UNIT 13 MERCHANT GUILDS AND URBANIZATION IN NORTH INDIA AND SOUTH INDIA[1]

Structure

13.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about:

- the existence and emergence of urban centres in the period between 600 CE and 1000 CE;
- in what ways was the urbanization of the early medieval period different from the Second Urbanization of the Ganga valley;

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

- the emergence of urbanization in north India and south India; and
- merchant guilds of north India and south India.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The early medieval period differed from the early historical period in crucial aspects. There was widespread practice of granting land in the early medieval period. Trade supposedly declined with a marked paucity of metallic currency. Many urban centres which have been subjected to limited excavations have yielded poor remains or sometimes a sterile layer indicating that many urban centres were deserted in this period. When compared to the Kushana levels, the post-Gupta levels in various excavations have given evidence of mediocre remains like the reuse of earlier structures and the use of brick bats. It is in the context of this widespread decay and decline of urban centres that any discussion on urbanization in the early medieval period has to be situated. Many critics of urban decay and the associated feudalism school have pointed out the existence, emergence and continuity of urban features in this period. In this Unit, we will be studying those features of urbanization which point to the flourishing commercial ethos and urban milieu of settlements in the early medieval India.

13.2 THIRD URBANIZATION

We have already studied the fact that the post-Gupta period was marked by increasing practise of land grants. Scholars believe that this feature led to ruralisation of the economy and brought an end to the Second Urbanization in Indian history. The associated features were widespread urban decay and decline of urban centres. Cities are believed to have disappeared on a pan-India scale between 300 -1000 CE. This decay was the result of the decline in the long distance trade. The resultant socio-economic changes have been understood as comprising of a feudal mode of production. However scholars have pointed out inconsistencies and contradictions in the feudalism formulation. While it is true that urban decay was marked by desertion of urban settlements in the early medieval period, it is equally certain that many other sites continued to exist and flourish. All these aspects have already been dealt with in the previous Unit. What is relevant to consider in the present Unit is that urban features appeared even in the pre-1000 CE period in many parts of India. Many urban centres with trading links, streets, houses of merchants, market places, monumental temples, artisanal quarters etc. emerged on the scene. The point which is noteworthy is that these urban centres differed from their early historical counterparts in the fact that they were deeply rooted in their rural contexts. Unlike the Second Urbanization (c. 600 BCE-300 CE) in the subcontinent which had its epicentre in the Ganga valley which acted as a platform for the development of secondary urban centres, the early medieval period did not have any such epicentre generating urban impulses to disparate regions. Various features like land grants- spurred agrarian expansion, generation of resources for local and supra-local groups; resource mobilization; participation of religious functionaries; holding of fairs; brisk temple building activities; trading in luxury and exotic items, provided the space for the coming together of ruling groups and merchant bodies along with local notables in settlements. These features combined together led to the emergence of urban centres which by their distinctiveness are situated by Chattopadhyaya in the Third phase of urbanization in Indian history.

Now let us begin by analysing those aspects which became the part of Third Urbanization. We will be discussing the different types of urban centres, trade, trade routes, merchants, commercial ethos, guilds, markets, shops etc. to get a wholesome picture of urbanization in the early medieval period.

13.3 URBANIZATION IN NORTH INDIA

In-depth studies of land grants reveal that market places were not entirely absent in the inscriptions of pre-1000 CE days. Inscriptions and textual sources speak of the presence of various types of market places, some of them hitherto unknown prior to CE 600. Thus the term *hatta* or *hattika* frequently occurs in the inscriptions of north India. *Hatta/hattika* generally signifies a rural level small centre of exchange. The term survives in the modern word *haat*, widely known in Bengal and Bihar. Such rural market centres are periodic in nature as transactions do not take place every day, but only on fixed days.

