UNIT 3 TRADE AND COMMERCE

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Trade: Definition and Phases
3.3 The First Phase (c. A.D. 700-900)
   3.3.1 Media of Exchange
   3.3.2 Relative Decline of Trade
   3.3.3 Urban Settlements: Decay
3.4 The Second Phase (c. A.D. 900-1300)
   3.4.1 Crafts and Industry
   3.4.2 Coins and other Media of Exchange
3.5 Aspects of Trade
   3.5.1 Inland Trade a) Commodities of Trade and their Consumers, and
       b) Trade Routes and Means of Communications
   3.5.2 Maritime Trade a) The Chief Participants
       b) Commodities Exchanged
       c) Ports
       d) Safety and Security of Merchants
   3.5.3 Revival of Towns
3.6 Let Us Sum Up
3.7 Key Words
3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to explain:

- the importance of trade and commerce in the overall economic history of India
during the six centuries between c.A.D. 700 and c.A.D. 1300,
- the historical features of trade in two broad phases: i) c.700-900 and ii) c.900-1300,
- the relationship between trade and commerce with i) metallic-currency, ii) village
economy and iii) towns,
- the role of crafts and industry in the trade operations,
- about the commodities of trade and their consumers—both in the inland and
foreign trade,
- the principal trade routes and means of communication, and
- the role of political authorities in furthering the interests of traders and
merchants.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The study of urban settlements undertaken in the second Unit would remain
incomplete if it is not related to trade and commerce. This aspect of Indian economy
in the early medieval centuries is an integral component. Like the two preceding
Units (1 and 2), the forms in which trade operations took place are envisaged in this
Unit in the backdrop of the development of Indian feudalism. The nature and extent
of the use of money, the functioning of market; the role of agricultural production,
and stages in the conditions of urban settlements are interrelated. Development:
None of these is unrelated to the system of land grants which has already been
described (Unit 1) as an almost all India phenomenon during the centuries under
discussion (eighth to thirteenth). One may even suggest that trade and commerce too
3.2 TRADE: DEFINITION AND PHASES

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

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

i) c.700-900 A.D., and
ii) c 900-1300 A.D.

Briefly, the two phases are marked by:

a) relative decline of trade, metallic currency, urban centres and a somewhat closed village economy in the first phase, and

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

3.3 THE FIRST PHASE (c.A.D. 700-900)

The period from A.D. 750—1000 witnessed wide-spread practice of granting land not only to priests and temples but also to warrior chiefs and state officials. As already seen (Unit 1) it lead to the emergence of a hierarchy of landlords. Even graded state officials such as maha-mandaleshvara, mandalka, samanta, mahasamanta, thakkura, etc. developed interests in land. However, they were different from the actual tillers of the soil and lived on the surplus extracted from the peasants who were hardly left with anything to trade. It resulted in the growth of rural economy where local needs were being satisfied locally through the imposition of numerous restrictions on the mobility of actual producers. The relative dearth of medium of exchange, viz., metal coins only strengthened this trend.

3.3.1 Media of Exchange

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

Though first suggested by D.D. Kosambi, it was the publication of Professor R.S. Sharma's *Indian Feudalism* in 1965 that brought to focus the paucity of coinage in the post-Gupta times, its link with trade and commerce and consequent emergence of feudal social formation. The subject has been keenly debated in the last twenty five years. There have been four major types of responses:
ii) A case study of Orissa substantiates complete absence of coins between c.A.D. 600 and 1200 but argues for trade with Southeast Asia and emphasizes the role of barter in foreign trade.

iii) Kashmir, on the other hand, shows emergence of copper coinage from about the eighth century A.D. Extremely poor quality of this coinage has been explained in terms of the decline of trade based economy and rise of agricultural pursuits in the valley.

iv) Finally, a point of view questions not only the idea of paucity of coins but also the decline in trade. This is based on the evidence from what is described as the mid-Eastern India comprising Bihar, West Bengal and the present Bangladesh during A.D. 750-1200. While it is conceded that there was no coined money and that the Palas and Senas themselves did not strike coins, it is also argued that there was no dearth of media of exchange. To illustrate, it is emphasized that there was not only a long series of Harikela silver coinage but also cowries and more importantly churni (money in the form of gold/silver dust) also functioned as media of exchange.

