

IDENTIFYING THE CHIEF TRADING EMPORIUMS IN INDIAN OCEAN MARITIME TRADE c.1000-c.1500

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ABSTRACT

Sea-ports constituted an important part in Indian sea trade. Ports were instrumental in attracting sea traffic. Ports occupied cosmopolitan space owing to the confluence and presence of foreign and indigenous merchants. The state had to tread a cautious path because atrocities and misgovernment might result in exodus of merchants to a new place. No modern work has managed to study the chief characteristics of main ports (Trading emporiums), between c. 1000-c. 1500, which could be identified throughout India irrespective of time and space gap. Even the contemporary accounts of Ibn Battuta, Duarte Barbosa and Tome Pires distinctly recorded the emergence of trading emporiums. Security, Justice, availability of raw materials and mercantile autonomy resulted in enhanced socio-economic activities which necessitated gradual transformation of a simple port into a 'Trading Emporium'. Prominent politico-economic regions of India like Sind, Gujarat, Konkan, Malabar, the Coromandel, Orissa and Bengal have been taken into account with help of both primary and secondary sources to identify main ports (Chief Trading Emporiums). The research paper also aims to study the basic principles which help these ports to attract such a large volume of sea traffic.

Keywords: Indian Ocean, Sea Trade, Ports, Trading Emporium.

INTRODUCTION:

In the simplest of definitions, a port stands for a place alongside the navigable ocean, sea or river. It had provisions for the loading and unloading of cargoes. Merchandise was collected and distributed into the hinterlands from the ports. However, there were many factors at play in transforming a small town alongside navigable river or sea into a busy seaport. It was expected to have ample storage for merchandise. Better connectivity with hinterlands was an added advantage. Security from pirates and justice had to be firmly established if a town aspired to become an important port. Ports represented a cosmopolitan culture. Many foreigners visited these places to undertake commercial activities. The rulers were thus forced to ensure the neutrality of ports. Ruling elites even provided autonomy and protection to the foreign nationals to promote their harbours. Religious freedom was extended to the merchants. Rulers benefited a lot in return. Increased commercial activities at their ports brought revenues and filled their coffers.

Nature has endowed India with a long coastline. With the Arabian Sea to its west, the Bay of Bengal to its east and the Indian Ocean to its south, it has been dotted with several ports since antiquity. But the point to remember is that all of these ports did not hold the same importance for the sea merchants. Some ports attracted more sea traffic than others for a long span of time. The same was true about the period between c.1000- c.1500. Some ports were successful in attracting a sizeable inflow of the mercantile trade, whereas others could only dream of such activity. For example, no port in Gujarat could rival the supremacy of Cambay, which remained a flourishing trade emporium till the sixteenth century. On his visit to Alexandria, Ibn Battuta remarked, "It has also the magnificent port, and among all the ports in the world I have seen none equal to it, except the ports of *Kawlam* (Quilon) and *Qalicut* (Calicut) in India" (H.A.R. Gibb, I: 19). Thus, even the contemporary writers could identify ports that were suitable for maritime trade. These ports could easily be termed as trading emporiums, which were on the list of every merchant who operated in the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately no modern work right from R.K Mookerji, *Indian Shipping: A History of Seaborne Trade and Maritime Activities of the Indian from the earliest Times* (1912), Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean : A History of People and the Sea* (1973), K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the India Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, (1985) and K.S Behra, ed., *Maritime Heritage of India* (1999) has attempted to underline the general characteristics which played a key role in transforming a simple port into 'Trading and Emporium.' Working on this hypothesis, the present paper would attempt to locate such trading emporiums in the Indian maritime trade.

CHIEF TRADING EMPORIUM IN INDIAN MARITIME TRADE:

SIND:

Sind was the first place of call for the ships entering into India from western Asia. In fact, it was directly associated with the Persian Gulf. Situated on the frontier of India, it witnessed flourishing mercantile trade since antiquity. It was an important centre of mercantile trade, but the invasion of the Arabs and the inclusion of Sind into the Islamic area of influence resulted in an unprecedented growth of maritime trade in this region. The Arabs and Persians had their colonies in Sind even prior to the emergence of Islam. Muhammad bin Qasim invaded Sind in 712 AD. The incursion was followed by a large migration of the Arabs into Sind. The Arabs not only settled around the coasts but, unlike other areas, they penetrated into the interiors also. Now the question remains why Sind, which was neither a good producer nor manufacturer, was preferred by the foreigners. Al Idrisi explains that Sind owed its prosperity to commerce because its land was arid and hence not suitable for agriculture. He further adds that the people of Sind had earned riches by playing the role of intermediaries. Al Idrisi writes that The merchants bought the entire cargo of ships and hoarded it till the things became dearer (Elliot and Dowson, I: 77). Nevertheless it still does not answer our question as to why was Sind visited by foreign vessels after all?

