

## **The Trade Ports in Early Medieval Peninsular India**

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There is a long and rich tradition of Indian trade. The ring of ports around the Indian peninsula covering vast region around the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian sea and the Indian Ocean facilitated Indian trade since the rise of the Jainism and the Buddhism where maritime trade was always looked with favour and it caused the prosperity of the vast area. The ports in the estuary of the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea with vast foreland and hinterland were the feeding areas of the maritime trade. The tradition of flourishing trade suffered a setback in Early Medieval period. The absence of strong central authority and the ushering in an age of feudalism as postulated by Prof. R.S.Sharma, D.D.Koshambi and others has brought to the forefront a burning topic for debate. The ring of ports around the peninsula, surplus agrarian and industrial product, around the vast area, the emergence of Abbāsīd rulers of Sirāf and Basra, the Fatimid Caliphate in Cāiro facilitated the brisk commercial transaction of the region with the Arabian world on the one hand and the Chinese empire on the other. The Indian ports also facilitated the transit trade between in China and the Arab world. Archaeological evidences available to us subscribe to the fact that there was flourishing trade covering the vast Indian littorals and hinterland. The trade and commerce of the area brought about the enrichment of the vast region. The tradition continued later on leading to the foundation of the East India Company rule in India. Till today we hardly observe any breakthrough.

A lot of changes of in the historical vision of early India have taken place during the last phase of the past century. The emphasis on dynastic history and episodic history has been shifted<sup>1</sup> by the intense attention of historians to the study economy, society, polity, culture etc. The most important economic change was the emergence of agriculture as the prime economic avocation in the Gangetic valley during the period of the replacement of lineage based politics to the territorial politics in the Vedic period. The spread of agriculture was normal and gradually agriculture spread to the whole of the sub-continent with the passing of time. The agrarian economy when firmly entrenched yielded surfeit in production. The surplus in production provided maintenance to craftsmen of the various types. The production increased and as a corollary trade and commerce thrived. The early India was a milestone in the realm on trade and commerce. It ushered in a glorious period of Indian commerce. India in the early phase of history was drawn to the framework of international trade. The forces of change in the socio-economic cultural realm gave a new shape to the transformation of simple egalitarian lineage based society to stratified class based and complex society<sup>2</sup>.

The evidences exclusively indigenous are inadequate about the buoyancy in trade and commerce in Early India. The indigenous evidences are largely supplemented by the accounts of foreign travelers and chroniclers who came to India in different times in early Indian right from the Māceḍoniān invasion to the Muslim invasion. Some travelers coming to India in the wake of the Muslim invasion visited different ports of India. But there are limitations to their accounts. The accounts are neither exhaustive nor accurate in all respects. The details about the ports are not given in systematic manner.

In the economic history of early India Indo-Roman trade held immense importance. It has got immense evidences too in the shape of classical accounts chiefly. The most significant sources of information are the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea. It is a text written by an anonymous Greek sailor, probably of the last quarter of the first century A.D. It is a repository of information on maritime trade, items of trade, ports and marts, pattern of navigation and sailing in the northern and western parts of the Indian Ocean. Two new editions of this source in the 1980s have certainly acted as a fillip to the study of Indo-Roman commerce<sup>3</sup>. The other important sources are the Natural History of Pliny of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and the Geographike Huphegesis of Ptolemy of the middle of the Second Century AD. They are important sources of information about Indian exports to Roman market, import of Roman goods, harbours and inland cities with occasional references to certain product available there<sup>4</sup>. These three texts have been exorbitantly used by the historians interested in Indian trade. Indigenous sources like the Jalaka, the Saṅgam literature in South India and the Pāli canonical texts also throw immense light to Indian trade. The Pāli literature throws much more light on the material condition of the Gangetic Valley. The Pāli texts, though primarily concerned for the reconstruction of the history of Buddhism, led to an improved understanding of the socio-economic condition. While the Vedic texts clearly highlight the rural life with agriculture as the mainstay, the Pāli texts show emphasis on the urban life with trade and commerce as the prime means of existence. The Pāli texts offer significant impression on the non-agrarian sectors of economy including transaction of commodities, ports, use of currency, the types of merchandise traded<sup>5</sup>. Śreṣṭhīs (rich merchant) and Sārthabāhas (caravan traders) acquired considerable prominence in these works which may be considered as trend setters in the economic historiography of ancient India for several decades.

Another important source of information in the indigenous level is the discovery of the Arthaśāstra and its subsequent editing. The Arthaśāstra devotes considerable attention to the trade and commerce of early India. It sheds light not only in the economic and political data but also demonstrates the capacity of Indian mind to formulate concepts on material life and political economy. It strongly recommends the state's participation in the economic activity and its hold in controlling economic activity including trade.