Many epigraphic descriptions of *hatta* also speak of the availability of the drinking-water (*prapa*) and resting places (*arama*), feeding houses (*sattra*) close to the *hatta*. In some inscriptions of the Palas, the terms *hattavara* is encountered. It would probably denote a *hatta* more important or larger than an ordinary one. A case in point is probably Devapaladevahatta. It stood close to the famous monastery and University of Nalanda. The *hatta* was named after Devapala (c. CE 810-850), the famous Pala ruler and it is likely that it was larger and more prominent than a simple rural level market place. The *hatta* at Tattanandapura (Ahar, Bulandshahr district, Uttar Pradesh) was situated within a large urban trading area. The mention of a *hattamarga* or a street leading to a market place is found in another inscription from Tattanandapura. There is a reference to horse fair (*ghotaka-yatra*) at the early medieval Prthudaka (modern Pehoa, Karnal district, Haryana) which took place in the ninth century. The term *yatra* stands for a fair which is once again periodic in nature.

It is almost entirely from north Indian inscriptions that one comes across a new type of market place from the eighth-ninth centuries. This is *mandapika*, literally meaning a covered area. The term in question can easily be equated with *mandis* of modern times in the Ganga-Yamuna *doab*, upper Ganga valley and western India. These *mandis* are larger than rural level *haats*, but smaller than markets in large urban areas. One of the earliest references to a *mandi* is seen in the Baijnath Prasasti (8^{th} /9^{th} century) in the Kangra region in Himachal Pradesh. At Kiragrama (modern Kangra) there was a *mandapika* where three merchants belonging to a family of merchants donated a cash of 6 drammas (silver coins) out of the daily collection in favour of a temple at Baijnath. The *mandapika* at Naddula (modern Nadol) demands our special attention. Inscriptions from Nadol show that Naddula was initially a village, in fact one village in a cluster of twelve villages (*dvadasagramiya Naddulagrama*). Naddula subsequently emerged as a *mandapika* where considerable trade took place mainly in grains and other agricultural products. Naddula then began to be called a *nagara* or city and ultimately became the political centre of the Cahamanas of Nadol. Naddula was obviously functioning as a nodal point where surplus agricultural products from surrounding villages were brought. This paved the way for the establishment of a *mandapika* at Naddula. These factors were instrumental in the remarkable transformation of Naddula from a village to an urban centre and finally to an apex political centre of local power in early medieval Rajasthan. That these *mandapikas* were well connected by trade routes and available transport systems is demonstrated by epigraphic records. Thus in CE 1114 commodities were brought to the *mandapika* at Mangalapura (modern Mangrol, Gujarat) by oxen (*vrsa*), asses (*gardabha*), and camels (*ushtra*).

Many *mandapikas* were known as *sulkamandapikas*, i.e. tolls and customs were levied both in cash and kind at the *mandapika*. The levy of tolls is a clear proof of the commercial transactions at the *mandapika*. The *mandapikas* witnessed transactions in grains, many daily necessity commodities (probably as bulk items), and costlier items like spices and animals like horses and elephants. Some of the *mandapikas*, for instance those at Siyadoni and Bilhari, were designated as *pattanamandapika*. The term may suggest either a *mandapika* in an urban area or a *mandapika* which had assumed an urban proportion. The *Lekhapaddhati*, an early medieval text from Gujarat, uses the term *mahamandapika*. The use of the prefix *maha* clearly demonstrates that at least some *mandapikas* became much larger than their counterparts. These *mandapikas* seem to have maintained crucial trading linkages both with their respective rural hinterland and also with larger urban areas.

Market places evidently had shops which were known as *vithis* and *apanas*. At Siyadoni some shops were described as hereditarily owned by some merchants (*pitrpitamahoparjita*), some others were owned or built by merchants themselves (*svoparjita*). The mention of shops owned hereditarily by traders-possibly for three generations-suggests the brisk commercial activities in such shopping establishments over a long period. These shops were evidently meant for retail trade.

Early medieval copper plates from Bengal often mention small boat stations (*nau-danda, nau-bandha*) as landmarks in rural spaces which have 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 copper plates (from seventh to early tenth century) stood by the river Kshiroda on which plied many boats.

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).