Sind enjoyed a basic geographical advantage. It was well connected with the fertile plains of Punjab through river transportation. The proximity to important land routes passing through Multan also

enabled it to act as a suitable place of storage, from where the merchandize could be sent to Punjab and Afghanistan. This is the reason for Andre Wink to suggest that the invasion of Muhammad bin Qasim was prompted by a desire to secure the maritime route passing through Sind (Andre Wink, I: 51). This invasion was mainly directed against the pirates of Sind who plundered ships sent for the Caliph from Ceylon. When Dahir, the ruler of Sind, expressed his helplessness in controlling piratical activities, the Caliph had to intervene for securing sea routes to Malabar, Cambay and even China. With the conquest of Sind, Muhammad bin Qasim tried to secure the port of Daibul. He even launched campaigns to chastise the pirates

Daibul, near modern Karachi, remained the most important port of Sind up to the thirteenth century. Located on the confluence of river Indus with the Arabian Sea, cargo could be procured\distributed easily from\into the hinterland of Daibul. It enjoyed close contacts not only with western Asia but also with Africa. Nkitin found it to be a very large place and ‘the great meeting place for all nations living along the coast of India and Ethopia’ (R.H. Major: 30).’ Daibul, however, faced a serious problem of silting which ultimately resulted in its downfall. Many other ports were also faced with the problem of silting. Duarte Barbosa writes that skilled pilots are required to navigate the ships to avoid stranding in mud (Longworth Dames, I: 139). Lahari, referred to as a prosperous port town by Ibn Battuta, attracted the flow of trade when navigation became dangerous in Daibul. Continuous silting remained a constant threat to all the important ports of India. Not only Daibul but even Cambay and Satgaon suffered great setbacks due to silting in later times. When the port of Daibul went into decline due to silting, navigation became difficult and the ships found the alternative port of Lahari. When Ibn Battuta visited Sind, he noticed the prosperity of Lahari. This port was located near the confluence of the Indus. Traders from Persia, Yemen and other countries assembled in Lahari to trade. The annual revenues of Lahari had grown to the tune of ‘60 lacs’ (H.A.R Gibb, III: 602).

The extension of Islamic area of influence into Gujarat under the armies of Alauddin Khalji would also have encouraged the migration of the foreigners settled in Sind to move towards the more promising lands. In the later half of the thirteenth century, Ghiasuddin Balban (1266-86 AD) sent his elder son to Sind, with an instruction to regulate the supply of the *bahri* (sea) horses (Simon Digby: 21). The migrants settled in Sind would have easily acquired horses of the best breed owing to their contacts in western Asia. When Duarte Barbosa arrived in India during the early sixteenth century, he found the presence of a large number of horses in Gujarat (Longworth Dames, I: 118). The horse trade appears to have moved along with these foreign immigrants. Thus, the silting of Daibul and expansion of Islamic empire into Gujarat diverted sea trade to new destinations.

GUJARAT:

Gujarat was the central zone of mercantile activities since antiquity. Bestowed with fertile arable land and a rich variety of products, it emerged both as a producer and manufacturer. Gujarat was well connected with the fertile plains of the Ganges from where cargo could be easily brought by the indigenous merchants. The rivers, though seasonal, also helped in bringing heavier merchandize to its coastal areas. Gujarat had its reference in the Periplus and its author noticed great oceanic trade around the gulf of Cambay (W. R. Schoff :24). Another important port was Lothal which belonged to the Harapan age. As discussed earlier, the emergence of Islam encouraged the mercantile trade to a considerable extent and Gujarat became its prime beneficiary. Even during Muslim invasions, Ibn Haukal finds that the Arabs merchants were warmly welcomed and offered a good deal in Gujarat (Elliot and Dowson, I: 38). Islamic religious practices were freely observed in Sind and Saimur (Elliot and Dowson, I: 38). The rulers and the governors in Gujarat always remained alive to the benefits that were derived from the sea. As a result, it remained home to vast treasures and thus lucrative for any ruler on the throne of Delhi. Alauddin Khalji acquired much wealth from his invasion of Gujarat in 1298 AD. The ruler of Ahmedabad was called the ‘King of the seas.’ He also participated in an Afro-Asian alliance against the Portuguese in 1508-09 AD.

