the field archaeological data on trade and urbanization is quite inadequate. The Gupta rulers are credited with the issuance of superb gold coins and also silver coins. The gold coinage of the Gupta Emperors was imitated by a number of smaller powers in the seventh century CE. But coins of precious metal (gold and silver) became fewer in the early medieval times than those of the preceding centuries. Minting of quality coins was limited to a handful number of places in north India; it is after CE 1000 that the issuing of precious coinage once again revived. Numismatic sources thus offer lesser data than that furnished by early historical coins. This itself has been interpreted by some scholars as a prime indication of dwindling commerce, especially foreign trade of India during the 600-1000 CE period. The evidence of coins found in some parts of India during the early medieval times will be discussed in the relevant sections.

12.3 TRADE, MARKET PLACES AND URBAN CENTRES CE 650-1300

Studies of these six centuries and a half have in recent years generated significant debates among historians. The period in question began to attract the attention of historians since the mid-thirties of the twentieth century, though initially scholars showed a distinct preference for dynastic history. Politically, north India and the whole of the subcontinent abounded in monarchical powers. But unlike the powers of the pre-600 CE none of the powers exercised paramount position over either north India, the Deccan or the far south. The political scene is featured by the prevalence of a number of regional powers of great strength and many local powers. Another notable character of the politico-administrative set up is the presence of numerous feudatories or *samantas* of various grades and ranking. The political scenario is much more complex than that of the previous centuries.

All these rulers issued numerous land grants which provide the main source of information not only for the political life but also for social, economic and cultural history.

12.4 DEBATES ON URBAN DECAY:ARGUMENTS FOR DECLINE

As we have pointed out earlier, land grants understandably contain extremely valuable data on early medieval rural society and economy. But the very nature and purpose of these grants leave little scope for recording activities of craftsmen and merchants in urban centres. Information on the non-agrarian sector of the economy in copper plates is relatively scarce. This is in sharp contrast to the donative records and administrative documents prior to CE 600 where merchants, craftsmen, various professional groups were prominently mentioned often in the context of non-rural settlements. A number of scholars have argued that the change in the mode of documents and documentation is in fact an indicator of the change in the social and economic life. The huge number of land grants, according to them, implies a strong ruralisation of the economy after CE 600/650. In such a changing material milieu the relevance of craftsmen, merchants and urban centres appear to have lessened. It has been argued that the decline in India's flourishing and brisk commerce with the Roman Empire after the fourth century adversely affected India's commercial economy. The period from CE 600-1000 did not witness India's meaningful participation in long-distance trade, and as a result there was little impetus to commodity crafts production and their exchange in an international network. It is implied therefore that India's long distance trade revived after CE 1000 mainly because of the growth in the trade with the expanding Arab commercial network.

The data from epigraphic materials has been supplemented by information from literary texts, especially the *Puranas*. A close perusal of the major *Puranas*, which appear to have taken their present shape by around 4th/5th century CE, has led many scholars to conclude that the Puranic descriptions imply sharp changes in social, economic and political situations. These scholars perceive major crises in the socio-economic and political set up after the fifth century. Attention has been drawn to Puranic descriptions of the impoverished conditions of merchants in the *Kaliyuga*, the worst of the Ages in the traditional scheme of four Ages in Indian thought. The merchants, according to the *Brihannaradiya Purana*, would be reduced to the position of servants (*karmopajivin*) and rice-husker (*tandulakarin*) in the *Kali* age.

Only a handful of merchants are explicitly mentioned in the inscriptions of north India during the period from CE 600 to 1000. Tamralipta, the premier port not only of Bengal, but also of the entire land-locked Ganga valley, eclipsed in the eighth century, mainly on account of the siltation of the river on which it stood. The last known epigraphic reference to Tamralipta is found in an eighth century inscription from the Hazaribagh region in Bihar. The port of Barbaricum in the delta of the river Indus did not enjoy any economic prominence in the early medieval times. The port of Daibul in the same region began to come to limelight as an international port after tenth century. Similarly, the premier port in Gujarat, namely Barygaza or Broach, was past its former glory. The fading out of these three ports could have adversely affected the long-distance maritime trade of north India. All these have been taken to demonstrate the gradual decline of trade and commerce in the early medieval north India.

The above portrayal of dwindling trade in the early medieval period has been further driven home by the paucity of coins of precious metals. Three outstanding regional powers of early medieval times, namely the Palas and the Senas of Bengal and Bihar (*c*. CE 750- 1200) and the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan (*c*. CE 754- 974) did not issue any coins. Another major power, the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Kannauj and western India, struck silver coins but of doubtful weight standard and metallic purity. Such coins would have been unsuitable as reliable metallic medium of exchange in the long-distance trade because of their questionable intrinsic value which did not match their face value. A notable exception to this declining monetary situation is seen in the issue of quality coins by the Shahi rulers of Punjab and north-western India. It has been pointed out that the territory under the Shahi rulers of north-western India had not yielded any copper plates. Thus some scholars would like to underline that money economy and land-grant economy were mutually incompatible.

In many copper plate grants from the Ganga valley and especially from Bengal, coin terms like *purana*, *dharana*, and *dramma* occur occasionally. Though these coin terms were known, no actual specimen of such coins has been discovered from the realms of the Palas and the Senas. On the other hand large number of copper plates often mention *kapardakas* or cowries. The expression *kapardaka-purana* also figures in these copper plates. The latter term does not point to a particular type of coin, but refers to a *purana* or a silver coin in terms of its equivalence to cowry-shells. The traditional arithmetical tables of early medieval eastern India indicates that the ratio of a silver coin to a cowry-shell stood at 1:1280. In other words 1280 cowries were equivalent to one silver coin. The wide use of the expression *kapardaka-purana* in early medieval inscriptions, hitherto unknown before eighth century, may suggest that cowry-shells had become the principal medium of exchange. These seem to have replaced the metallic currency which lost its relevance on account of its questionable intrinsic value. Excavations at Colgong near Bhagalpur in eastern Bihar have yielded large number of cowries, thereby providing the material proof of their regular circulation as a medium of exchange.

It has been pointed out that cowries could have been only a poor and inadequate substitute for metallic money. The transportation of a huge bulk of cowry-shells would have created more problems than advantages; in other words, cowry-shells are viewed as unsuitable for long-distance commerce. These could be at the best useful for local level trade and were 'restrictive of long-distance trade'. Thus the widespread prevalence of cowry-shells as notional currency is interpreted as a further evidence of the decline of long-distance trade.