13.3.1 Merchant Community

Our sources also underline the diversities of merchants. While older terms like *vanik*, *sarthavaha* and *sresthi* continued, there appeared new types of merchants. At the famous *mandapika* of Siyadoni we note the active presence of a salt-dealer (*nemakavanij*), whose father too was a salt-dealer. He was prosperous enough to have provided considerable patronage to a number of temples in Siyadoni. An insightful probe into early medieval inscriptions from Rajasthan highlights the growing importance of a number of local merchant lineages, e.g. *Dhusara, Dharkata, Uesavala/ Oisavala* (later day *Oswals*), *Srimali* and *Pragvata*. Merchant-donors often highlighted their genealogy at the time of making donations with a view to underlining that they belonged to a status-group and were not upstarts. A particular type of merchants began to figure in inscriptions from Gujarat after CE 1000. They are called *nauvittakas*, not encountered hitherto before. The term indicates a merchant who derived their wealth (*vitta*) from ships (*nau*); in other words, it denotes a ship-owning merchant. The term has a close correspondence to the Persian/Arabic word, *nakhuda*, i.e. *khuda* or lord of *nau* (ship).

13.3.2 Metallic Money

The data and arguments presented above on merchants, market places, commodities, ports and routes of communication do not portray the image of languishing trade, including long-distance commerce, in the early medieval north India. It will be logical here to look into the problem of the relative lack of metallic currency in the early medieval India. The wide prevalence of cowry-shells in eastern India, especially Bengal, does not necessarily indicate that transactions were conducted within a restricted commercial circuit. Cowry-shells are not locally available in Bengal. Arab accounts of 12th , 13th , 14th centuries and the descriptions of Ma huan (early sixteenth century) amply demonstrate that cowry-shells reached Bengal from far away Maldives. These were brought in shiploads from Maldives to Bengal. The latter exported rice to Maldives. Cowry-shells cannot be therefore restrictive of long-distance trade, as these were well integrated into the overseas trade in the Indian Ocean. The cowry-shells were shipped as bulk items and functioned as small exchange and ballast in the Indian Ocean maritime economy.

While the Palas and the Senas of Bengal are not known to have struck coins, this does not, however, prove the non-minting of coins in Bengal. Sustained researches for the last three decades very effectively demonstrate that in the south-eastern parts of Bengal (the Samatata-Harikela zone) excellent silver coinages were continuously minted from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. This demands a close scrutiny.

The last gold coinage of ancient Bengal cannot be pushed beyond late seventh century. These were imitations of Gupta gold coins of *suvarna* standard, but heavily debased. However, from the eighth century onwards high quality silver coins began to be struck, generally weighing 8 grams. The obverse of these pieces has the figure of a recumbent bull and the legend *Harikela*; the reverse has a tripartite symbol. Palaeographical analysis of the script of the legend *Harikela* suggests that these inscribed coins belonged to the eighth century. More or less at the same time also appeared similar silver coins with the legend *Pattikera* inscribed on the obverse side. The silver pieces of *Pattikera* were influenced by the minting tradition of the *Harikela* silver coinage. Silver coins of high quality (with silver content as high as 90%) continued to be minted in Harikela after the eighth century, but with some significant changes.

The Harikela coins, being akin to *puranas* of the Pala-Sena records, could also be easily exchanged with and converted into cowry-shells. The monetary scenario in south-eastern Bengal fits in well with the information on brisk trade through the port of Samandar. The above statements negate the widely held perception that Bengal had little precious coinage in the early medieval times and therefore experienced a sharp slump in its trade.

It is significant that there are several early medieval coin hoards in northern India, especially in the Ganga-Yamuna doab area, which till early eleventh century was dominated by the Gurjara-Pratiharas. Recent analysis of coin hoards, mostly containing *dramma* pieces, 'demonstrates that the volume of coinage in circulation in North India c. AD 600-1000, was comparable to that of the Kushana, Sultanate and Mughal period, and clearly superior to that of the preceding Gupta and the succeeding Rajput periods'. No shortage of currency in the Gurjara-Pratihara kingdom (late eighth to late tenth century) is visible. Thus neither in eastern India, dominated by the Palas and Senas, nor in the Gurjara-Pratihara realm, there are valid empirical grounds to uphold the conclusion that early medieval north India experienced a 'monetary anaemia' and languishing trade in the early middle ages, especially c. CE 600-1000.