Gujarat was a home to several ports. Lothal and Broach were important ports in ancient times. Around the tenth century, Al Qalqashandi found Somanath to be was a rich port and it was touched by almost

all the ships bound for Aden (Muhammad Zaki: 73). The invasion and subsequent plunder of Somanath by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni resulted in its decline after 1024-25 AD. Romila Thapar argues that Somanath recovered quickly from this plunder. She finds the elite of the city working towards the revival of the port city. The Chaulakya king, Kumarpala, appointed a governor at Somanath to check the piratical activities of local Abhira chief (Romila Thapar: 81). Still the menace continued. *Bawarjis*, the dreaded pirates of the sea, had access to Somanath and they came to worship the deity also (Romila Thapar: 39). The land grant to Nuruddin Firoz, a Persian sea-merchant, might have been an effort to revive the merchants' confidence in the administration of Somanath. Still, its projection into the open sea appears to have encouraged its decline because the increasing troubles by local rulers and piratical activities (of *Bawarjis*) would have forced the merchants to look for safer harbours. Romila Thapar also suggests that the invasion of Somanath might have been an attempt of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni to destroy the western links of the port. Horses were coming to India through the sea. The phenomenon was not favourable to Ghazni which desired to play the beneficial role of intermediary in this horse trade through its land routes (Romila Thapar: 51). In that case, the invasion then this could be the long lasting impact of Sultan Mahmud's invasion. After his invasion there are very few references of horses coming through Somanath. Balban sent his son to Sind to control the supply of *bahri* (sea) horses (Simon Digby: 21), whereas Duarte Barbosa finds Cambay having a good stock of horses in the sixteenth century (Longworth Dames I :118). Surat did not come into the limelight till the fifteenth century, when Duarte Barbosa noticed that the governor of Surat earned handsome revenues from maritime trade (Longworth Dames, I :149-150). Gogha, though visited by Ibn Battuta, could never compete with other important ports of Gujarat in its prosperity. So the question arises which was the port emporium for this geographical zone? The answer was loud and clear in the accounts of all the observers and travellers. Cambay remained a port *par excellence* during the period under study.

The naval incursions and piratical activities forced the merchants to search for safe harbourage in Gujarat. The pursuit led them to Cambay, which was situated inside the gulf and could be secured during emergencies by lowering the chains across the mouth of the gulf or blocking it with stones. Cambay might have been promoted by the Gurjara Partiharas to attract sea commerce from rival ports like Broach. Whatever may be the reason, Cambay emerged as the port emporium between eleventh to sixteenth century. Cambay is an ancient port which even existed in the Harappan times (S.J.D. Varaprasad and S.R Rao: 89). It, however, came to limelight only after the eleventh century. Ibn Battuta found Cambay inhabited by a large number of foreign merchants who constructed beautiful houses and resided in them. He even appreciates the design of a handsome mosque in Cambay (Mahdi Husain :172). Tome Pires remarks:

“ ...Cambay- the chief city of Milingobin- sail many ships to all parts to Aden, Ormuz, the kingdom of Deccan, Goa, Bhatkal, all over Malabar, Ceylon, Bengal, Pegu, Siam, Pedir, Pase and Malacca where they take quantities of merchandize, bringing other kinds back, thus making Cambay rich and important. Cambay chiefly stretches out two arms, with her right arm she reaches out towards Aden and with the other towards Malacca, as the most important places to sail to.” (Franciso Rodrigues, I: 42)

Cambay was so well connected with the Red Sea that even the annual pilgrimage to Mecca commenced from Cambay. The envoy (of the Fatimid caliph in Egypt), who brought a *khilat* for Muhammad bin Tughluq started his return journey to Egypt via Cambay. (H.A.R Gibb, III: 674). Alauddin Khalji acquired rich plunder from his invasion of Cambay in 1298 AD. The inclusion of Cambay in the Delhi sultanate further helped its expansion. As suggested earlier, the prosperity of Daibul might have suffered a setback with the expansion of the Islamic diasporas in Gujarat. Ghiasuddin Balban sent his son to Sind to secure the supply of the horses from western Asia, but Duarte Barbosa informs that horses were found in abundance in Gujarat. (Longworth Dames, I: 118) It is probable that the same thing might have happened to the inflow of other merchandize from and to western Asia.