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

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

It is significant to note in this context that:

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

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

3.3.2 Relative Decline of Trade

Internally, the fragmentation of political authority and the dispersal of power to local chiefs, religious grantees, etc. seem to have had an adverse effect, at least in the initial centuries of the land grant economy. Many of the intermediary landlords, particularly of less productive areas, resorted to loot and plunder or excessive taxes on goods passing through their territories. This must have dampened the enthusiasm of traders and merchants. No less discouraging were the frequent wars amongst potential ruling chiefs. Though two Jain texts of the eighth century,
Samaralacakaka of Haribhadra Suri and the Kuvvalamala of Uddyotana Suri, refer to brisk trade and busy towns, it is rightly argued that these texts heavily draw their material from the sources of earlier centuries and, therefore, do not necessarily reflect the true economic condition of the eight century.

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

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

The first phase was also marked by the decay and desertion of many towns. It is an important symptom of commercial decline because the towns are primarily the settlements of people engaged in crafts and commerce. As trade declined and the demand for craft-goods slumped, the traders and craftsmen living in towns had to disperse to rural areas for alternative means of livelihood. Thus towns decayed and townsfolk became a part of village economy. Beside the accounts of Hiuen Tsang, the Pauranic records too, while referring to Kali age indicate depopulation of important cities. This seems to have been the continuation of the trend already indicated by Varahamihira (5th century). Reference was made in Unit 2 to the excavated data from 140 sites. The decay of important towns such as Vaishali, Pataliputra, Varanasi, etc. is evident from the archaeological excavations which reveal poverty of structure and antiquities. The pan-Indian scene is marked by desertion of urban centres or their state of decay in the period between the third and eighth centuries. Even those settlements which continued up to the eighth century, were deserted thereafter. One can mention Ropar (in Punjab), Atranjikhera and Bhat (in Uttar Pradesh), Eran (in Madhya Pradesh), Prabhas Patan (in Gujarat), Maheswar and Paunar (in Maharashtra), and Kudavelli (in Andhra Pradesh) in this category of urban settlements. Even the medieval greatness of Kanauj (in the Farrukhabad district of Uttar Pradesh) for which several wars were fought amongst the Palas, Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas, has still to be testified by the excavator's spade.

The commercial activity during the first phase of early medieval period had declined but did not disappear completely. In fact, trade in costly and luxury goods meant for the use of kings, feudal chiefs and heads of temples and monasteries continued to exist. The articles such as precious and semi-precious stones, ivory, horses, etc. formed an important part of the long distance trade, but the evidence for transactions in the goods of daily use is quite meagre in the sources belonging to this period. The only important article mentioned in the inscriptions are salt and oil which could not be produced by every village, and thus had to be brought from outside. If the economy had not been self-sufficient, the references to trade in grains, sugar, textile, handicrafts, etc. would have been more numerous. In short the nature of commercial activity during A.D. 750-1000 was such which catered more to the landed intermediaries and feudal lords rather than the masses. Though there were some pockets of trade and commerce such as Pehoa (near Karnal in Haryana) and Ahar (near Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh) where merchants from far and wide met to transact business, they could not make any significant dent in the closed economy of the country as a whole.

Check Your Progress 1

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

2) Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark (√) or (X).
   i) According to R.S. Sharma there was decline of coinage during the post-Gupta period.
   ii) There was abundance of coins in Orissa between 600-1200 A.D.
   iii) The poor quality of copper coins of Kashmir (around 8th century) can be ascribed to the decline in trade.
   iv) Apart from minted money there were no media of exchange during 8th-
3.4 THE SECOND PHASE (c.A.D.900 - 1300)

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

As already explained (Unit 1), the widespread practice of land grants had been a significant factor in agrarian expansion. Though it is recognised that it is not easy to quantify this development, one can also not overlook the noticeable regional variations and disparities. However, the period from the beginning of the tenth century to the end of the thirteenth was the age of greater production of both cereals and pulses as well as of commercial crops. Naturally, it created a favourable climate for widening the scope of both internal and external trade.

3.4.1 Crafts and Industry

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

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

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

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

3.4.2 Coins and Other Media of Exchange

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

i) Whether references to coins are in the context of exchanges in the rural area or in the urban setting?

ii) the types of exchange centres and the nature of “market” where such transactions take place;

iii) the personnel involved in these transactions; and

iv) how far are the inscriptive references to coins only notional? etc.