The quintessence of feudalism in Indian history with its special feature in the economic perspective was pointed out unequivocally by R.S.Sharma and his followers strongly argued that there was rapid decline of trade and specially the long distance trade. The typical symptoms of the self-sufficient and enclosed village economy were found by R.S.Sharma in the areas like the Gaṅgā-Yamunā Doāb and Rājāsthān under the Gurjara Pratihāras, Bengal and Bihar under the Pālas and the Deccan under the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. The conception of closed village economy confronted the notion that commodities produced in a particular area should also be used for the exchange of commodities in other areas. The commodities should be consumed locally. The conception of the major slump in trade is countenanced with the idea of a decrease in the number of minted metallic currency in early medieval times particularly from 600 to 1000 AD. The money economy was in serious crisis and minted metallic pieces lost their relevance. It has continued as indication of slump in trade<sup>6</sup>. The outstanding powers like the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, the Pālas and the Senas are held to have issued coins. The coins issued by some other dynasties are lacking in economic significance because their metallic purity is not beyond dispute. Such coins of dubious value and authenticity were not fit to be used for long distance trade. From the perspective of the shortage in the supply of coins and the issue of land grants in lieu of cash payment it may be inferred that

the politico-social milieu after 600 AD precipitated the process of urban decay and the dwindling of trade and commerce.

The argument in favour of Indian Feudalism as postulated by R.S.Sharma and his followers has not gone unchallenged. There are controversies even among the upholders of the Indian feudalism in respect of its genesis; its apex and decline<sup>7</sup>.The conception of Indian feudalism has not been set free from criticism. There are some empirical evidences to confront the theory of feudalism in India. One of the important points against Indian feudalism is to be traced in the early medieval trade. It should be kept carefully in mind that the two vital resources like salt and iron were not possessed by all the villages. It is very much incompatible with the concept of a self-sufficient and enclosed village society<sup>8</sup>.Moreover the early medieval villages were neither undifferentiated nor isolated. Moreover there are ample evidences of trade, urbanism and money economy in early medieval India with the distinguishing feature of long distance trade. It cannot be denied that the land grants are mainly shedding light upon the agrarian side. But the painstaking and inquisitive studies into the marginal and scanty evidences of commercial life in copper plates and other inscriptions have adequately acquainted us with the different types of merchants and the various levels of market places and exchange centres of the sub-continent during the questionable period of commercial decline. Many of the rural based trade centres provided the vital link between the rural exchange centre on the one hand and the larger and more complex market places in the urban centres on the other. This type of middle category trade centres appears as 'Maṇḍapikās' in north India, as 'peṇṭhās' in the Deccan and as 'nagaram' in the far south.

It is extremely difficult to reconcile the concept of Indian feudalism with its adverse implication in trade and commerce with the remarkable expansion of the Indian Ocean trade from around the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. India had definitely a significant role in the Indian Ocean trade. It is difficult to accept the proposition of the decline of the volume of India's long distance trade at the time when there was the obvious growth of Indian Ocean trade. The rise of Islam with its extensive impetus to commerce and urbanity undoubtedly provided a fillip to long distance trade particularly across the Indian Ocean<sup>9</sup>.The ultimate destination in the West was Sirāf and Basra under the Seldjuk and Abbasid rulers and alFustat(old Cairo) under the Fatimid Caliphate on the one hand and the harbours of China on the other<sup>10</sup>.The round trip between the western and the eastern termini of the Indian Ocean trade was helped by the harbours on both the sea-boards of India which got immense advantage of the inevitable and indispensable stop-over, transshipment of goods, besides participating in the export and import trade of the sub-continent. The system of 'segmented voyages' between the western and eastern termini of the Indian Ocean probably started from 1000 AD onwards. It not only led to the proliferation of ports in the east and the west coast of Indian peninsula but also led to the 'emporium trade'. All these proved to be beneficial to India's sea borne commerce during the early middle age<sup>11</sup>.

Indian peninsula was marked by the existence of so many ports in ancient and early medieval India. As feudalism in early medieval India could not altogether stop trade and commerce though there was a hiccup in the progress of trade and the mainstay of economy was agriculture. Feudalism was not much entrenched in India and so European prototype was hardly seen in India. As a result of the continuity of trade the importance of the ports were always felt. Indian peninsula was the connecting link of the flourishing trade between the Arabian world and the Chinese littorals. It was the normal feature of the ports in early India that they were rarely on the open roadstead or sea and largely situated in the

estuary of a river or in the delta of a river. This is also true in the eastern seaboard and the Bengal littorals. The eastern coast is less indented than the western coasts. As a result of that the western seaboard is endowed with the better natural harbours<sup>12</sup>. There were only a few harbours in ancient Bengal and the exact location of those is difficult to ascertain in modern time because the hydrography of Bengal has undergone considerable changes in ancient and modern times. So there is a controversy among the scholars about their exact location. According to the classical sources, Gāṅge was an early port in ancient Bengal. The port was named after the river Gaṅgā<sup>13</sup>. Gāṅge has been mentioned by Ptolemy as a mart. It might be located at or near Degaṅga in North 24 Parganas, through which flowed the Jamunā, a branch of the Gaṅgā which ultimately flowed to the Bay of Bengal. The traces of ships, boats on the terracotta seals found from Chandraketugarh strongly favour the fact that Chandraketugarh was a major port of early historical period. It was situated on the bank of the Vidyādhari River. Chandraketugarh was probably a riverine port having facilities of access to the sea which bolstered up long distance trade through this port. Excavations conducted show that it is fraught with the archaeological remains of different ages, from the time of the Mauryas to that of the Pālas. Archaeological excavations unearthed among many other things the punch marked coins of the Maurya age, cast copper coins of the late Śuṅga period which strongly corroborate the fact that Chandraketugarh had cultural and commercial contact with the outer world. This riverine port is known only from the archaeological sources and attempts have been made to equate it with Gāṅge of Periplus. An early impression of the towns in the Gaṅgā Valley has been discerned in the Hiuen Tsang's account and they were distressed and deserted condition.