The question remains why Cambay managed to dominate the mercantile trade of the Arabian Sea?

During the first half of fourteenth century, Cambay had beautiful buildings and ‘wonderful’ mosques, which were continuously built by the foreign merchants. This strengthens the argument that Cambay owed its prosperity to Islamic diasporas that followed Muslim conquerors to Gujarat. These Muslims traders must have had their roots in western Asia and, thus, stood in better position to attract the inflow of oceanic trade from the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. At the same time, Cambay was bestowed with some other crucial advantages. Situated on the Mahi estuary, this port provided security and better interconnectivity to the foreigners. The rulers were aware of the profits that accrued from the sea trade. Ufi narrates an incident in which some locals burnt the mosque and killed eighty Muslims. The local ruler, Rai Singh, acted swiftly and ordered the arrest of two ‘leading men from each class of infidels, Brahman, fire worshipper, and others’ to be punished. He also distributed money to enable the Muslims to rebuild their mosque and minarets (Elliot and Dowson, II: 164). This action was primarily taken to satisfy the aggrieved foreign merchants, lest they should leave the city *en mass*.

Cambay was also a place of considerable manufacturing, where considerable work was done in ivory, gold, cloths and quilts, that “in this city the best workmen in every kind of work are found”(Elliot and Dowson, II: 142). By the sixteenth century, the gulf of Cambay began to face the problem of silting. The navigation became difficult. Duarte Barbosa writes:

“Sailing from these ports is very dangerous for keeled ships, because being at the top of the tide the water here runs out so far in the gulf that, in a very short space of time, four or five leagues are left bare....and when there is a flowing tide it flows so strong that they say a man running at full speed cannot escape it...many (ships) are left stranded on rocks where they are lost.” (Longworth Dames, I: 139)

As the political balance shifted to Surat, the latter emerged as one of the richest ports after the sixteenth century.

KONKAN:

Konkan was the next zone of Indian maritime trade. However, its mercantile character differed a lot from Sind and Gujarat. It presented a entirely different scenario, which was created by a peculiar set of ecological conditions and economic compulsions. Konkan is a hilly area and does not have a satisfactory cultivation. Life in general was hard. Its greatest asset was its location. It was favourably located enroute (via sea) to Gujarat and Malabar. Its favourable location encouraged its mercantile activities. In medieval times, it derived considerable profits from its role as an intermediary. The absence of good farm products was compensated by the availability of teak and pearls from the gulf of Sopara. It also exported a large quantity of cotton cloths, but this must have been more like a re-export than original products. The availability of sufficient quantity of teak proved to be a great allurements for the ships, especially *dhow*s (sea-going ships), trading in the Arabian Sea. Bassein, Thana and Chaul emerged as centre of respectable shipbuilding industry. Apart from the construction of new ships, these might have served as a place of repair for the old ships. Konkan also followed the cruel policy of plundering the ships that did not make a call at its ports. Marco Polo informs us about a local ruler who even encouraged the pirates to rob the ocean going ships from his principality in return of horses (H. Yule, II: 395).

As mentioned earlier, Konkan was famous for its teak. Though Bassein, Thana and Chaul developed as leading centres of shipbuilding, but Chaul outpaced others in attracting the inflow of sea traffic. First mentioned by Ptolemy as Symulla or Tamulla, several travellers observed a considerable mercantile activity in Chaul. Duarte Barbosa found Thana infested with pirates (Longworth Dames, I: 153), whereas Chaul witnessed the great oceanic traffic during the winter months of December, January, February and March (Longworth Dames, I: 159). Chaul benefited a lot from its location. Situated on the banks of the river Kundalika, it was visited both by the Arabs engaged in long distance trade and *Banias* (trading community among Hindus) from Gujarat doing coastal trading between Malabar and Gujarat. It seems that Chaul also promised better facilities and protection to the foreigners. The better connectivity of Chaul with Gujarat, Red Sea routes and the Persian Gulf, forced the Portuguese to pass

a royal charter to regulate the spice trade between Chaul and Red Sea. The Portuguese did not want that any spices should reach Europe through Alexandria and Venice (B. Ashok Rajeshirke: 109). This charter forced the Nizam of Chaul to join the league formed by the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt against the Portuguese.