13.4 URBANIZATION IN SOUTH INDIA

The early medieval economy of south India was predominantly agrarian, with an initial phase of agrarian expansion (6^{th}- 9^{th} centuries CE). It has been suggested that this was brought about by the practice of land grants, in which the Brahmadeya and the temple as the two major forces of integration, were the foci of rural organisation. At the same time, the need for exchange points and increase in commercial activities led to some of the *Brahmadeyas* and temple centres to expand their economic role thereby incorporating trade, craft and commercial activities and creating urban space for all such newly emerging economic groups. Political and/or administrative centres were also the foci of urban activities and attracted heterogeneous population, both as consumers of commercial goods and as users of money, i.e. coins which were royal issues and also possibly the currency of the merchant guilds, although the latter is not clearly or directly attested to in inscriptional records. This was the Second urbanization for the south Indian regions.

The phase of urbanization with which we are concerned here was of a different nature, and was *sui generis*, consequent upon the development of an agrarian order developing between the 6^{th} to the 9^{th} centuries CE, i.e. the first phase of the early medieval period. This process, which was spread over the whole peninsula, was, however, not uniform in all the south Indian regions. The Deccan i.e. Karnataka and the Andhra regions differed considerably in the nature of agrarian organization, although the land grant system was a widespread institutional means for the extension of agriculture and agrarian organization. These regions do not have continuous plains except in the delta regions of the Krishna and Godavari and in some pockets of the interior river valleys. Agricultural activities were more intensive in the delta regions, while large parts of the plateau and hilly areas remained predominantly pastoral and/or agro-pastoral and dependent on hunting activities. The early medieval urbanization in the Tamil region was a re-urbanization brought about by agrarian expansion and organization of peasant micro-regions like the *nadu*, with the emergence of the *nagaram* or market for the peasant region. It manifested itself in a new set of urban centres between the 8th and 12th centuries, representing an intelligible sequence of change, by providing an agrarian base and large surpluses to be channelled into trade. The proliferation of such market centres together with the movement of larger trade organizations like the *Ayyavole* led to the emergence of urban centres and inter regional trade networks and communication.

13.4.1 Market Centres, Trade Networks and Itinerant Trade

Early medieval urbanization shows a phenomenal increase and proliferation of urban centres of relatively modest dimensions. These are the market centres, trade centres (fairs–*Santa/Santai*) which were primarily nodal points of exchange network. The range of interaction of such centres varied from small agrarian hinterlands to regional commercial hinterlands and to inter-regional contexts and contexts beyond the borders of India. However, by and large the early medieval urban centres were far more rooted in their regional contexts than the early historical urban centres. The need for marketing facilities and development of local exchange brought into existence market centres, which were points of exchange for a specific region or small agrarian hinterlands. This is best illustrated by the *nagaram* of south India, substantial evidence of which comes from Tamil Nadu and to a limited extent from Karnataka (*nakhara*) and Andhra region (*nagaramu*). It served as the market for the *nadu* (K.R.Hall, 1980) or *kurram*, a peasant region of Tamil Nadu. Some of them emerged due to the exchange needs of the *nadu*. A fairly large number of such centres were founded by the ruling families or were established with royal sanction, as for example under the Cholas. They were named after the rulers, a feature common to all regions in south India, with the suffix *pura* or *pattana*. However not all such *nagarams* were commercially of equal significance. *Nagarams* located on important trade routes and at the points of intersection by itinerant traders developed into large towns, both in terms of their size and volume of trade and commerce. They were ultimately brought into a network of intra-regional and inter-regional trade as well as overseas trade through the itinerant merchant organizations and through royal ports and royal interests in and the policy of fostering long distance trade. Such a development occurred more or less uniformly throughout peninsular India from the 10th century CE when south India was drawn into the wider South Asian trade, which was revived in the 10th century and in which all the countries of South Asia, China and the Arab countries came to be involved. Between the 10th and 12th centuries CE South Asian trade provided the impetus for the development of commodity production and exchange, growth of towns, both interior and coastal. The *nagarams* of the Tamil region linked the ports with political and administrative centres, which were consumer points and with the craft centres in the interior. The movement of the itinerant traders played a major role in this network. Major craft centres which developed in response to inter-regional trade were textile and weaving centres in all the three culture regions of south India–Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil Nadu. Some of the craft and commercial centres of the early historic period survived till the early medieval period and were brought into the processes of re- urbanization which linked them with the new socio-economic institutions of the period.