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

As far as the actual role of metal money is concerned, the little work that has been done on a regional basis does not help us to grasp the localization of currency production.
Despite the plethora of references to coins, the evidence of overall volume of money in circulation is almost negligible. Nor can one overlook the poor purchasing power of early medieval coins, irrespective of the metal used. All coins of the period were highly debased and reduced in weight. Also, in terms of the rising population and expanding area of settlement, the use of money seems to have been highly restricted. The case study of early medieval Rajasthan shows that the revival of trade, multiplication of exchange centres and markets and prosperity of merchant families took place only with the help of “partial monetization”. Similarly, the cash nexus on the Western coast (Konkan area) under the Shilaharas (c. A.D. 850-1250) was also marked by limited use of money. The types and denominations of coins remained not only extremely localised but could not penetrate deep into the economic ethos. Masses were far away from handling of coins. The currency system of South India during A.D. 950-1300 also shows that transactions at all levels of the society were not equally affected by coined money. For example, the fabulous expenses reported to have been incurred by the Pandyas as regular buyers of imported horses cannot be thought in terms of what we know as very poor Pandyan currency. Barter was still an important means of exchange in local inter-regional and perhaps even in inter-national commerce. There are references which indicate that caravans of merchants exchanged their commodities with those of other regions. According to one account, horses imported from abroad were paid for not in cash but in Indian goods which may have been silk, spices or ivory. These Indian goods enjoyed constant demand in the markets all over the world.
Though the revival of even "partial monetization" was contributing to economic growth, yet no less significant was the parallel development of credit instruments by which debits and credits could be transferred without the handling of cash money. In the texts of the period we find references to a device called *hundika* or the bill of exchange which might have been used by merchants for commercial transactions. Through this device credit could be extended by one merchant to another and, thus, the obstacle to commerce due to shortage of coined money could be overcome. The *Lakhapaddhati*, a text which throws light on the life of Gujarat in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, refers to various means of raising loan for consumption as well as commercial ventures through the mortgage of land, house and cattle.

**Check Your Progress 2**

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

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

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

**3.5 ASPECTS OF TRADE**

The increased agricultural production and the momentum picked by industrial and craft production were responsible for giving rise to a hierarchy of exchange centres. These centres functioned beyond the confines of the current production. The production...
inter-regional and intra-regional exchange networks were creating cracks in the relatively closed village economy of the first phase (c. A.D. 750-900).

3.5.1 Inland Trade

A large variety of commodities were carried for trading through a network of trade routes in the country. Let us first discuss the commodities of trade.

a) Commodities of Trade and their Consumers

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

The chief customers of Indian goods were of course the rich inhabitants of China, Arabia and Egypt. Many of the Indian goods might have found their way to Europe as well as via Mediterranean. While the aspects of foreign trade will be discussed at length later, it needs to be highlighted that the domestic demand was not insignificant. A new class of consumers emerged as a result of large scale landgrants from the eighth century onwards. The priests who earlier subsisted on a meagre fees offered at domestic and other rites were now entitled to hereditary enjoyment of vast landed estates, benefits and rights. This new landowing class, along with the ruling chiefs and rising mercantile class, became an important buyer of luxuries and necessities because of their better purchasing power.

The brahmanical and non-brahmanical religious establishments, which commanded vast resources in the form of landed estates and local levies, developed as important consumers of almost all marketable goods. They required not only such articles as coconuts, betel leaves and arecanuts, which had acquired great ritual sanctity, but also increased quantity of food for presentation to gods or for distribution as prasada. The personnel of religious establishments, which numbered up to many hundreds in case of big and important temples, constituted an important consuming group to be fed and clothed by peasants, artisans and merchants. Thus big temples with their vast resources and varied requirements also helped in generating commercial activity. This phenomenon was more marked in South India where many temple sites became important commercial centres (See also Unit 2; Sub-sec2.4.3).

b) Trade Routes and Means of Communication

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

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

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

3.5.2 Maritime Trade

During this period large scale trading activities were carried through sea. Here we will discuss the main countries engaged in sea trade, the commodities of trade, main ports and security of the sea routes. Let us first start with the main participants in maritime trade.

a) The Chief Participants

The period under survey was marked by great expansion of sea trade between the two extremeties of Asia, viz. the Persian Gulf and South China. India which lay midway between the two extremeties greatly benefited from this trade. The hazards of long sea voyages were sought to be curtailed by anchoring on the Indian coasts.