A very celebrated port of Eastern Indian was Tāmralipta. It is represented by modern Tamruk which is situated on the right bank of the Rupnārāyaṇ. It is probably the same as Tāmārites of Ptolemy and Tāluctae of Pliny<sup>14</sup>. P.C. Dasgupta finds many textual references to Tāmralipta in Ancient literary texts<sup>15</sup>. It was at its height when Fa-Shien and Hiuen-Tsang visited Tāmralipta respectively in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Varāhamihira refers to it as a city (Varahāmhira, X, 14). The name 'Dāmālipta' is used not only in the Daśakumāracharita but also in the Abhidhanachintāmani. Several synonyms of Tāmralipta are referred by the lexicographer Hemachandra. They are Tāmālipta, Tāmālipti, Tāmālinī, Vishṇugriha, Stambāpa<sup>16</sup>. The name in the form of Tāmraliptaka is used by Rājāśekhara. The Kathāsaritasāgara refers to the Tāmraliptika as situated in eastern sea and in the Daśakumāracharita, it is referred to as a flourishing centre of trade and maritime activities close to the sea and not far away from the Ganges<sup>17</sup>. Due to its advantageous position it became an important port in Eastern India for embarkation for China, Ceylon, and Eastern Archipelago. Fa-hien in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD actually took ship from this place which was at the sea mouth. Again it was from this port on the coast of eastern India that the Chinese visitor sailed for the land of Śrībhoja. Hiuen-tsang was impressed by the availability of precious items at this port. The international maritime contact of Tāmralipta is proved by the disembarkation of It-sing at this port from Malay Peninsula. But the useful career of the great port of Eastern India came to a sad end due to natural causes of the disappearance of the channel linking Tamruk to the sea which made the island more or less joined to the mainland. It was largely responsible for its downfall<sup>18</sup>. The silting of the mouth of the Saraswati and the shifting of its course decreased the utility of Tāmralipti and we find Saptgrāma gradually emerging as a major port of Bengal<sup>19</sup>. Tāmralipta seems to have declined as an international port around the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. The last known reference to Tāmralipta is furnished by the Duḍhpāni inscription<sup>20</sup>. According to this record, three merchants brothers hailing from Ayoḍhyā came to Tāmralipta where they earned considerable money by trading. Saptagrāma was also a major port of medieval Bengal.

It was in the Hooghly district. It was located on the banks of the river Saraswati and definitely not close to the Bay of Bengal.

After the decline of the Tāmralipta in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD there was a temporary doom for Bengal's flourishing long distance maritime trade. The frequent references to Bahr Harkal in the Arabic accounts recognize the importance of the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean trade. It has been inferred from the Arab accounts that there was a port named Samandār in the country of 'Dhm' (Pronounced as Dhanm, probably referring to the famous kingdom of Dharmapāla). It was probably the Kingdom of the Pālas in Bengal. The name of the port of Samandār appears to have been named after Samudra or sea. It was located probably in the littoral Bengal. Al Idrisi (1162) on the basis of the accounts of Khurdādbēh (882) inform us that an island visited by various types of merchants was close to Samandār<sup>21</sup>. Samandār located very close to the Sandwīp island should be rationally identified with a port in or near modern Chittagong. Both Al Idrīsī and Khurdādbēh are, articulate highly of Samandār as a port. It had indentation which favoured the ingress and egress of ships with merchandise.