The presence of Arab merchants at Chaul also attracted the trade in good horses towards this port. It supplied horses to the Yadavas, Vijaynagara and other important principalities in south India. Copper was another important commodity that was exported from Chaul to other areas, specially Cambay, through coastal trading (B. Ashok Rajeshirke: 111)

The Portuguese followed a systematic policy to destroy the commercial activities in Chaul. In their attempt to regulate the spice trade of India, they diverted horse trade from Chaul to Goa. They provided protection to merchants in return for Cartez (K.N. Chaudhuri: 384-385). With the establishment of their factory in Surat, they forbade the import of spices to Chaul. Around 1520 AD, they issued an order that anyone found carrying spices to Chaul would be condemned to death or given severe punishment. This proved to be a deadly blow to the prosperity of Chaul. The supremacy of Chaul was now replaced with the new capital of the Portuguese at Goa

MALABAR:

Malabar was the most important zone in the oceanic trade. In touch with the outer world since antiquity, this zone became an eye sore for Pliny who complained that India was draining the Roman Empire of precious metals with her grass and roots. (A.H.M. Jones: 5) Malabar was traditionally known for its supply of spices, specially pepper. The prosperity of the Roman Empire and its insatiable demand for spices made Malabar a favourite destination of foreign merchants. An intense struggle to control the supplies of Malabar ensued between the Sassanids (Persians) and the Romans. The emergence of Islamic caliphate once again generated a huge demand for Indian spices in west Asia. Victories of the Islamic armies extended the influence of the caliphate in Asia and Africa. It heralded the era of *Pan Islamica*. It was represented by general prosperity and extension of trade. Muslim armies plundered huge treasures in Africa and Asia and brought them in circulation for the expanding Asian markets. Cities grew rapidly. Products of distant world were brought for the caliph and Muslim gentry. This 'country of pepper', as designated by the Arab geographers gained a lot from such a scenario. Al Qalaqashandi recorded that the ports of Malabar soon acquired a cosmopolitan character (Muhammad Zaki: 75). They attracted a big diaspora of foreign nationals professing different religions. Earlier it had come into contact with Christianity when Saint Thomas arrived in south India around the first century. After twelfth century, it gained more importance because it emerged as the single zone of trans-shipment for the vessels trading in the Indian Ocean. There is some evidence that sailing was done all the way from the Persian Gulf to China prior to the eleventh century, but sources point to the absence of such a phenomenon in the period under study. *Junks* sailed up to Quilon and Wassaf writes about their vastness (Elliot and Dowson, III: 32). *Dhows* were confined to the western sector of the Indian Ocean. This trend encouraged large settlement of traders in Malabar. Duarte Barbosa records the presence of the Gujaratis, Arabs, Persians and Dakhnis, known as *Pardesis* in Malabar. According to his testimony, the foreigners were provided with their own controllers and governors to regulate their affairs (Longworth Dames, II: 76) Malabar was dotted with several small and big ports of national and international fame. Throughout medieval period, ports of Malabar nurtured internal rivalry for supremacy in attracting the inflow of maritime trade. The struggle to emerge as a single trading emporium was mainly confined to two important ports, namely Quilon and Calicut. The prosperity of these two constrained Ibn Battuta to compare them with the magnificent port of Alexandria (H.A.R Gibb, I: 19). We would therefore study the multi-dimensional trade of Malabar, with special reference to these two ports in order to locate its trading emporium.

Ruled by a Hindu ruler, who was designated as Samuri, Calicut emerged as a rich, prosperous and populated port. It was extremely famous in the Indian Ocean trading world. In 1498 AD, the great sailor Ibn Majid brought the Portuguese, in search of Indian pepper, to Calicut. Increase in maritime activities after the eleventh century attracted considerable number of merchants to Malabar. Muslim

diasporas from Gujarat and western Asia moved towards Malabar. Arrival of these diasporas strengthened contacts of Calicut with other trading zones of the Indian Ocean. The Chinese also made Malabar their farthest destination in the Indian Ocean. They normally terminated their voyage in Calicut. Availability of the Chinese commodities, silk and porcelain in particular, was an added advantage. Porcelain and silk were in huge demand throughout India, western Asia and Africa. Trading activities in Calicut, however, remained in the hands of Muslim merchants. They almost monopolized its foreign trade. They even threatened the Samuri that they would leave the port if the Portuguese were allowed to trade in Calicut around 1498 AD. The threat was serious enough to force the Samuri to turn hostile towards the foreigners (the Portuguese). Duarte Barbosa informs us that the Gujaratis (Muslims) owned the best houses in Calicut (Longworth Dames, II :73). Calicut developed with the active participation of the ruling class. As mentioned earlier, the rulers granted autonomy to merchants. They (merchants) had their own *shahbandar* who regulated their internal affairs. The merchants were promised security of their lives and goods. The duties were moderate. Abdur Razzaq records:

“Security and justice are so firmly established in this city (Calicut) that most wealthy merchants bring thither from maritime countries considerable cargoes, which they unload, and unhesitatingly send into the markets and bazaars, without thinking in the meantime of any necessity of checking the account or of keeping watch over the goods. The officers of the custom-house take upon themselves the charge of looking after the merchandise, over which they keep watch day and night. When a sale is effected, they levy a duty on the goods of one-fortieth part; if they are not sold, they make no charge on them whatsoever.”(R. H. Major: 14)

Ibn Battuta describes that in Malabar, it is a custom that whenever a ship was destroyed, whatsoever was saved from it went to the treasury. But, this practice was not followed in the town of Calicut (Mahdi Husain: 192). The merchandize went back to the true owner. With better deals to offer, the port of Calicut succeeded in attracting the maritime flow. It emerged not only as an exporter but also as an important intermediary. Precious commodities brought from all quarters of the world were available in Calicut. It fulfilled the demand of both the luxuries and staples. Even costly products from Abyssinia, Zirbad and Zanguebar were available here.

Quilon was another important port of the Malabar. It was reputed for its supply of pepper. Tome Pires remarks that the ruler of Quilon used to receive forty elephants from Ceylon in earlier times (Franciso Rodrigues, I: 80). Elephants of Ceylon were greatly cherished in India for their warring skills. Ibn Battuta refers to the merchants of Quilon who possessed considerable wealth, so much so that one of them could buy the whole ship with its merchandize in one deal (Ibn Battuta (Mahdi Husain: 193) Duarte Barbosa also found Quilon populated with traders from several nations and religions. They possessed many ships and sailed in all directions (Longworth Dames, II: 97). These merchants would have enabled the port to have favourable trading relations with western Asia. Quilon also acted as the first port of call for the ships sailing for southeast Asia. Quilon was in close commercial contacts with the Chinese merchants (Yule and Cordier, 30). Chinese mission to Muhammad bin Tughluq landed at Quilon. Ibn Battuta saw a big Chinese cock for the first time in Quilon (Yule and Cordier: 110) It seemed that the big *junks* made Quilon their last port of call. Jews and Christians also participated in the maritime trade of Quilon. Contemporary sources even point towards Jews owning large chunks of pepper land (gardens) in Quilon. In short, ships from Quilon sailed to all directions loaded with the goods of diverse varieties (Longworth Dames, II: 97)

THE COROMANDEL:

The Coromandel, famous for its clothes and pearls, emerged as a commercial destination with the rise of the Cholas. The eleventh century witnessed the Chola navy marching upto Srivijaya (1025 AD) to further its mercantile interests. The Cholas had already invaded Ceylon to monopolize maritime trade on the advice of merchants from Tamil areas. Various guilds like the Nadesi, Manigramam and Ayyavole started recording their presence in the Coromandel. These maritime activities were not new

to Tamil areas. Sangam literature alludes to big ships entering the port of Puhar (Kaveripattinam) without lowering their sails (K. V. Raman: 114) Joseph Needham records Roman Syrian settlements in Virapattinam (around modern Pondicherry) during the first century (J. Needham, I: 178-179).

The Tamil merchants helped in Hindu colonization of southeast Asia. The eleventh century witnessed a great impetus to these maritime activities. The Cholas and Pandayas contributed a lot towards these developments. Islamic influx into the Coromandel under Muslim armies brought Tamilnadu into the Islamic area of influence. However, it benefited the most with the Chinese participation in the Indian Ocean after the eleventh century. Historically, the eastern coasts of India remained more inclined towards southeast Asia and China. Wassaf observes that the big ships, floating like mountains in the sea, started arriving in Ma'abar (Elliot and Dowson, III: 32)

The Coromandel and Tamil areas faced one major disadvantage, which was the lack of good and deep harbourage. Kayal, Hinawar and Tochi were recorded as the main ports, but they could not be compared with Daibul, Cambay, Calicut and Quilon in their grandeur. Hence one can find reference to the inscriptions encouraging the traders to come to these ports. One such inscription in Motupalli (1358 AD) is worth mentioning. It converted Motupalli into a safe haven for sea merchants and remitted many taxes. It also promised to extend autonomy to them in their internal affairs (P. R. Srinivasan: no. 635)