The perception of a 'monetary anaemia' afflicting the erstwhile vibrant commercial economy is strongly present in many historical researches. Dwindling trade and the relative absence of metallic money were not conducive to the large scale production of commodities for exchange related purposes. The result was not only immense dependence on agriculture, but also of a self-sufficient village economy. All the needs of the villages are suggested to have been met in villages which left little urge for the movement of commodities from outside. The relative lack of trade thus brought into existence self-sufficient villages which were closed and stagnant.

The lack of coined money could have posed serious problems for rulers to pay salaries to their officers. Under such circumstances, the ruler had to take recourse to assigning land to his officers in lieu of cash. This gave rise to the practice of issuing secular land grants, in addition to grants of lands to religious persons and institutions. The assignment of service or secular land grants further impoverished the royal exchequer and corroded the central authority. The adverse effects of languishing commerce and 'monetary anaemia' were not thus limited to economic life, but paved the way for a decentralised polity and parcellised sovereignty.

In course of time these powerful functionaries who were the donees of grants not only amassed enormous wealth from the areas assigned to them, but became locally very powerful. This further undermined the authority of the ruler, the apex political authority. In other words, the ruler gradually suffered considerable loss of his economic and political prerogatives at the cost of these feudatories and vassals.

The conditions in economy and polity resulted in the genesis and consolidation of feudalism in India in the early medieval period. As the economy, characterised as feudal, was steeped in ruralism and gave little scope to trade, it is supposed to have been hardly conducive to urban growth. In marked contrast to the wealth of archaeological data on urban centres of early historical period, excavated and explored information about early medieval cities is much poorer. Many of the former urban centres have yielded evidence of their decaying material milieu, haphazard layout and utilization of re-used bricks in this period. These are interpreted as clear signs of de-urbanization over greater parts of the subcontinent, including north India, during the CE 600-1000 phase. A Prakrit text mentions that urban centres turned into villages (*nayarani gamabhuayani hohinti*). It has been argued that the decline in India's commerce played a crucial role in urban decay. Analyses of the copper plates of the Palas, Senas and the Pratiharas point to lesser references to terms like *nagara* and *pura*. Copper plates are replete with references to *jayaskandhavaras* or victorious army camps. Such *jayaskandhavaras* began to act as politico-military headquarters. It has been inferred that urban centres as areas for exchange and crafts production gradually faded away and were replaced by military and political headquarters.

Early medieval north India witnessed the rise of many centres of pilgrimage (*tirtha*) which as sacred centres sometime assumed urban proportions. The historians of Indian feudalism argue that as urban centres lost their relevance as trading zones, they became religious centres which undermined their role as centres of production/ manufacture of commodities and exchange. Three areas showed typical symptoms of a feudal economy: Bengal under the Palas and the Senas, the Gurjara-Pratihara kingdom in the Ganga-Yamuna doab, and the Rashtrakuta domains in the Deccan.

12.5 DEBATES ON URBAN DECAY:ARGUMENTS AGAINST

The above portrayal of a declining commercial and urban economy in north India during the early medieval period, however, has not gone uncontested. Many scholars have pointed out factual inaccuracies in the formulation of the feudalism theory. Attempts have been made by using various sources, including epigraphic materials, to show that trade did not alarmingly decline and that there was no major de-urbanisation over an extensive area. It is beyond any doubt that the practice of land grants, often issued with reference to lands lying in the uncultivated, unsettled forest or fallow tracts, paved the way for unprecedented rural expansion. But does the proliferation of agrarian settlements necessarily imply consolidation of self-sufficient and closed villages? Two essential and indispensable requirements of human life, namely salt and iron, were not available locally. If these items were to be procured from non-local sources, then serious doubts can be raised about the perception of the self-sufficiency and closed nature of early medieval villages.

In the following sections considerable information is provided about trade, trade routes and maritime linkages both of north and south India which attest to the fact that not all trade declined in the early medieval India. Some ports, trading centres and routes were witness to the flourishing trade and commerce in this period. In fact many centres rose to prominence in this period despite the fact that many others eclipsed. Thus the theory of complete decay and desertion does not hold water.

12.6 PORTS AND TRADE ROUTES IN NORTH INDIA

Bengal, located in the Ganga delta and watered by many rivers, had several riverine ports facilitating inland riverine communications. Early medieval copper plates from Bengal often mention small boat stations (*nau-danda, nau-bandha*) as landmarks in rural spaces which had innumerable streams and rivulets (*srotasvini, ganginika*), canals, and channels. Of course the most important riverine route was along the Ganga or Bhagirathi on which plied many vessels (*sa khalu Bhagirathipathapravartmana-nauvata*). From the late seventh century onwards, the eastern part of the delta began to have riverine ports. One such port was Devaparvata (modern Mainamati-Lalmai, Bangladesh) which according to the copper plates (from seventh to early tenth century) was located on the river Kshiroda on which plied many boats. Another copper plate of *c.* CE 971, found from Sabhar (close to Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh) records an unusual place-name: Vangasagara-sambhandariyaka. Sabhar is located on the river Vamsi and functions as a small inland riverine port. The term sambhandariyaka may be taken to mean a place offering adequate or proper facilities (*samyak*) for storage of goods (*bhandara*). The very name Sabhar is suggested to have been derived from the word, *sambhara*, meaning a stock of commodities. There is a strong likelihood that at Sabhar or ancient Sambhara stood a *sambhandariyaka*. This warehousing facility at Sabhar may bring it close to *putabhedanas* of earlier times. References to mercantile activities figure in various types of literary texts. The *knivalayamala* of Girasenasuri (*c*. 8th century) offers a lively account of an assembly of merchants (*vanikmeli*) who congregated at the well-known port town of Surparaka. Though the account is probably based on earlier memories, the interesting point is the exchange of the experiences of merchants among themselves. The same port also appears in the *Jatakamala* of Aryasura (*c.* 7th/8th century). At Surparaka, according to this text, lived the Buddha in one of his previous births as a master mariner, conversant with the art of bringing in (*aharana*) and taking out (*apaharana*) ships. These leave an impression of continuity and not cessation of commerce, and is contrary to the notion that commerce was on decline in the wake of feudal social formation.