13.4.2 Craft Production

Areas of craft production are difficult to locate. However, traditional textile and weaving centres have continued down to modern times (Chingleput, Coimbatore, Madurai, Salem, Tanjavur, Tirichirappalli and Tirunelveli districts). Weaving as an industry was systematically promoted by the rulers of south India from pre-Chola times. Special care was bestowed under the Cholas on old weaving centres and encouragement given to settlement of weavers in new areas. There were many cotton producing areas near which weaving centres appeared. But Kancipuram as the major centre received special attention from the Cholas. Madurai was equally important. Eventually Kanci came to represent the venue of the *Mahanadu* or corporate organization of the weavers, which controlled the production and marketing of cloth and its trade. Craft production was more intensive in the Kongu region, where 12th –14th century inscriptions indicate large-scale artisan (*Kammalar*) activity and participation in important civic duties, receiving special privileges. As interdependent economic groups the trading organizations and artisanal groups acknowledged their mutual benefits where the traders along with other local elite were seen as conferring special privileges on the artisans and giving special asylum to them.

13.5 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Different levels of urban centres developed in south India. However, these varied from region to region in their function and importance as also their relationship to larger exchange networks.

13.5.1 Deccan-Karnataka

In Karnataka the *nagarams* served different functions as points of exchange in trading networks and as regular markets for agrarian/peasant regions. However, the uniform feature in all such *nagarams* (*nakharas*) is that they either had or acquired a basic agricultural hinterland (through grants to the local temples) for the non-producing urban/craft/trade groups living in such centres. Markets in these centres were controlled by traders headed by a chief merchant called *pattanasvami*, the lord of the town.

In Karnataka, the steady increase in towns from the 7th to the 12th centuries shows a proliferation of commercial centres with a concentration of such centres in north west Karnataka, Konkan coast and the commercial districts of Bijapur, Dharwar, Belgaum and Shimoga . In the trade with the west i.e., Arabia, Persian Gulf and beyond, the west coast of peninsular India played a consistently dominant role even from the early historical period. Several ports such as Thana in Maharashtra;

Goa; and Bhatkal, Karwar, Honavar and Mangalore in Karnataka developed during the revival of long distance trade between the 10th and 12th centuries, with evidence of coastal shipping and ocean navigation.

The use of money on a large scale in commercial transactions was generally on the increase throughout south India during this period, particularly in the Deccan and Andhra regions. Epigraphy being the major source of information, most studies have relied entirely on inscriptions for categorising and locating the types of towns which emerged in various regions. In Karnataka, the terms used for towns of different types are *rajadhani*, *nelevidu* and *pattana* or *nagara*. While *nelevidu* was usually the headquarters of a local/provincial ruler, *pattana* or *nagara* refer to commercial towns.

Transport and communication were facilitated through construction of roads in north-west Karnataka, where Terdal (Bijapur district), Lokkigundi and Belgaum emerged as important trade centres. Highways and Trunk roads came up linking Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil Nadu and earlier trade routes survived well into early medieval times. On the northern and southern banks of the Kaveri, in its middle reaches (Kongu region) arose a number of exchange points between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu such as Talakkad (near Mysore) and Mudikondan (Thiruvarur district). Wider trade networks also existed between Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil regions. The presence of Kannada, Tamil and Telugu merchants is well attested in several towns such as Belgaum (Karnataka), Peruru (Nalgonda district, Andhra Pradesh) and the coastal towns of Visakhapatnam and Ghantasala in Andhra. The Andhra coast concentrated on the Southeast Asian trade with Motupalli, Visakhapatnam and Ghantasala acting as major outlets. Market towns of inter-regional importance are represented by places like Nellore, Draksharama, Tripurantakam and Anumakonda in Andhra Pradesh.