The Asian trade during these centuries was largely dominated by the Arabs. After having destroyed the important port and market of Valabhi on the Saurashtra coast in the eighth century, they made themselves the chief maritime force in the Arabian
Early Medieval Economy: 
8th – 13th Century

Ocean. Later in the twelfth century, she became an important participant in this trade and started sending her own ships to South-east Asia and India. However, it did not affect the position of Arabs who continued to maintain their supreme hold on the Asian trade.

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

Abu Zaid, an Arab author of the tenth century refers to Indian merchants visiting Siraf in the Persian Gulf, while Ibn Battuta (14th century) tells us of a colony of Indian merchants at Aden in the Red Sea. A Gujarati text of the 14th century refers to a merchant Jagadu of Kutch who traded with Persia with the help of Indian agents stationed at Hormuz. In South India, the Colas, took keen interest in maritime trade. The Tamil inscriptions found in Malaya and Sumatra indicate the commercial activities of Tamil mercantile community in these regions. The Colas also sent a number of embassies to China to improve economic relations with her. They even sent naval expedition against the Srivijaya empire in the eleventh century to keep the sea route to China safe for their trade. However, by and large the references to the physical participation of Indian merchants are quite limited. This did not affect the demand for Indian products which reached the outside world through the Arabs and the Chinese.

b) Commodities Exchanged

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

In return for eastern products, India sent its aromatics and spices, particularly pepper. According to Marco Polo pepper was consumed at the rate of 10,000 pounds daily in the city of Kitisay (Hang-Chau) alone. Chao Ju Kua, a Chinese port official of the thirteenth century, tells us that Gujarat, Malwa, Malabar and Coromandel sent cotton cloth to China. It is pointed out by Ibn Battuta (A.D. 1333) that fine cotton fabrics were rarer and more highly priced than silk in the cities of China. India also exported ivory, rhinoceros horns, and some precious and semiprecious stones to China.

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

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

As far as imports from the West are concerned, the most significant item was the horse. As the number of feudal lords and chiefs increased in the early medieval period, the demand for horses also increased manifold. Horses were brought both by land and sea. Ibn Battuta tells us that horse-dealers coming through the North-western land routes earned large profits. According to an Arab author, Wassaf (A.D. 1328) more than 10,000 horses were brought annually to the Coromandel
coast, Cambay and other ports of India in the thirteenth century. Horses were brought from such places as Bahrain, Muscat, Aden, Persia, etc. Besides horses, dates, ivory, coral, emeralds, etc. were also brought to India from the West.

c) Ports
There were a number of ports on the Indian coasts, which not only served the inland trade network but also acted as a link between the eastern and western trade. In fact, almost every creek that could provide facility for a safe anchorage of ships, developed into a port of some national or international significance.

On the mouth of the Indus, Debal was an important port which according to Al Idrisi (twelfth century), was visited by vessels from Arabia as well as from China and other Indian ports. Chief ports on the Gujarat coast were Somanatha, Broach and Cambay.

Somanatha had links with China in the East and Zanzibar (in Africa) in the West. Broach or ancient Bhrigukachcha has had a very long history. Cambay is known as Khambayat in Arabic sources, and Stambhatirtha in Sanskrit sources. Its earliest reference goes back to the ninth century A.D. Sopara and Thana were other important ports on the Western coast of India.

On the Malabar coast, Quilon had emerged as the most important port. The Arab Writers tell us that ships coming from the West called at the port of Quilon for collecting fresh water before sailing for Kedah in South-east Asia. Similarly, the Chinese sources of the thirteenth century also state that Chinese traders going to the country of the Arabs had to change their ships at Quilon.