The vast plains of north India were well frequented by several overland routes of communication, some of them gaining particular prominence in the early medieval times. Thus Chia-tan (785-805) informs us about a route which ran from Kamarupa to Magadha by touching Pundravardhana (north Bengal) and Kajanigla (near the Rajmahal Hills). A number of overland routes connected Kanyakubja with different parts of India, as al Biruni reported. One such route ran from Kanyakubja to Gangasagara (at the confluence of the Ganga with the sea) through Ayodhya, Varanasi, Pataliputra and Monghyr. Another route starting from Kanyakubja connected Prayaga (Prayagraj, earlier Allahabad), then through the Rewa region of Madhya Pradesh reached Odisha and from there extended as far south as Kanchipuram (near Chennai). The Ganga-Yamuna doab was well connected with western India, according to al Biruni. Thus Mathura maintained an overland linkage with Ujjayini and Bayana (Rajasthan) and from both the places it was possible to reach the well-known port of Somnath in Kathiawad.

In the twelfth and early thirteenth century copper plates of some Sena kings one notes a new kind of settlement, named *caturaka*. The term *caturaka* is not encountered in the Bengal inscriptions prior to the twelfth century. It means literally a place which stood at the convergence of four roads. The *caturaka* was not a village, but it was also not a large urban market area. One such *caturaka* was known as Betadda-caturaka on the river Ganga (*purve Jahnavisima*). This is identified as Betore in Howrah district, West Bengal which came into considerable prominence in the sixteenth century as an inland riverine port connecting the Ganga with the famous port of Saptagrama on the river Sarasvati. The beginning of the role of Betore as a riverine port may thus go back to the twelfth century. These inland port towns in the Ganga delta occupied a position intermediate between the rural hinterland and large urban centres and played a role more or less similar to that of the early medieval *mandapikas* of northern and western India. The above sources thus belie the image of a slump in trade in north India.

Indirect evidence of commerce can also be gleaned from the list of various revenue-collecting officers available in the copper plates. Thus the references to the *hattapati* (officer in charge of *hattas*), *saulkika* (officer in charge of collection of *sulka* or tolls and customs), *tarika* (officer in charge of collection of *tara* or ferry dues), *gamagamika* (officer looking after ingress and egress), *nauvata* and *arddha-nauvata* (senior and junior officers supervising movements of mercantile fleet) cannot but highlight movements of merchants and commodities in north India. This also implies the existence of some routes of communications, especially the overland communication in north India. In the first half of the ninth century Viradharadeva undertook a journey from Nagarahara (Jelalabad, Afghanistan) to Sambodhi (Bodhgaya, Bihar). The inscription which records this also describes Viradharadeva's delight at the sight of many of his country-men at Bodhgaya. This amply demonstrates the regularity and frequency of travel along this extensive overland communication route. This overland route must have been particularly significant for the import of quality war-horses from the north-western borderland of India into the Ganga valley. It is therefore not surprising that the Pala inscriptions tell us about the eagerness of the Pala kings to procure horses from the northern quarters. This is also corroborated by the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* of Minhaj-us Siraj who impresses upon us the regular arrival of Arab horse dealers in Nudia (the capital of the Sena king, Lakshmanasena, *c.* CE 1179-1199). Bengal's linkages with the north-eastern frontier areas and Kamarupa in particular are amply borne out by inscriptions, Minhaj's accounts and Marco Polo's travels (*c.* CE 1254- 1324). Gujarat under the Chaulukya rulers experienced considerable improvements in overland connections. Anahilapura, the premier city of the Chalukya kingdom (Patan), was well connected with Munjapura, Jhunjhuvada, Viramgam, Wadhwan, Saela, Vanthali. On the other hand it was also linked up with Varanasi, Prayaga and Dhara (in Central India). Important ports of Gujarat, like, Stambhapura or Cambay and Somanatha, maintained effective communications with inland towns, especially those in the Malwa plataeu. Tamralipta, the premier port in the east till the eighth century, was visited by merchants from Ayodhya. In CE 1024 the Cola king Rajendra's daring raid from coastal Andhra on Vangala-desa in Bengal clearly indicates the overland linkages of Bengal with Odisha and from then onwards to Andhra. In the far north-west, Multan in the Punjab rose to considerable prominence as a major centre of trade which was connected with the Ganga plains and also with the north-western borderland of the subcontinent. Multan looms large in the Arab accounts as a major trade centre.

12.7 MARITIME LONG DISTANCE TRADE (NORTH INDIA)

The above data and arguments do not suggest a slump in trade in north India during the early medieval period. A careful perusal of available information may not also suggest languishing trade of north India with areas overseas. For this purpose, the Arabic and Persian texts provide us with significant information. It is surprising that the proponents of Indian feudal formation have generally neglected these sources for the understanding of the long-distance trade of India.

The rise and spread of Islam in West Asia, parts of Africa and in the Mediterranean region right up to Spain proved to be conducive to commercial movement. Islam is characterised by a distinct orientation to trade and urbanism. The establishment and consolidation of the Abbasid Caliphate in the eighth century facilitated overland communication between West Asia and Central Asia, China and South Asia. But more spectacular developments are noticeable in the maritime commerce. The Abbasid Caliphate was instrumental in increasing the importance of the Persian Gulf (Darya-i-Akhzar) with Siraf as the premier port in the northern part of the Gulf. The foundation of the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt (Misr) in CE 969 led to a major change in maritime commerce. It resulted in the rise of the Red Sea as the principal sea-corridor of western Indian Ocean, facilitating thereby sea-borne trade with India and also the Mediterranean regions.

The long-distance maritime trade in the Indian Ocean had its western termini either at Siraf or at Alexandria in Egypt and the eastern termini in maritime Southeast Asia and also the coast of China. These maritime movements across the Indian Ocean, guided and shaped by the predictable alterations of the monsoon wind system, had to include India which stood at the centre of the Indian Ocean. The very designation of this maritime space as al Bahr al Hind (the Sea or Ocean of India) strongly underlines the familiarity of Arabic-speaking merchants and travellers with the Indian ports and harbours. Two segments of the Bahr al Hind were well known to the Arab authors: *Bahr Larvi* (Lar=Lata or southern Gujarat; the sea of Gujarat, i.e. the Arabian Sea) and *Bahr Harkal* (the sea of Harikela; Harikela stood for the south-eastern part of Bangladesh; thus *Bahr Harkal* denotes the Bay of Bengal). We may recall that in a copper plate of CE 971 the Bay of Bengal has already been mentioned as Vangasagara.