It is held that Ibn Batutā in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century AD arrived at a major port on the Bengal coast named Sudkāwān. Sudkāwān was very close to the Bay of Bengal and Ibn Batutā undertook a northerly journey from Sudkāwān by boat to the Blue river (generally Meghnā). It indicates that Sudkāwān was very close to Chittagong. Samandār and Sudkāwān might have been the same port in or around Chittagong. It was located in the Samataṭa- Harikela region of early Bengal. Samandār was a premier port of Bengal in the early medieval period. The merchandise from Kāmrup was exported from this port. The information may be collected from the narratives of Al Idrīsī and Ibn Batutā<sup>22</sup>. Arab writers inform us of the contact of Samandār with Uranbin (Orissa), Kāñchipuram and Sri Lañkā. It has been corroborated by Ibn Batutā who once planned to come to Bengal from Māldīves. He hired a fleet and reached Sudkāwān via Mālābār and along the Coromāṇḍal coast. It indicates that there was maritime linkage between a port of south-eastern Bengal and Māldīves in the western sector of the Indian ocean. While returning he sailed from Sunurkāwān (Sonārgaon near Dhaccā) for Jāvā in a Chinese Jānk. So Bengal coast was linked overseas with the South-east Asia in addition to its trade with the Māldīves. He returned via the straits of Mālāccā straits and south East Asia. The extensive contact between the east and west coasts of India via Bengal coast has been supported by the existence of wide hinterland. The hinterland included Arākān, Kāmrup and wide areas of the deltaic Bengal. Probably this was the factor why Chittagong was called by the Portuguese as premier port. After the fall of Tāmralipta around the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD the centre of attention and attraction for maritime trade shifted to the littorals of the south east Bengal and from 9<sup>th</sup> century AD there was an extensive rise of the port of Samandār or Sudkāwān very close to Chittagong and the port was in flourishing condition and carried on brisk trade till the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD. The port of Chittagong reached to the height of its importance in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was the principal outlet to the sea in the early medieval time. During the early medieval time the Śailendra ruler of Java sent a request to the Pala emperor Devapāla (805-840 A.D) to grant land for the maintenance of the Buddhist monastery at Nālandā. The Pala emperor acted accordingly and land was granted in favour of the monastery. It should not be considered in isolation. The cultural contact went on simultaneously with the material contact for the furtherance of trade and commerce. The overseas commercial connection was probably followed by cultural contact. The commercial connection for longtime with Java might have prepared the ground for laying before Devapāla the request for granting of land in favour of the Buddhist monastery at Nālandā. Merchants on commercial trip were often accompanied by religious preachers. The celebrated Buddhist

teacher Atīśa Dipaṅkar was known for undertaking a trip to Suvarṇadvīpa by a merchant vessel. On his return journey he sailed from Suvarṇadvīpa to Tāmradvīpa (Śrīlankā) and finally to the Bengal coast<sup>23</sup>.

The port of Samandār was supported by many other harbours in Bengal littorals. These were mostly riverine ports and they played very significant role in the inland riverine communication with coastal Bengal. These riverine harbours provided vital linkage of the deltaic hinterland with the major ports in seaboard. In the context of riverine port mention should, first of all, be made of Devaparvata located in or about Maināmati in Comilla district of Bānglādesh. It was a port on the river Kshirodā(modern Khīrnāi).It flourished as early as in the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. The port Devaparvata was first mentioned in the Kailān inscription of Śrīdharanarāta<sup>24</sup>.Devaparvata was once again mentioned as riverine port in the copper plate of Bhavadeva Abhinavamrigānka (765-780 A.D), a Deva ruler of Samataṭa<sup>25</sup> .Devaparvata was once again mentioned in the Paśchimbhāg copper plate(930AD) of Śrīchandra (925-975 A.D), the greatest ruler of the Chandra dynasty<sup>26</sup>

It may be inferred from the above facts that the river Kshirodā was navigable river at least till the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD but later on in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century AD the copper plate of Śrīchandra was not issued from Devaparvata but from Vikrampura (near Dhaka). It was also the capital of the Chandras. With the shifting of the political power from Devaparvata to Vikrampura, the importance of the port of Devaparvata went down. The Sabar inscription of Śrī Chandra (971 AD) informs us of a place named Vaṅgasāgara Śambaṇḍāriyaka. Vaṅgasāgara indicated its association with probably the Bay of Bengal. The term Sambaṇḍāriyaka stood for a place which was a bhāṇḍāra where goods, were probably stored. The place was probably a storehouse where merchandise was stored. It was probably a trade centre with war house facilities. It had connection with the Bay of Bengal and probably it was located on the littoral of Bengal which is implied by the term Vaṅgasāgara. The inscription does not categorically refer to the fact that it was located on the sea coast. The name ‘Sabar’ where the inscription is located derived from the Sanskrit Sambhāra meaning collection of commercial commodities. Sabar is an archaeological site and we may identify Vaṅgasāgara Śambaṇḍāriyaka with Sabar which was a riverine port connecting link with the Bay of Bengal<sup>27</sup>.

Though the western part of Bengal did not have any port during the early medieval period of importance equivalent to Samandār in south-east Bengal, the Bhagiratha, a part of the Ganges established connection with different parts of South Bengal. The navigability of the Bhagirathi was unquestionable. Al Beruṇi emphasized that there was regular riverine movement from Varanasi to Gaṅgāsāgara where the Ganges flows to the sea. The Rākshasākhadi copper plate<sup>28</sup> of Śrīmaddomanapāla refers the fact that there was a riverine port called Dvarahaṭaka near Gaṅgāsāgara. The suffix ‘haṭṭika’ meaning market centre points to the fact that Dvarahaṭaka was probably an exchange centre situated near Dvāra or gate of what might have been the estuary of the Ganga to the Bay of Bengal. It might be possible that the local markets had connection with the riverine ports which ultimately brought merchandise to the seaboard wherefrom those were sent to the west and east coast. The modern south 24 parganas of West Bengal has got rich storage of archaeological remains like stone sculptures, bronze icons, archaeological fragments, brick temples, tanks, embankment and these are undoubtedly the evidences of regular settlements in the Sundarvan areas which is a sharp contrast what we see today as areas full of forest and wild animals.