An important feature in the composition of these ports was their concentration in the southern zone. Kayal, Kaveripattinam and Nagapattinam went on to emerge as important ports in southern Coromandel. The reason could be their proximity nearer to the marked international trading routes. Ships destined for China from Malabar hesitated to steer deep into the Bay of Bengal. Ports of southern coasts, on the other hand, could be touched without deviating from the marked routes. This phenomenon resulted in the concentration of all the major mercantile activities in the ports situated in the southern Coromandel. They also served as the ports of trans-shipment for the ports located in the interior of the Bay of Bengal. Ships brought merchandize from northern areas to do trading in the southern ports. The sixteenth century traveller, Duarte Barbosa writes, "Cael has a great haven whither every year sail many ships from Charamandel and Benguala, so that....there is a great traffic in goods of many kinds coming from other regions." (Longworth Dames, II: 123) Kayal was a prominent port. It survived throughout the medieval period and received a regular supply of horses from western Asia. Marco Polo records that Kayal was in touch with the ships coming from the west. Ships arrived from Hormuz, Arabia, Kish and Aden bringing a large supply of war-horses. It witnessed brisk mercantile activities (H. Yule, II: 370). Both Chettis and Lubbaïs were found trading in Kayal, yet it did not emerge as the trading emporium of Coromandel (H. Yule, II: 370-374) Which port can be designated as the trading emporium in the Coromandel? The claim to greatness was contested between two major ports of Tamilnadu. Kaveripattinam was an important port of Tamilnadu. It had its reference even in the Sangam literature. Ships sailed to the port of Kaveripattinam without slacking their sails and brought precious metals from Malaya, Ceylon and Arabia (K.V. Raman: 114) Developed under the patronage of Pandayas, Kaveripattinam attracted a huge volume of sea traffic. The Pandayan attempt to attract horse trade to Kaveripattinam also brought prominence to it. However, the decline of Pandayas and the subsequent revival of Chola power shifted the centre of south Indian political and economic activities towards Chola areas. The Cholas patronized the port of Nagapattinam and it soon surpassed Kaveripattinam in its grandeur and extent of mercantile trade

Nagapattinam, developed under the patronage of the Cholas, witnessed a tremendous rush of sea traffic and remained an important port throughout early medieval period. The Portuguese, on their arrival in the area, marked Nagapattinam as their chief city in the Coromandel (Longworth Dames, II: 123-124). Expansion of the Chola influence, which extended upto Bengal and Malabar, provided large and secured hinterlands. They patronized and attracted the inflow of commercial traffic to their areas. The Cholas were fully aware of the benefits of maritime trade and vigorously attracted itinerant and sea merchants, who were provided security and freedom to govern their internal matters. The Cholas sent embassies to different countries. In order to attract the Buddhist merchants of southeast Asia, They even permitted the construction of a Buddhist sanctuary in Nagapattinam. A large volume of porcelain

related to that period has been excavated at Nagapattinam. Chinese works of twelfth and thirteenth century testify the greatness of Nagapattinam. Zhuavo Ragua in Zufan Zhi (1290 AD) and Wang Dayaun in Daryio Zhiva (1305 AD) refer to this large city (K.V. Raman: 114) Availability of porcelain was important as it was in considerable demand all over Indian Ocean trading world. The merchants would prefer to visit a port that promised Chinese porcelain and rarities. The improved links with China and southeast Asia enabled Nagapattinam to ensure supply of porcelain and silk from China and spices of southeast Asia. The Cholas also monopolized the supply of pearls. Their missions to China carried pearls and other costly finished products with a view to signify their control over these routes to the Chinese emperor. However, it perhaps went into decline in the first half of fifteenth century. Famous Chinese commander Cheng Ho did not arrive in Nagapattinam during his seven expeditions of the Indian Ocean in the mid fifteenth century. Nevertheless, it recovered soon. It was a flourishing port when the Portuguese arrived. Realizing its strategic importance, the Portuguese made it their headquarters in the Coromandel.