Though ports are numerically more in the Deccan and the far south of India, a number of ports are known in north India too from the Arabic and Persian texts. It is true that these texts speak of greater volume and regularity of trade in the post-1000 CE phase, but there are clear indications of India's maritime trade even before CE 1000.

Accounts of the first Arab invasion of Sindh in eighth century in the *Chachnama* and the accounts of an Arabic Historian al Baladhuri (d. *c.* 892 CE) demonstrate the importance of the port of Daybul, located in the Indus delta. Already by this time, Daybul was noted for its maritime contacts with Sri Lanka. The ruins of this early medieval port have been unearthed at the site of Banbhore in Pakistan. The prominence of Daybul continues in the accounts of Arab writers of the ninth-twelfth centuries. In the western sea-board of northern India it is, however, the Gujarat coast that stole the limelight. Though Broach, called Baruz in the Arab accounts, had faded away, a great port came into commercial prominence, viz. Sristambhapura/ Sristambhatirtha or modern Cambay. It figures repeatedly in the Arabic accounts of Sulaiman (*c*. CE 851), ibn Khurdadbih (*c*. CE 882), al Masudi (CE 915), Buzurg ibn Shahriyar (CE 955), the anonymous author of the *Hudud al Alam* (CE 982), al Biruni (CE 1034), al Idrisi (CE 1162), Chau-ju-kua (CE 1225), Marco Polo (CE 1295) and Ibn Battutta (early fourteenth century). It maintained contacts with both the Persian Gulf ports like Siraf and Hormuz and Aden at the mouth of the Red Sea. Two early medieval Sanskrit texts, the *Vastupalamahatmyam* and the *Jagaducarita*, speak highly of this port as the centre of activities of two premier Gujarati merchants, Vastupala and Jagadu (twelfth/thirteenth century). Cambay, certainly an outstanding port, was ably supported by several smaller ports which could have acted as feeder ports to the principal port of Cambay. These were Somanatha (figuring prominently in a Sanskrit-Arabic bilingual inscription of CE 1264), al Dyb (Diu, mentioned in a twelfth century Jewish trade letter) and Ghogha. The close contacts between Hormuz (in Sanskrit texts called *Ardrapura*) and Cambay, Somanatha and Ghogha are well documented in epigraphic and literary sources. Ghogha is specifically mentioned as a point of arrival for ships from Hormuz (*hurmujivahana*). The port of Cambay was also well linked with a number of ports in the Konkan coast like, Thana, Sanjan and Chaul all of which are mentioned in the Arabic accounts. These ports in Gujarat and the neighbouring north Konkan coast also appear in Indian textual sources and in inscriptions, generally labelled as *velakulas* or ports.

Attention now may be turned to the ports on the Bengal coast, the major outlet for the land-locked Ganga valley to the sea. It is true that nothing is heard about the active role of the great port of Tamralipta after the eighth century CE. One, however, cannot also miss that as early as in the first half of the seventh century Huien Tsang was impressed with the sea-borne connections of Samatata (eastern extreme of the Ganga delta) with certain areas in Southeast Asia. This was happening when Tamralipta was at its glorious best. That Samatata-Harikela region was emerging as a major point of contact with maritime links with Southeast Asia in late seventh century will be evident from the accounts of I-tsing (CE 675-95 in India). The Arab accounts, from the mid-ninth century to early fourteenth century, speak very highly of a port in the kingdom of DHM (pronounced as Dhaum, i.e. Pala king Dharmapala), thereby locating it in the Bengal delta. This port is Samandar. The name is probably derived from the term *samudra* or sea. Ibn Battutta knew it by the name Sudkawan. It was located at the mouth of a river and close to it was an island, which according to al Idrisi (CE 1162) was full of merchants from diverse countries. Idrisi also informs us that the port was located close to a creek or inlet (*khawar*) which facilitated ingress and egress of vessels. Ibn Battutta undertook a journey from Sudkawan far up in the north to Habang which is identified with Habiganj in Bangladesh. He undertook a riverine journey, sailing along the Blue river. This river is generally identified with Meghna. The various literary accounts about Samandar/Sudkawan have led to its identification with a port located near modern Chittagong (Chattagram). In fact, the area had come to be known as *navachattamandala* in two vase inscriptions, respectively of the eighth and the tenth centuries. The decline and loss of Tamralipta seems to have been considerably compensated with the rise of this new port in the eastern-most part of the delta. Samandar, according to the Arabic texts maintained commercial linkages with Serendib (Sri Lanka), Uranshin (Odisha), Ganja (Kanchipuram in Coromandel). Ibn Battutta, though belonging to a later period, speaks of the voyages between Sudkawan and the Maldives. We are not sure about Sudkawan's connections with Southeast Asia. But it is well known from a copper plate from Nalanda that the king of Java, Balaputradeva, requested the reigning Pala king, Devapala (CE 802-37) to grant five villages to the Nalanda monastery; the request of the Javanese king was duly honoured. This is a clear signal of the regular cultural and maritime contacts between Bengal and Southeast Asia. Such cultural contacts appear to have been situated amidst frequent commercial contacts between the two areas. The significant point is that the Arab authors speak of the availability of fine quality textiles, Qamaruni aloe wood, rhinoceros horns and swords at the port of Samandar which was probably shipping these items. Qamaruni aloe wood, standing second only to the aloe wood of Multan, was not a local product of Bengal or Samandar itself. It was brought from Kamarupa along the river to Samandar. The rhinoceros horn too appears to have reached Samandar from north-eastern parts of India. The sword was probably a manufactured item from Anga (eastern Bihar) which was famous for the making of this weapon. Textiles were in all probability local products of Bengal which earned sustained fame for the production of finest quality cotton textiles. The port of Samandar, therefore, commanded an extensive hinterland. As we have earlier pointed out, smaller and inland riverine ports in the Ganga delta (for instance, Devaparvata and Vangasagarasambhandariyaka) are likely to have provided crucial linkages between the premier port in the Bengal delta and the interior. There is little to dispute the presence of brisk long-distance maritime trade in the early medieval Bengal. It is difficult to subscribe to the perception of a languishing long-distance trade in early medieval Bengal.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Analyze the role of inscriptions and coinage in assessing the development of trade and commerce during AD 300-1300.