Large scale commercial transactions were conducted from large harbours on the Bengal littorals. But the significant aspect of the maritime trade in Bengal littorals was that there were many riverine ports in different parts of the deltaic Bengal which had connection with the Bay of Bengal. The hinterland of Bengal, Bihar and large part of north India was used by riverine ports of Bengal for voluminous maritime trade across the Bay of Bengal to the sides of the Indian Ocean.

Many trade routes intersected at the eastern coast of South India. Māmallapuram developed under the Pallavas and Nāgapattanam became prominent in the Chola period. Kāverīpattinam too was important but less so to Nāgapattinam (also known as Puhar) was the premier port in early historical time. Classical accounts refer to it as Khāberis or Cāmara. The port has been exhaustively described in the Saṅgam Literature. It has been identified with Kāverīpattinam, a small fishing village on the Tamilnaḍu coast located at a place where the Kaveri River flows to the Bay of Bengal. Excavation at the site helped us in the reconstruction of the history of the maritime trade in eastern seaboard of the Bay of Bengal to the South-east Asia, China and the Arab world. The large number of early medieval Chola coins found at Kāverīpattanam indicate that it continued to be an important part for longtime<sup>29</sup>. Other ports on the eastern coast of India mentioned in the early Bengali literature are Puri, Kaliṅga or Kaliṅgapatam, Chicacole, Bānpur and Rāmeśwara<sup>30</sup>. Tiruppalāivanam and Mayilarppil were the coastal towns that served the area north of Kāñchīpuram, Kovālām and Tiruvandandai were located north of Māmallapuram while Sadras and Puḍupattinam were located to its south. Other important coastal towns included Pallavapattinam, Cuddalore and Tiruveṇḍipuram. The ports and market towns in South India were involved in a flourishing trade as well as direct trade with far-flung areas. The goods involved both staples and luxury goods<sup>31</sup>.

The eastern littorals were naturally oriented towards the movements of men and traffic in the eastern sector of the Indian Ocean which was further linked up with the Java and the China Seas. Māmallapuram of the Pallava time and Nāgapattinam during the Chola time were the most prominent ports for international trade. Visakhapattanam in the Andhra coast also flourished as an important port during the Chola rule. Its importance was known since 1068 AD. It was later on renamed as Koluttuṅgacholapuram after the name of the Chola ruler Kolluttuṅga I, though its original name Visakhapattanam was still retained<sup>32</sup>. What is interesting as well as significant is that three embassies were sent by the Chola emperors in 1014, 1033 and 1079 to Sung emperors of China. It supports the view that the Chola emperors had commercial and diplomatic contact with the Chinese emperors. The seaborne commercial matter naturally favoured political relation with the Chinese empire<sup>33</sup>. There was a close commercial and maritime tie of the Chola Empire with the Śrīvijaya (modern Palembang) in South East Asia. The Śrīvijaya King offered cultural patronage to the Buddhist monastery at Nāgapattinam and the cultural relation was possibly backed by the material relation of maritime trade with the Chola Empire. It was likely that the Śrīvijaya was intermediary between South East Asia and China. A Chola inscription of Rājendra Chola refers to the fact that Chinese gold was offered to a temple in Nagāpattinam by the agent of the King of Kadaram identified with Keḍah in the Malay Peninsula. The agent of the King of Śrīvijaya also made a gift of a jewel to the Karaṅasvami temple of Nagāpattam<sup>34</sup>. These are nothing but the maritime connection between the Coromāṇḍal coast and the Srivijaya Kingdom and in the Malay peninsula along with the Chinese empire. Political and cultural relationship between the Chola rulers with the south-east Asian countries favoured the brisk maritime trade.

The Cholas maintained, unlike many other major powers in early India, lingering interest in the Bay of Bengal. The politico-economic interest of the Cholas in the south-east Asia drove the Chola emperors to take naval aggression in Srilanka. There are divergences of opinion regarding the motive that prompted the Chola rulers to undertake naval aggression against Srilanka. According to one version they were motivated by intention on gaining glory by taking up the policy of Digvijaya<sup>35</sup>. The theory of plunder propounded by W.Spencer that the Cholas were prompted by the prospect of short term gain by means of plunder to the neighboring country has also gained ground. It was subscribed further by Burton Stein<sup>36</sup>. According to Burton Stein, there was lack of strong central control over local level. There was limited central authority and bureaucratic control of the apex political authority. The segmented nature of Chola rule and the dearth income of the central authority because the income coming from agrarian revenue was mostly consumed by the local authority. The central authority, in desperation, was forced to take up naval aggression to Srilanka for resources. The theory has been challenged on the basis of intense study into the epigraphic evidences. The Chola inscriptions brought out the potent fact that there was proper central control in the Chola administration over the village government. Moreover, it is not certain that the Chola Empire suffered from the dearth of economic resources<sup>37</sup>. In reality the Chola emperors were very much well aware of the importance of maritime commerce with the South East Asia. They knew that the trade and commerce had enough revenue bearing potential. They knew that it would help furtherance of economic improvement of the Kingdom if the resources earned from trade were supplemented with agrarian income. It was the appreciation of the importance of trade that prompted Kolutttaṅga I of the Chola dynasty to abolish tolls and customs at a time when he consciously enhanced the status of the port of Visakhapattinam<sup>38</sup>.