No regular banking and credit were followed for money lending did not find much favour with people. Deposits were made usually with the temples and the interest was utilised for worship. Thus the temple's role in commercial activities was significant. Interest was invariably in kind, particularly paddy, although money interest was not unknown.

The marketing services were provided by the merchants and vendors in weekly fairs held by the *pattanasvamis* and others as an act of dharma. Among the shops the privileged ones were the *manyadangadi* and temple shops or *devarangadi*. Others like the *karadangadi*, *angadimane* or *malige* represent the wholesalers. Commerce, inter-regional and intra-regional, and pilgrimage added to the proliferation of towns and trade centres and at the apex of the urban hierarchy stood the *rajadhani pattanas* like Kalyani and Dvarasamudra. Arasiyakere and Balligave were commercial centres which also served as administrative centres. Notable among the inland towns were Paithan, Ter or Tagara, Kalyana, Nandgad, Valaipatna, Pandiyur, Kuduregundi (Hassan district). Vaijayanatipura, Puligere, Mudubidire and others.

13.5.2 The Andhra Region

Exchange networks developed in Andhra from the early historical times mainly due to the opening up of the peninsula to the north Indian trading circuits. Both inland and maritime trade, particularly long distance trade with the western and Southeast Asian regions stimulated the growth of commerce and urban activities. The early medieval urban processes in Andhra were *sui generis* and were brought about by the agrarian expansion of the period comparable to other regions of south India. Craft production and development of towns and cities, including ports, were thus built into the general socio-economic transformations of the period. The demand for luxury goods in addition to regular consumption of daily requirements led to the development of industries such as metal industry. Mining for gold, iron, copper, brass and diamonds was done in several parts of the Deccan, while zinc and tin probably came from Southeast Asia. Much of the information on the metal crafts comes from the 10^{th} century onwards and more particularly during the Kakatiya period (11^{th}-14^{th} centuries CE). The Kakatiya inscriptions refer to the *Pancalohala Beharamu*, a community named after the metal trade. Apart from the royal families as the main promoters of these crafts, the temples were recipients of gifts of jewellery and ornaments for the deities.

The second major industry of the Andhra region was the production of oil, *gingelly* being the most common among the oil seeds. Production of sugar and *jaggery* was also an important craft well attested in inscriptions. Later date epigraphic records confirm the development of these crafts and by the Vijayanagara period they attained significant proportions. Textile industry was, however, the foremost in medieval Andhra with its substantial black soil (e.g. Guntur district) cotton producing areas occurring in the whole region. The best and delicate fabrics of Andhra were known to Marco Polo and other medieval travellers. Other manufactures included salt production, etc.

The Kakatiya period is marked by greater intensity of urban processes and hence several towns emerged with the suffixes *puri, nagaram and pattana*. It was not the mere presence of crafts and trade but also mainly the presence of guilds that marked the towns. Such centres of manufacture and exchange are often mentioned only in the 15^{th} and 16^{th} century literature. Categories like temple towns, royal towns or political centres can be identified where the most common economic activity related to manufacture and exchange. They were also centres of surplus appropriation. The temple's wealth and economic activities involved different professional groups, the temple representing the spatial context for urban growth, especially those in big pilgrim centres. In political centres the concentration of wealth, accumulation of surplus and its redistribution to different functionaries of the state created urban space. Prior to the 11^{th} century, however, craft and trade remained localised. Hanumakondapura, the political seat of the early Kakatiyas, became a big commercial centre due to its strategic location. From the 10^{th} –11^{th} centuries, under the Chalukyas of Kalyani and later under the Kakatiyas, royal incentive led to the growth of such centres.