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2) Discuss the debates among the historians over the issue of urban decay. In your opinion which argument stands out more convincing and why?

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12.8 TRADE ROUTES IN SOUTH INDIA

Regions like Pudukkottai and Ramanathapuram , Salem and Coimbatore lay on ancient trade routes linking Karnataka and Kerala with Tamil Nadu and further south to the Mannar gulf leading to Sri Lanka. Their commercial importance dates from the *Sangam* age, marked by the distribution of early Tamil Brahmi inscriptions and Roman coin hoards apart from Punch-marked coins. They continued well into the medieval times and facilitated the movement of trade from the western coast to the eastern coast. The emergence of coastal towns such as Tiruppalaivanam, Mayilappur, Mamallapuram and further south the southern ports of Kaverippumpattinam, Nagappattinam (on the Chola coast), Tondi, Kayal and other towns on the Pandya coast would also indicate a coastal route. Tondi

(Tittandatanapuram) was an important coastal town where several merchant groups like the Anjuvannam, Manigramam and Samanta Pandasalis entered into an agreement for the levy of certain taxes for endowments to the local temple. The Kamudi and Piranmalai inscriptions of the 13th-14th centuries refer to 18 *pattinams*, 32 *valarpurams* and 64 *kadigaittavalams*, all of which indicate the rise of several towns, representing coastal towns, fairs and market towns of different degrees of importance in the trading network of south India. In the Kongu region, in which Mudikondacolapuram was a major trade centre, several towns south and north of the Kaveri emerged with the increasing movement of merchants, who made grants to local temples. Perur was a considerably important and large town where merchants with the title *Chakravarti* exercised great influence.

12.9 MARITIME LINKAGES OF SOUTH INDIA

Foreign trade received a set-back especially after the decline of maritime trade in the early historical period. Conventional narratives refer to trade routes (overland and riverine), commercial centres, professional bodies of merchants but much less is known about coastal networks, which seem to be rarer.

There was regular coastal traffic along the entire littoral; particularly the Konkan and Malaya region emerged into prominence during this period. Let us discuss the coastal trade and maritime links of the different regions of the south.

12.9.1 Karnataka

Trans-oceanic contacts were on the increase and ports like Bhatkal, Basrur, Barakur, Karwar, Honavar, Kasargod, Kumbala, Mangalore, Sirur, Sadasivagad, Malpe, Ankola, Mirjan developed on the Konkan and Kanara coasts. Honavar was one of the major ports. There was regular coastal traffic and periodical long distance traffic for the unloading and collection of goods at the coastal towns brought into bigger ports like Honavar. Kasargod was of greater importance for Muslim merchants. Mangalore was the biggest town for Arab travellers.

Arab writers refer to articles of export such as rice, pepper, silk, coconut, bananas, teak, aloe, amber, bamboo, camphor, cardamom, cloves, mango, sulphur and myrobalan. Marco Polo lists the imports such as copper, brocades of gold, silk, and drugs. Horses, elephants, pearls, cloth, musk, and sandal from Gandhara, Turushka, Simhala, Chola, Magadha, and Maleyala were other important items of trade, if one were to take the inscriptions of the itinerant traders into consideration. Commodities like teak, coconut, spices (pepper and ginger) and textiles are found in one of the most impressive lists in an inscription of CE 1204 from Belgaum, which witnessed a major convergence of many types of merchants in north Karnataka. Items of trade also included regular consumer goods like paddy, rice, black pepper, asafoetida, green ginger, turmeric, betel leaves, areca nuts, coconuts, palm leaves, grass, sugarcane, coarse sugar, plantains and myrobalan. It is not clear which of these were transported by coastal crafts. The coastal network for trade in both agrarian products and manufactured ones apart from luxuries was brisk and impressive.

12.9.2 The Konkan Coastal Trade and Voyages

The Konkan coast, former Aparanta i.e., the Maharashtra coast (north and south Konkan) and its importance was known to classical sources. However, the inter-linkages between the ports of northern and southern Konkan are not clearly known in the early period. The term Konkana becomes more prominent only in the early medieval period. Kamkam in the Arabian texts is invariably equated with the kingdom of Balhara i.e., the Rashtrakutas. The distinction between north Konkan and Tulwan (Dabhole to Goa–Juwah Sindapur) was not known in the 4th and 5th centuries CE. From the Badami Chalukya period (6th-8th centuries CE) interest in controlling certain parts of this coast increased especially after the conquest of Lata (south coastal Gujrat) by the Chalukyas. Henceforth coastal linkages between the northern Konkan coast and the Gujarat Kathiawad coasts developed and coastal voyages became regular.

The early medieval period witnessed the emergence of more and newer ports in the Konkan littorals than in the early historical period. A great number of ports on the Konkan coast appear from the 9th century CE which are mentioned in the Arabic and Persian sources. Kolhapur is known from the Jewish letters of merchants as an important business centre. A number of harbours from north to south are mentioned such as Samyana/Sindan (=Sanjan in Thana district), Sristhanaka (Thana), Cemuliya/ Saimur (Chaul in Kolaba district), Nagapura (Nagav in Kolaba district), Balipattana (Kharepatan in Ratnagiri district), Gopakapattana/ Gove (Goa), Chandrapura/ Sindapur (Chandore to the south of Goa). Sindapur is prominently referred to in the Arab sources. Gove of the Kadambas was an important port and capital. Arab accounts such as those of Sulaiman and Ibn Khurdadbeh (9th century) give interesting facts about the trading network connecting Konkan and Malabar with Cambay (Kanbaya), corroborated by the Persian geographical text *Hudud al Alam* (CE 982). Surparaka i.e. Sopara near Mumbai was also known to foreign accounts. The long coastal voyages from Konkan through Malabar to Sri Lanka established links with the interior trading and craft centres. Hence the Silaharas, the most formidable power on the Maharashtra coast, tried to establish close control over the whole Konkan coast. Till the 11th century CE the ports of north Konkan were more important, but from the 11th century the situation changed with the southern Konkan ports also becoming prominent, particularly Balipattana mentioned in the epigraphic records of the Silaharas (present Kharepatan in the Ratnagiri district). Coastal voyages between Balipattana and the area around Goa connected Chandrapura and Cemuliya (Chaul) to Balipattana. Balipattana was the point of convergence of vessels near Goa and those from the north of Balipattana. Tolls on vessels at Balipattana yielded considerable revenue. Exemptions were given to encourage commercial links with the two important harbours of north and south sectors. The development of coastal trade in the northern sector of the Konkan littorals, with Balipattana in a more prominent position, appears to have resulted because of the gradual spread of agrarian settlements, diversification of crops, proliferation of crafts and growth of commerce in Karnataka during the early medieval times. Sindapur, which had close connection with Goa, is known from the navigational manual of Arabian navigator Ahmed ibn Majid (the celebrated *muallim* of the 15th century). Under local Kadamba rulers Gopakapattana, Gopapura and Gove (Goa) emerged as the most important ports. References to pilgrimages from Goa (by Kadamba rulers) to Kolhapur, Somanatha, on the Kathiawad coast (1038 and 1125) i.e. from south Konkan to the Kathiawad coast (Saurashtra) via Thana in the 11th century, to Arab Muslim merchants rescuing a Kadamba ruler from shipwreck and becoming even administrative heads in Goa point to its importance. The term *Nauvittaka* interchangeable with the Arab *nakhuda* (master of the ship) evidently refers to a ship owning merchant. A *mijigiti* (*masjid*) built by him was maintained by tolls at Goa from vessels from Gurjjara, Saurashtra, Lata, Konkan, etc. Linkages between Manjrur, a leading port in the northern part of Malabar and Kathiawad and voyages through Konkan coast to Gujarat, are attested by the Cairo Geniza records of Jewish merchants, which prove the role of Jewish traders in the trade with Aden. Tinbu a ship owner (*nakhuda*) is known from a Jewish letter of CE 1145.