India's trade with the South-East Asia and China grew very much in the early medieval period. It has been argued by Tansen that between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a major change in the nature of Sino-Indian interaction from Buddhist dominated to trade centre exchanges. China itself by that time emerged as a major centre of Buddhism. The increasing signification of Chinese Buddhism and the growing importance of indigenous Chinese Buddhist schools and practices had led to the reduction of the importance of cultural transmission from India to China. The stream of Buddhist monks moving between India and China continued in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. But Indian Buddhism was no longer an essential lifeline for the survival and growth of Chinese Buddhism. Sino-Indian trade links in the early medieval times can be divided into three phases. The 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries saw a continuation of the earlier demand for Buddhist ritual items. In the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a decline in overland trade between India and China due to disturbance in the political condition in Central Asia and Myanmar. In the late 10<sup>th</sup> century both tributary and commercial relations were revived and overland and maritime trade grew significantly<sup>39</sup>. Since the tenth century the principal destination of ships in the eastern sector was of course the Chinese coast, though China's attitude and policy to the sea were neither consistent, nor continuous. It oscillated between complete 'closed door' policy to vigorous encouragement to foreign traders and brisk participation in foreign trade. As China did not belong, at least geographically, to the Indian Ocean world, her link with South and West Asia had to be maintained via South East Asia. Śrīvijaya(modern Palembang in South-Eastern part of Sumatra)rose to prominence as intermediary between south and East Asia<sup>40</sup>.

With regard to monetary history it may convincingly be proved that money was not scarce in early medieval India. The states were not suffering from financial crisis. There was reduction of coin



types and a decline in the aesthetic quality of coins, but not the volume of coins in circulation. It has been pointed out that there was debasement of coinage, but the debasement of coinage was neither necessarily a signal of financial crisis of the state nor of general economic crisis. In fact, it could reflect an increasing demand for coins in a situation where supply of precious metal was restricted. It has been postulated that India experienced sustained shortage of silver since 1000 AD and that made it necessary for rulers to dilute the silver content of their coins<sup>41</sup>.

The Indian Ocean trade was facilitated by the influence of the monsoon wind. The predictable movements of two monsoon winds directed the movement of ships throughout the year. The knowledge of the monsoon wind by the sailors helped them to sail through the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean for carrying on brisk trade in commodities to the south East Asia and Arabian World. The increasingly intelligent and more developed utilization of the wind system can be seen from the late first century AD. This is the time when the Indo-Roman seaborne trade was at its zenith. The south west monsoon was regularly used by western mariners to reach the western littorals of India from the Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports. The same wind was used by the ships sailing in the Bay of Bengal from Coromondal coast to Orissa or Bengal or South East Asia. The voyage from Bengal coast to south Indian littorals must have been made with the favourable blowing of monsoon (north east monsoon-October/November, March/April). This was confirmed by Fa-Shien's return journey to China. Fa-Shien started return journey from the port of Tāmralipta in the beginning of the winter and reached Śrilanka. The sea voyage from Tāmralipta to Srilanka was undertaken during the time of north-east monsoon. On the other hand the journey which brought It-sing from Malay to Tāmralipta must have been undertaken during the south-western monsoon<sup>42</sup>.

The traders of the sub-continent were part of a wider world of trade interactions that connected Africa, Europe, and various parts of Asia. From the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Arabs expanded their political dominion into northern Africa, the Mediterranean Region, central Asia and Sind. The territorial conquest in Egypt, Persia and Sind gave them strategic control over Indian Ocean trade. The political success of the Arabs had important implication for the spread of Islam as well as for the expansion of international trade. Arab conquests and the establishment of Abbasid Caliphates made it possible for the Arab traders to emerge and lead trade along the overland as well as the maritime routes that connected Europe with East Asia.

The western coast of Indian peninsula was provided with greater indentations than the eastern counterpart. The western counterparts were provided with the facility to form estuaries. There were series of ports on the western coast starting from Debal in the Indus delta to the littorals in Gujrat like Somnāth, Stambāka, Cāmbay, Sthānaka, Sanjān Supāraka, Cemuliyā, Chandrapura or Sindābūr near Goa on the Konkan littorals and finally Malabar, Fāndarina and Quilon<sup>43</sup>. The Arab writers mention other ports on the western coast which were not so much of use. They were Kudafarid (Alimukām), Siñjili, Tañdiyār, Śhāliyāt, Fandārīna, Dahfattam, Buddfatan, Jurbātan, Fufal etc<sup>44</sup>. The ports did not remain in static situation and the importance of them was often fluctuating. The rise and fall of such ports might be because of the factors of natural reasons, the relation of the feeder ports and their relation with the main harbours and the overall political stability of the coastal area. The importance of these harbours was also related to the shifting of the significance of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea as the sea lanes to the Indian Ocean. The matter has been brought to light that the Konkan ports were often overshadowed by the Gujrat