During the three centuries between the tenth and thirteenth, the Coromandel coast developed into a virtual clearing house for the ships coming from the East and West. The Arab author, Wassaf, tells us that the wealth of the isles of the Persian Gulf and the beauty of other countries as far as Europe is derived from the Coromandel coast. The most important port in this region was Nagapattinam. Puri and Kalingapatnam were important ports on the Orissa coast. In Bengal the fortunes of Tamralipti were reviving though according to some scholars, it was being superceded by another port of Saptagrama.

d) Safety and Security of Merchants
In view of the heavy returns, the contemporary political authorities showed keen interest in the facilities provided to the traders trading in foreign trade. The author even goes on to say that the merchants in all the ports were provided with proper protection and all facilities for the quick and smooth transit of their goods. These ports were not only providing a safe haven for the ships but also acted as centres for the exchange of goods from one part of the world to another. They were, in fact, the gateways of the world.
Chalukyas of Gujarat (10th-13th centuries) set up a separate department of harbours (Velakulakarana) under royal control. In South India too, the Cola Kings managed their ports through royal officials who, with the help of local merchant organisations, looked after the foreign merchants and collected the port-cesses. The Arab writers unanimously praise the Rashtrakuta kings for their policy of peace and toleration towards the Arabs. The Chalukyas of Gujarat also granted religious and economic freedom to the Muslim merchants in their state. Ibn Battuta tells us that whenever a foreign merchant died, his property was not confiscated but kept in safe custody to be handed over to the next of kin. An inscription of A.D. 1244 found at Motupalli in the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh reveals that the King guarantees protection to the storm-stricken ships and promised to collect duty as per the law of land in order to win over the confidence of foreign merchants.

3.5.3 Revival of Towns

The second phase of early medieval India (c.900-1300 A.D.) was a departure from the preceding two centuries insofar as it is marked by a very distinctive revival of urban centres. This revival became an almost all India phenomenon. It is often described as the “third urbanisation” of the Indian sub-continent. (For details see Unit 2.)

Check Your Progress 3

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

b) How did the religious establishments help in trading activities?

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

3) Mark (√) against the right and (×) against the wrong statements given below:
   i) The Indian goods reached to outside world through Chinese and Arab merchants.
   ii) The main overseas trading activities were undertaken by Indian merchants.
   iii) Some inscriptions in Malaya and Sumatra indicate the presence of Tamil merchants.
   iv) There was a settlement of Indian merchants in Aden.

4) a) Write five lines on the import of horses in India.
b) List 2 ports each of East, West, and South coasts of India during the period under study.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

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

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

The overall picture of trade and commerce during the six centuries under discussion is that of feudalisation. The way in which money transactions took place, the manipulations of landed interests including those of state officials and ruling chiefs, functioning of the ruling elite in the interests of big traders and merchants and putting restrictions on artisans and craftsmen (see also Unit 4) are indicators of the process of feudalisation.

3.7 KEY WORDS

Ghanaka: Oil mill.
Jalapathakarana: Department/Officer for looking after highways.
Market: Space where buying and selling of goods take place as a regular activity.
Tellika: Oilman.
Velakula-Karana: Department/Officer for harbours.

3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) The first phase is marked by the decline of trade, metallic currency and urban centres and the second phase by the reversal of these. See Sec. 3.2.

2) i) √ ii) × iii) √ iv) × Also see Sub-sec. 3.3.1.

3) The Arab presence in the North-west and the sea raids adversely affected the Indian trade. However, from 10th century onwards they contributed to the growth of Indian sea trade. See Sub-sec. 3.3.2.

4) The main reason for the decay of town was the decline of trade. Also See Sub-sec. 3.3.2.
Check Your Progress 2

1) India produced cotton and silk textiles. Their quality was comparable with the best textiles in the world. See Sub-sec. 3.4.1.
2) The main metal works were iron, copper, gold, silver, etc. See Sub-sec 3.4.2.
3) There is a noticeable increase in minted money but a number of transactions were carried through exchange of commodities. The economy was not fully dependent on minted money. See Sub-sec. 3.4.2.

Check Your Progress 3

1) a) Compare with Sub-sec. 3.5.1 (a)
   b) The religious establishments with their vast resources generated a demand for a number of commodities. See Sub-sec 3.5.1 (a).
2) A number of routes are mentioned in contemporary sources. See Sub-sec. 3.5.1 (b).
3) i) √ ii) × iii) √ iv) √
4) a) See Sub-sec. 3.5.2 (b).
   b) West-Broach, Cambay; East-Puri, Kalingapator; South-Quilon, Coromandel.