Ships plying between Aden and India had to encounter piracy on the Konkan coast. Tinbu's shipping business spanned from Manjrur to Thana along the Konkan littorals. Early Indian merchants also participated in shipping enterprises but the data is meagre. The *Nakhuda* Mahruz Jacob brought a letter to his brother-in-law in CE 1145 from Manjrur, referring to the coastal voyage from Manjrur to Thana. Kanbaya (Cambay) also formed a significant part of this coastal network and linkages with Mangalore and other ports in the Malabar littorals. References also to Mulaybaar and to Kollam indicate that the voyages from Somanath in Kathiawad assumed considerable regularity from 11th century onwards. The early medieval sources are silent about the types of vessels which were known to the *Periplus* such as *Trappaga* and *Kottyamba*, which correspond to the references in the Jain text *Angavijja* (4th century CE). *Trapyaka* and *Kottimba* were coastal crafts, which must have plied from Cemuliya and Chandrapura to Balipattana. The picture about the coastal crafts is hazy, textual and epigraphic references being meagre. Visual representations on *Viragals* or hero stones in the context of battles and in the caves in Borivli, near Mumbai, show some varieties of crafts made of planks sewn together. They may also have been used in the battles between the Silaharas and Kadambas of the 12th century. Smaller boats carrying soldiers and large ones carrying passengers and cargo are referred to in the Jewish letters.

Epigraphic data is available on a community of ship owning merchants in early medieval Konkan. The *Mahamatya* was a high ranking officer, and under the Silaharas an officer called Vasaida was also a *nauvittaka* (The Arab sources refer to the *nakhuda*). They combined commercial and administrative roles. The monetary scenario does not seem to correspond to the information on brisk trade due to the relative lack of metal pieces from mid-8th century to the end of the 10th century CE. While the Rashtrakutas had no definite dynastic coinage, the Arabic *drammas* must have been in use. The Silaharas issued the *gadhiya* paisa type i.e., silver coins. Gold coins appear from the 11th century (under the Kalachuris, Kadambas and western Chalukyas). There seems to have been unhindered movement of merchants and merchandise along the coast despite risks and uncertainties. Unlike the spirit of adventure involved in long distance trade, the journeys along the coast were relatively more sedate and safer. There was continuity in this traffic, although shifts and alterations even within the overall sedate nature of commerce in the Konkan coast, led to the emergence of newer ports like Balipattana. Sanjan under the Rashtrakutas was a well-known port in north Konkan. Linkages between the Malabar littorals, Konkan and Saurashtra were unbroken from the early historic to the early medieval and well into the early modern times.

12.9.3 Andhra Pradesh

The 11th-12th centuries represent a period of moderate long distance trade activities in Andhra. For this it is claimed that the political atmosphere was not conducive. But internal trade was prevalent on a limited scale. Merchants often acted as bankers, for example Chanda Bhima Poti *setti* acted as a banker to Velanati Kulottunga Coda Gonkaraju (1157). Capitals of subordinate chiefs and chieftains such as Vengi, Gudimetta, Nadendla, Dharanikota and Nellore attracted merchants. Among the temples fostering trade were the five *aramas* (Bhimapura, Gudipudi, Palakonalu, Draksharama and Amaravati) as also Mallesvara at Bezwada and Mahasena at Chebrolu which were centres of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage centres included the more famous Simhachalam, Bapatla, Ghantasala, Srisailam, Ahobalam and Tirupati. In the 11th-12th centuries towns grew around such temples. The Lords of Penugonda, Tamil merchants and merchant organizations in Andhra including the 500, Manigramam, Anjuvannam (Mallam inscription) were fairly active. However, a spectacular growth under the Kakatiya king Ganapatideva (1199-1261) opened a new epoch in the trade of Andhra by encouraging sea- borne trade and by renovating the port of Motupalli, Guntur district and by issuing an *abhaya sasana* for all foreign merchants. This led to freedom from oppressive taxation and from piracy. Fixed duties on articles of trade such as sandal, camphor, pearls, ivory, silk, thread, coral and spices enabled regular movement of goods and merchants. The means of communication were also improved. Marco Polo refers to this port as Mutfili. The Motupalli inscription (Guntur district) of CE 1244 records both the imports and exports of this town. The general prosperity of the *Vaisya* community from this period is reflected in the *Vaishya Purana*. Penugonda and 17 other towns constituted the original habitat of *Vaishyas* of 714 *gotras*, each with a *nakaram* with a *nakarasvami* at its head. Komatis, the traders, on whom stories abound in the *Vaishya Purana*, are an important group mentioned also in some inscriptions from Ghantasala. Studies on the economy, society and polity in Telingana during the 11th-14th centuries have increasingly shown that Telingana was a major region of trade potential under the Kakatiyas, in whose period this relatively dry and lake irrigated region was consciously developed through agrarian expansion and organised trade. Later it was this process which enhanced the importance of Andhra as a whole in the interregional and long distance trade networks, due to the royal policy of encouragement and patronage.