13.5.3 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 15th-16th 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.

13.5.4 The Tamil Region

It is in the Tamil region that the processes of the development of early medieval economy, particularly trading activities and urban development, are best illustrated in the rich epigraphic records of the Pallava-Pandya and Chola periods. Starting with the systematic development of an agrarian order through institutions like the *brahmadeya* and the temple during the 6th-9th centuries, the emergence of the *nagaram* as a marketing centre for the peasant regions called the *nadu* met the exchange needs of the *nadu* as a peasant region, which not only assisted in the exchange system of the *nadu* but also acted as a meeting point for the inter -*nadu*– exchange and inter-regional exchange. Subsequently it also enabled the movement of goods in long distance trade carried on by itinerant trading organizations. It was a gradual expansion of a trading network for which the Tamil region provides the most significant evidence in different phases. Though not all such *nagarams* became major urban centres, many of them located on trade routes and distribution points intersecting with the itinerant trade of the *Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurruvar* (*Nanadesi, Valanjiyar* and *Ayyavole*), *Manigramam* and *Anjuvannam,* evolved into big towns and cities apart from the capitals and ports of the ruling families. All these centres came to be linked through a large exchange network into a web of commercial activity with the West Asian and South Asian (Sri Lanka) and Southeast Asian regions, where the inscriptions of the itinerant trading organizations appear from the 11th century CE. The urban centres which developed as a result of increasing non-agricultural or craft production and trade had the *brahmadeyas* and temples, apart from royal centres, as their focus and arose in nodal points.

The ports like Mamallapuram, Kaverippumpattinam, Nagappattinam were royal ports conspicuously promoted by royal patrons, where evidence of long distance trade is marked by the presence of foreign agents (e.g. from China at Nagappattinam) and royal functionaries interacting with each other. The exchange of embassies with China by the Chola rulers and the abolition of tolls (*Sungam*), building of religious institutions like the Buddhist *vihara* at Nagappattinam were acts of deliberate royal policy for promoting trade. The Chola royal expeditions to Southeast Asia, especially Srivijaya also were aimed at creating facilities for the south Indian traders, whose presence in these regions and as far as China was commercially significant. The rural-urban continuum (i.e. without the town-country dichotomy but with a gradual transformation towards urban forms and activities) is best illustrated by urban processes in the Tamil region where the economic activities of the *brahmadeya* and temple centres, marked urban growth in the core regions with the emergence of clusters of *brahmadeyas* and temple centres. Some of them were administrative centres and hence political processes and/or commercial importance also added to the urban character of these centres.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Analyze the role of inscriptions and coinage in assessing the emergence of urbanization in the period between 300-1000 CE.

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2) With reference to any two regions of south India discuss the main features of urbanization in the period between 600-1200 CE.

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13.6 GUILDS[2]

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 the 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

[2] This small section on 'Guilds' has been taken from EHI 03, Block 1, Unit 4.

activities and was, thus, saved from the harassment by local officials. Unlike a hawker or vendor, he had greater credibility in the market. Thus, in spite 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.

13.6.1 Guilds of North India

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 travelled 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.

13.6.2 The Trading Organizations (Guilds) of South India

The trading or merchant community was generally known as the *Balanjas*, who claimed to be the protectors of the *Vira Balanja Dharma* (*banaju, banajiga, Vaniga*, etc.) or code of conduct and traded in the south Indian regions and beyond in the eastern countries such as Burma, Malaysia and Sumatra. In Karnataka the 500 *Svamis of Ayyavole* originating in Aihole in the 8th century CE, moved into other areas and by the 10th century appear in the Tamil region on the main trade routes. They acquired an elaborate ring of epithets like *Ubhaya Nanadesi*, *Mummaridandas Ainnurruvar*, *Svamigalu Pekkndru*, *Nanadesi Pekkndru* (and *Gavares*). Their activities increased by the 12th century CE (Belgaum inscription of CE 1134), their presence in many *nagaras* and *gramas* attested by their inscriptions in Bijapur, Belgaum and Dharwar districts. Even after the 12th century i.e., from the 13th century (Kakatiya period) to the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire their inscriptions are found in the Deccan and Andhra regions but with lesser visibility due to changes in the nature of trade and other entrants into the South Asian trading network. A graphic picture of their activities is found in the inscription of Belgaum, CE 1184, travelling by land and water, penetrating into many regions with their articles of trade like superior elephants, well bred horses, large sapphires, crystals, pearls, rubies, diamonds, lapis lazuli, onyx, topaz, carbuncles, coral, emeralds, *karkketana*, and various articles of lesser value. Apart from hawking and peddling, they also had also extensive dealings in foreign trade.