and Malabar coasts though the Konkan coast was geographically suitably located. K.N. Choudhury has shown that by the 11<sup>th</sup> century the Indian Ocean trade was divided into smaller segments, the stretch from the Red Sea and Persian Gulf to Gujrat and Malabar; from the Indian coast to the Indonesian archipelago; and from South East Asia to East Asia. Great trade emporia emerged at the junction of these segments providing merchants with cargo, shipping services and protection. They included Aden, Holmuz, Cambay, Cālicuṭ, Sātḡāon, Malacca, Guangzhou and Quanzhon. The importance of silk, porcelain, sandalwood and black pepper has been highlighted in the Asian trade in medieval times. The commodities were exchanged for various items such as incense, horses, ivory, cotton textiles and metal products. Indian Ocean trade was oriented towards the east. Srilanka was an important hub of the Indian Ocean trade<sup>45</sup>.

The ports of the Gujrat coast also played an important part in the international sea-trade. It is from the port of Bhr̥gukachha that Kubera, the merchant chief of Anahilvāḍa, is said to have set sail for trading with a foreign country. We learn from Marco Polo that there was the regular export of the products of Gujrat to Arabia and other lands. We refer to the port of Cambay as being visited by merchants with many ships<sup>46</sup>.

One of the most important ports of the west coast was Bhāmbur. It was situated in Sind. It was identified by Elliot with Bārbāricum Emporium of the Periplus and Bārbari of Ptolemy<sup>47</sup>. This port was not mentioned by the Arab writers of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Debal near the mouth of the Indus was a large mart and port meeting the needs of extensive areas. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the port was known to the Arabs. It was the chief port of the Indus when the Arabs invaded the lower part of the Sind. But its existence in the earlier period as a town, if not as a port, cannot be denied. The scholars are divided in their opinion regarding the location of Debal<sup>48</sup>. Some are inclined to locate it at the mouth of the Indus and somewhat distant from the sea. According to Elliot, it may be identified with modern Karachi<sup>49</sup>. This identification has been rejected by many scholars. There are some scholars like Burnes, Cunningham etc who are inclined to place Debal between Karachi and Thāṭṭa<sup>50</sup>. Its importance has been emphasized by many contemporary writers. Ibn Hankal states that the city of Debal was on the west of the Mīhrām towards the sea. It was a large mart and the port for the neighboring region. The prosperity of the city of Debal was due to the volume of trade which was conducted through its well known port. According to Al Idrīsī, Debal was a populous place where vessels of Sind and other countries congregated. Trade was carried on in a variety of articles with efficiency and intelligence. Ships laden with the products of Oman and the ships of China and India met at this port. Chinese vessels brought stuffs and other goods from China and those of India brought perfumes and aromatics. Debal is elsewhere described as celebrated city on the shore of the sea of Hind, an emporium where the rivers of Lahore and Multan discharge themselves into the salt sea<sup>51</sup>. Some sources speak highly of the importance of the port of Debal which remained in flourishing condition till the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. Lāhorī Bandar or Lāri Bandar mentioned by Alberuni as Lotiarāni and by Ibn Batuta as Lāhori, was an important part of the region in the early medieval time<sup>52</sup>. Some scholars hold that with the decaying of the port of Debal. The view has not been accepted by others<sup>53</sup>. The importance of Lāhorī Bandar was not as much as that of Debal. Ibn Batuta describes that it was a handsome city on the shore of a big sea. The people from Yemen, from Fars and other countries had visited the place. It led to enormous increase of revenue which was the cause of the prosperity<sup>54</sup>. The port gradually dwindled into insignificance later on. The prominence once held by it was taken away by Dharāja, a port that lay little east to Lāhorī<sup>55</sup>.

According to Rās Mālā there were two ports both situated in Saurashtra, namely Veraval and Somanatha pattana<sup>56</sup>. Some scholars hold that they were the names of one and the same place. But there are others who held the view that they were the two different ports situated close to each other<sup>57</sup>. Feristha holds the view that Somanath was a fortified city situated on a narrow peninsula watered on three sides by the sea<sup>58</sup>. The place was famous for maritime commerce as also for its temples. The place was so important and convenient for transit trade that the ships plying between Sufāla and China stationed here. The port of Veraval was situated about two miles away from Somanatha Pattana<sup>59</sup>. Many inscriptions were found here. The port of Goghā assumed importance under the Valabhis. Its influence dwindled with the decline of the Valabhis.