12.9.4 Kerala

Kerala developed contacts with the west and foreign traders like the Jews, Christians and Arabs were given trading towns (i.e. centres with major trading activities given to them for settlement and trade) under royal charters. Other coastal towns emerged such as Kolikkodu, Kollam etc. which became *entrepots* of south Asian trade. The Anjuvannam was a trading organization more often met with on the Kerala and Kanara coast in the 9th-10th centuries and even later; the Hanzamana of the 15th16th century inscriptions in South Kanara probably representing the Anjuvannam of the early medieval times. The location of such trading groups and of Arab horse dealers from the Malaiyala region enhanced the importance of the coastal towns in Karnataka and Kerala, as also the presence of the Ayyavole referred to in an inscription of Sultan Battery (15th-16th centuries) near Kozhikode.

12.9.5 Tamil Nadu

From the mid-twelfth century onwards there are definite indications of increased participation in foreign trade judging from the overseas imports in south India in the late 13th and 14th centuries CE. The Chinese trade missions to south India under the Yuan dynasty underline the importance of south India and its overseas trade in the Chola and post- Chola periods. Changes in the commodities of maritime trade from luxuries to necessities such as dyes, cotton yarn, textiles, processed iron, pepper, and horses become more prominent in Ayyavole inscriptions. How these goods came to south India for trans-shipment and who the shippers were, are not known. The guild inscriptions suggest that they sent their agents quite far abroad and established trading stations (e.g. Takua Pa – Manigramam [in Malaya peniusula]) and Pagan – Ayyavole (in Burma, Myanmar. The first indicates the place and the second represents the guild.).

Merchants had access to kings and the Chola invasions of Sri Lanka involved such interactions. The external policy of the Cholas was designed to favour the expansion of overseas trade interests from which both the Chola ruler and the merchants derived benefit. These expeditions were not for plunder and loot but trade figured as an important factor in framing of the Chola policy and the Chola rulers had links with the merchant community for mutual benefit. In northern Sri Lanka Chola inscriptions are found from Mantai to Trincomallee, Polonnaruva being the main centre. Chola occupation of northern Sri Lanka may have been a hurdle in the links of Sri Lanka with Southeast Asia, especially the Sinhalese links with Java and Bali. Sri Lanka was rich in precious stones such as rubies, topaz and sapphire. Arab works like *Akhbar al-Sin wa'l-Hind*, a collection of travel stories, and that of Ibn Khurdadabih refer also to pepper, perfumes, musk, diamonds and precious stones, aloes, gold and pearls, some of them like aromatics being imported to Sri Lanka. The Gulf of Mannar rich in pearls and Mantai (Mahatitta) in northwest Sri Lanka was the point of ingress for the Cholas, the latter being one of the great emporiums of the early medieval period comparable to Siraf on the Persian gulf. Pepper was highly priced in China and in the west and the demand had grown in the 13th century.

The Chola and Southeast Asia trade links are attested to by the Nagappattinam records of the early 11th century and Kamboja's gifts to Chola kings and the Chola missions to China (CE 1077). Rajendra's expedition to Southeast Asia was a coastal voyage to Kadaram or Srivijaya. Chola raids were meant to "protect Indian commercial interests from interference by Srivijaya". Like the Sung emperors of China or the rulers of Srivijaya in Southeast Asia, the Cholas both solicited and sought to foster foreign trade and to establish trading rights for the Tamil speaking merchants in those areas. The Srivijaya inscription of Canton, if it has been interpreted correctly, gives an unusual inside look at the sub-surface diplomacy that preceded the commercial moves of the Cholas at Canton. (It records a donation on behalf of Kulottunga I, to the Taoist monastery in Canton). By CE 1088 the Ayyavole guild was established near Barus in Sumatra. The Chola rulers were personally interested in sharing the profits of maritime trade. Inscriptions from Piranmalai (latter half of the 13th century), Koilpatti (Trichy district, 1305), Tiruvarankyuricchi, same district, record the imports and exports. The goods mentioned in them include areca nuts, pepper, myrobalans, iron, cotton, thick cloth, thread, wax, yak's tail, camphor oil, civet, horses, elephants, camels?, aloeswood, sandalwood. In the Sung maritime trade the main commodities were cloves, frankincense, dried galingale, abaca cloth, umbrellas, swords, bottle-gourd, edible date, medicinal rhubarb, slaves, peafowl, benzoin, putchuk, margosa bark, melons, gardenia flowers, coconut, cardamom, lacquer ware and a host of other things. Common commodities in the Chinese and south Indian lists are identifiable. Sandalwood and camphor were two articles of great demand in the Indian Ocean trade. Aromatics were also an important item as there was constant demand for expendable, sacred items. Frankincense was the only item coming from West Asia, while the bulk of the aromatics came from Southeast Asia. The Ayyavole inscriptions mention a vast range of commodities exported from the Pandya kingdom. The Kayalpattinam and Tittandatanapuram (Tondi) inscriptions of 14th century on the east (Pandya) coast of Tamil Nadu refer to the trading organizations and stockists of goods, such as the *Manigramam* and *Samanta pandasalis*. In Andhra the Chintapalle inscription (Guntur district) of the Chagi chief and the Motupalli inscription (CE 1184) of Ganapati Deva refer to the same regional inflow and outflow of goods of maritime trade. The ramifications of this trade covered a wide spectrum of regions and commodities from China through Southeast Asian countries, Sri Lanka and south India to the West Asian regions. Further, the Gujarat coast, which linked most of the Indian trade with West Asia, had regular sea traffic connecting it with Hormuz and other Central Asian regions and north China. South Indian merchandise also used this important channel for its trade. Marco Polo refers to the importance of this trade to China in pepper, precious stones and pearls. Malabar, the Pandya region, sent envoys to China (1283 and 1284) and envoys from China reached Kollam (CE 1279), a major port on the west coast. The overseas commerce primarily that of West Asia and Egypt (Cairo) and China, was mainly from the west coast with Kollam as the major port. The Geniza documents and Jewish letters contain impressive evidence of the links with the Mediterranean regions- Italy, Sicily, Morocco and Lebanon (Syria). The Egyptian corporate association called the *Karimi* dealt in pepper and spices. By the 13th century they obtained their eastern commodities from Indian traders of Gujarat and south India during the Chola, Pandya and Kakatiya periods and also from the island of Sinhala. The Sung and later Yuan rulers of China encouraged this trade. The Indian subcontinent drew in gold, silver and copper in payment for many of its exports. In China payment in kind was advocated. The Geniza documents show that Jewish merchants trading with south India had to make payment in gold to offset their unfavourable trade balances. Spices to Egypt led to a constant flow of gold to India from Europe and Egypt (the Venetian sequins of the Vijayanagar period). But the horse trade was a major currency drain and this aspect of the outflow of gold from, especially in the post- Chola period, is an aspect of economy which needs more intensive study.