The *Mahanadu* of merchants often met in the mandapas of temples. It is not easy to comprehend the nature of relationship among the different merchant guilds. Nor is it clear as to whether a hierarchy of such organizations evolved during the early medieval times. The *Ayyavole 500* with their *Virasasanas* seem to be the most important of these organizations and could well have been at the apex of the itinerant trading bodies. That these merchants moved in groups of trading caravans (*Satu* in Telugu and *Sattu* in Tamil) is also referred to by Ferishta (c. 1560-1620) and Ibn Battuta (d.1377). The inter-regional movement of goods was controlled by these organizations and we find the *Ayyavole 500* in south Karnataka calling themselves the *Southern Ayyavole* and the *Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurruvar* moving into the Andhra region regularly from the 11th century.

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 peninsula) 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.

The 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-Sinwa'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.

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. 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?, aloes wood, 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. 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 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. Ma'bar, 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, aloes wood, (*Agaru- Aghil*), areca nuts and betel nuts, bdellium, 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.

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, myrobalan, 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) Analyze the growth of urbanization in south India.

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2) Epigraphy was the main source of information to study the process of urbanization in south India. Comment.

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3) Discuss the role of merchant guilds in the growth of craft, trade, and urbanization.

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13.7 SUMMARY

Agrarian expansion and general reliance on agrarian sector was the chief feature of the early medieval economy. Urban centres after 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 the religious functionaries had given rise to numerous towns and cities in different regions of the Indian subcontinent. Different kinds of urban centres like *pura, nagaram, mandapika, hatta*, *pattinam* emerged. These were instrumental in giving rise to a new phase of urbanization in early medieval India. Tamil Nadu particularly experienced 're-urbanization' through the growth of *nadus*, *nagarams* and organization with wide networks such as *Ayyavole*. As compared to early historical urban centres, during this phase, urban centres developed deeper roots within the regions. Presence of increased number of guilds suggests the 'diversification of production activities'. There was regular coastal traffic along the entire littoral. The Konkan and Malaya region emerged into prominence during this period. At local levels, local bodies like *nagarams* in Tamil Nadu and *nagaramu* in Andhra region were active in organising the trade. Merchants involved in brisk trading activities throughout the period used to move in trading groups (*caravans*).

13.8 KEY WORDS

Cairo Geniza Records : Archive of ancient Jewish manuscripts found in synagogue of Fostat-Cairo. In the 1890s the material was removed to Bodleian Library, Oxford University, London.

Composite Artisan Community : It followed different crafts but were organized into a large crafts community by the 14th century CE. Hence, wielded considerable influence.

Kongu Region : Region of ancient Tamil Nadu in south India. It comprises of the present Coimbatore, Erode, Salem, Karur and a part of Dindigul districts of Tamil Nadu.

Malay Peninsula : It is what is today 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

Sui Generis : Self-generated or the processes originated and developed on their own and not due to outside influence.

Virasasanas : Inscriptions of guilds that begin with a *prasasti* describing their brave and heroic deeds as itinerant traders, who were also good fighters.

13.9 ANSWERS TO CHEK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) See Section 13.3 and 13.4 including its Sub-sections.

2) See Section 13.5.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) See Sections 13.4 and 13.5.

2) See Sections 13.4 and 13.5.

3) See Section 13.6 and its Sub-sections.

13.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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