Cambay was one of the principal ports of Gujrat. It was the chief seat of Indian trade with the west and many other countries. Merchandise from every country was to be found here and they were sent to many other countries from here. It was a natural port where the vessels could enter. Marco Polo calls it Kāmbayet<sup>60</sup>. In the Rās Mālā the port of Cambay is called 'Stumbhteerth. In another work it is described as a principal city of Gujrat where many traders lived. It was a flourishing place<sup>61</sup>. Al Idrisī incidentally mentions the port of Sindān and Subara. They are located south of Cambay. Both of them were in the coast of Gujrat. Sindān was about a mile and half away from the sea. It was an industrial town. The town was large and it had extensive commerce. Subara was also a busy and populous town and it was one of the entry ports of India<sup>62</sup>. Another port of outstanding importance was Broach. Its importance was also mentioned by author of Periplus of Erythraean Sea. It was also held as Bārygazā. The interesting point is that the port was mentioned by the Muslim and Indian author of the early medieval time. It indicates that the port was of much significance during the early medieval time. Al Idrisī says that it was a large and handsome town. Its inhabitants were rich and mostly engaged in trade. They had skill enough to sail abroad to further their trade. The vessels of China and Sind used to come to that port. It had maintained contact with the Arabian world. Al Idrisī had pointed out another port of importance in West Coast. It was Sindābur. It was situated at a place of about four day's journey from Bāruch. It was on the Gulf where the ship could easily anchor. It was a well known port as stated by Rāshīuddin, Abul Fidā along with Al Idrisī. It was not noticed that voyages from Sindābur and Aden used to take place. It was a populous port<sup>63</sup>. There was a port located near the mouth of the Narmada. It was called Gandhar. It was harbour of importance throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries<sup>64</sup>.

An important Port of the Malabar Coast was Quilon. Texts such as the 9<sup>th</sup> century 'Akbar as Sin wāl-Hind' and others describe the longtime maritime journey made by Arab traders from Oman to Quilon (Kollām) in Kerala and on to China via the port of Kālāh-bar near Singapore and the Malacca straits<sup>65</sup>. The Chinese sources like wise state that Chinese traders going to the country of the Arabs had to transship at Quilon to smaller boats. Abu Dulāf also mentions Quilon as the port embarkation for Oman in Arabia<sup>66</sup>. The Ling-wāi-tā refers to the people of Sumatra and Arabia bringing their waters to trade in the country of Quilon. The prosperity of Quilon seems to have continued up to the time of Marco Polo who refers to the merchants from South China and Arabia making profitable voyages to Malabar, in particular the port of Quilon<sup>67</sup>.

The early medieval age saw the migration of several communities involved in trade. Among the earliest such movements were those of Arabs and Persian traders who settled along the Konkan, Gujrat and Malabar coasts. It is recorded in an inscription of 875 AD that the King of Madurai was granting

asylum to the Arab traders. This is the first time that the Arab traders settled in the Coromandel coast. Arabic inscriptions at Cambay, Somanath, Junāgarh and Anāhilavāḍa indicate that the Arab ship-owners and traders were living in these parts of Gujrat in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A group of Jewish merchants began to settle themselves at Mangalore from the early 11<sup>th</sup> century. These merchants were labelled as 'India traders' and they were engaged in brisk trade between old Cairo and Aden but subsequently extending up to south western coast of India. According to Goitein, these Jewish merchants were engaged in active maritime trade between west India and Arab world via the Red Sea, the Persian gulf, the gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea<sup>68</sup>. The political development of West Asia also led to the movements that affected the sub-continent. The Arab expansion in West Asia led to several movements of Christians and Persians to the Kerala coast.

Among the three coastal segments in the western littorals – the Gujrāt coast, Konkan coast and Malabar Coast-the Gujrāt coast was of outstanding importance. Gujrāt was famous for agriculture. It was noted for the cotton plantation and indigo production which immensely contributed to its flourishing textile industries. Gujrāt was famous for the production of oilseeds which immensely contributed to the flourishing of oil mills (Ghanakas) particularly since 1000 AD. The agricultural prosperity of Gujarāt was attributed to the greater irrigational facility after 1000A.D<sup>69</sup>. To this has to be added the importance of the Chālukya rulers whose long rule of nearly three centuries contributed to the rise of Gujrāt as a leading regional powers of western India. This long political presence of the Chālukya has not only resulted in political integration of greater part of Gujrāt but also ensured peace and prosperity of the region. It also paved the way for linkage with the coastal tracts and furtherance of trade in the western coast with the Persian Gulf Sea and the Red sea region.

So it may be inferred from the foregoing discussion that there was brisk maritime trade of the peninsular India with the south East Asian countries and China in the eastern flank of the globe and the west Asian countries through the Persian Gulf and the Red sea. The rise of the Seljuk and Abbāsīd rulers in Sirāf and Basra respectively and the Fatimid Caliphate (since 965 AD) gave immense patronage to the West Asian trade since the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. The rise of the Tang dynasty in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD gave a fillip to the maritime trade with China through the Śrīvijaya Kingdom and Malacca straits. The string of ports from the Gujrāt coast to the port of the Coromandel coast proved to be the contributing factor for the furtherance of maritime trade and prosperity of the Indian subcontinent. It was the continuous process of the prospect of trade and commerce in the region that contradicts the rationale of Prof. R.S. Sharma and some others who upheld the fact that there was the decaying of urbanization and decline of trade and commerce with the emergence of feudalism as political model in the early medieval India. On the contrary, the brisk maritime trade with the string of ports in both sides of the peninsula with Arabian world and the south east Asian and China empire was one of the inspiring factor that motivated the European powers to come to the Indian shore in the medieval time and to lay the foundation of the colonial empire in India.

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