The commodities handled by *Ayyavole* and *Manigramam* thus include a wide variety of goods such as textiles, iron, aloeswood, (Agaru- Aghil), areca nuts and betel nuts, bedellium, camphor, civet, cotton and cotton fabric. Spinning and weaving technology were hence consciously developed and Southeast Asia became a major market for Indian textiles. The brisk trade in cotton is known from the

Chineses accounts (Patula-14th century). Textiles were also a major export to the western markets. Horses were always imported from Turushka, Kamboja and Yavana countries, although the rearing of horses was not understood in south India. The Motupalli inscription (Meera Abraham, p.170) refers to many items. Iron and steel wootz was exported from many parts of south India. Indian steel out of which the famous Damascus sword was made was one of the most important exports from India as seen in the Geniza records. Musk, myrobaln, pearls, pepper, putchuk, rose water, sandalwood, wax and honey and silk — varieties were also traded in, while Chinese silk was imported into Chola and Pandya countries.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) Discuss the maritime linkages forged between Indian ports and those overseas in the early medieval south India.

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2. Write a short note on the trade routes in south India which became important in the early medieval period.

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12.10 SUMMARY

There is a long drawn debate among the scholars whether there was urban decay or there existed considerable growth during the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods. Those favouring the theory of urban decay argue that the decline of trade with the Roman Empire, and the Huna inroads adversely affected the trading activities in India. The period saw sharp decline of the growth of urban centres; there was also near absence of metallic money (gold and silver). Instead the usage of cowrie shells increased indicating the decline of long distance trade as cowries could only largely be used for smaller transactions. Thus they emphasized that there was an emphatic decline in the long distance trade. Instead land grants increased manifold. The emergence of a self-sufficient village economy ultimately created the conditions for the rise of feudalism in India. However, those who contradict the argument insist that the picture presented was too gloomy. They emphasize that neither the market places disappeared altogether nor was there a slump in trade in north India. Rather the rise of Islam paved the way for brisk commercial activities in the region. In south India agrarian expansion gave rise to a new phase of urbanization. There was regular coastal traffic along the entire littoral; particularly the Konkan and Malaya region emerged into prominence in this period.

12.11 KEY WORDS

Abbasid Caliphate : In CE 750, the Umayya Caliphs were replaced by the Abbasid. In CE 762 they moved the capital from Damascus to Syria to the new city of Baghdad in Iraq. The Abbasids ruled all over Western Asia and north Africa from CE 750 until about 1000, when they began to weaken. At first north Africa broke away and formed the independent kingdom under the Fatimids. In CE 1258 the Abbasid dynasty ended.

Ayyavole : A powerful merchant guild of early medieval south India.

Fatimid Caliphate : The Fatimids ruled over north Africa, Egypt and Palestine from the 10^{th} to 12^{th} Century CE. The Fatimids claimed to be the descendants of Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, and wife of Ali, the fourth Caliph and first Shia Imam. The ultimate goal of the Fatimids was to replace the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad with their own when Caliph Ubayd Allah proclaimed himself Caliph at Cairo in 909 in opposition to the Sunni Caliph of Baghdad. They established a new sea route to Asia via the Red Sea, instead of the earlier more frequented route via the Persian Gulf.

Gurjara-Pratihara : The dynasty was founded by Nagabhata I in the 8^{th} century. The kingdom reached at its peak under king Bhoja (836-90) and Mahendrapala (890-910). It had its capital at Kannauj. The dynasty was weakened by repeated attacks of the Rashtrakutas in the 10th century and its power completely broken when Mahmud Ghazni sacked Kannauj in 1018 CE.

Huna : They were nomadic and pastoral people from Central Asia. They were Mongolian in appearance. They enjoyed military superiority due to their rapid horse power. The Hunas appear in history in 3 century BCE when the Great Wall of China was erected to exclude them from China. The Huna kingdom was centered in modern Hungary. Attila (CE 434-453) was their most powerful king. Huna's rule extended from the Rhine across the north of the Black Sea as far as the Caspian Sea. The Guptas also fell prey to the Huna inroads in CE 480. They overran the whole of north India. They succeeded for a brief period of 30 years to establish their kingdom in Malwa around CE 500 under the leadership of Toramana. His son and successor Mihirkula conquered north India but was soon driven into Kashmir by Yashodharman where he died in about CE 542.

Malay Peninsula	:	It is what is today called Peninsular Malaysia and Ocean of adjacent islands of Southeast Asia including the east coast of Sumatra, the coast of Borneo, and smaller islands that lie between these areas. It lies between the Andaman Sea of the Indian Ocean and the start of Malacca on the west and the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea on the east. The northern part of the Peninsula forms a part of Thailand; the southern part constitutes west Malaysia, the Malayan part of Malaysia.
Manigramam	:	A powerful merchant guild of early medieval south India.
Sasanid Empire (226-651 CE)	:	They established an empire roughly within the frontiers achieved by the Achaemenids, with the capital Ctesiphon. The dynasty was founded by the king Ardashir I who was the vassal of Parthian ruler. Shapur I (241-272) inflicted crushing defeats on Romans twice; later he also attacked the Kushanas and occupied Peshawar, the capital of Kushanas. The last Sassanid ruler was Yazdgard III (632-636). The Arabs took Ctesiphon and in 651, the last Sassanian king died as a fugitive.
Western Kshatrapa Rulers	:	A Saka ruling house ruled over western India and Malwa.

12.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) See Section 12.2.

2) See Sections 12.4 and 12.5.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) See Section 12.9 and its Sub-sections.

2) See Section 12.8.

12.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

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