ORISSA:

Orissa was known all over the Indian subcontinent for the breeding of elephants. It generated some amount of shipping from Chilka and Puri. Khalkatapatna, eleven kilometers east of Konark, witnessed maritime traffic during the reign of the Ganga dynasty. Chinese celadon, porcelain with blue floral design on white background, and glazed chocolate ware of Arabian origins have been excavated at this place. Chinese copper coins of the fourteenth century with peculiar motifs constituted another important find from this site.(S. R. Rao :230) Still there was certainly no such port as to claim the prestigious position of a trading emporium. Perhaps Bengal and Tamil areas continued to attract products from Orissa via land routes. Coastal trading between the Coromandel and Bengal would have brought ships to these ports of Orissa.

BENGAL:

Bengal was known for the production of cotton, sugarcane, ginger and slaves. It was a prosperous and important zone in the Indian Ocean trading world. It remained in contact with southeast Asia since antiquity. First Chinese traveller in India, Fahien embarked on a ship from Bengal enroute to China. The Bengalis played a leading role in colonizing southeast Asia (Franciso Rodrigues, I: 143) Bengal remained closely aligned to north Indian politics. Control of Bengal was important for any ruler in Delhi because it ensured an outlet to the sea through the Ganges. It is the only river that covered almost all the major cities of central India. The Yamuna in the vicinity of Delhi also merged in the Ganges near Allahabad. In the absence of suitable land transportation, a considerable volume of merchandize could be brought to the sea through the river. This phenomenon of better linkage of ports with hinterlands, through the rivers, resulted in the emergence of Bengal as an important zone of maritime trade. It enjoyed close ties not only with southeast Asia but also with western Asia. Both *junks* (suitable for the eastern sector of the Indian Ocean) and *dhows* (suitable for the Arabian sea) were constructed here. The result was the availability of vast range of merchadize. Bengal had hot and humid weather. It was also infested with dacoits who plundered the merchants. Numerous battles further complicated the situation; still the incentives were so huge that merchants could not avoid the place. Ibn Battuta calls Bengal *Duzakhast bur ni'amat* ('A Hell full of Good Things') (Yule and Cordier: 5). Tome Pires remarks that in Bengal goods were highly taxed, but still merchants received good profits if they landed at the harbours of Bengal (Franciso Rodrigues, I: 93) Thus, a visit to Bengal was sure to bring immense profits to sailing vessels. Expansion of Islamic area of influence resulted in corresponding expansion of mercantile activities in Bengal. Interestingly, Duarte Barbosa found Muslims living in the coastal areas (Longworth Dames, II :135). Merchants from Bengal extended their areas of operation. Ibn Battuta found Bengali merchants living in separate quarters in Sumatra (Mahdi Husain: 242 fn. 2). Ships sailed to all directions from Bengal. Ibn Battuta boarded a junk from Bengal on his journey to China (Yule and Cordier: 92.) Duarte Barbosa noticed both dhows and junks

in Bengal (Longworth Dames, II :142-145). Simon Digby believes that Bengalis constructed their own *junks* and this technique might have filtered down to Bengal after such a long era of commercial intercourse with China (Simon Digby, I: 131) *Junks* were built in Bengal even when the Chinese withdrew from the Indian Ocean trade around fifteenth century.

Now the question arises which was chief trading emporium of Bengal? This question has been hotly debated. Contemporary travelogues refer to two important ports, with different characteristics. The first port Satgaon or Chitgaon was located near the shores and witnessed a large volume of sea traffic till 1623 AD when Hooghly was made the royal port by the Portuguese (Yule and Cordier: 82). Satgaon was loosely controlled by many governors till the arrival of the Mughal armies. It witnessed continuous conflicts. Why was it visited by maritime traders after all? The answer lies in its location. Outside the delta of the Ganges, Satgaon offered ships a passage into Bengal. The merchants unloaded cargoes from the big vessels into smaller vessels before steering into river Meghna. During rainy seasons, big ships would have sailed into river Meghna from Satgaon. Ibn Battuta boarded a *junk* from Satgaon for southeast Asia (Yule and Cordier: 92).

Sunargaon was, strictly speaking, not a port. It was not situated near the sea. It was located in the interiors on river Meghna. But, if the volume of commodities and the number of merchants contributed to the emergence of a chief trading emporium, then certainly Sunargaon was not lagging behind. Ships brought immense merchandize from the distant countries of the Indian Ocean trading world to Sunargaon. The ships sailed to Satgaon to find their way to Sunargaon. It was well fortified city and big bazaars were held in it. It also remained the seat of the governors of east Bengal from 1351 AD to 1608 AD (Yule and Cordier: 93).

The presence of nobility would have created a zone of considerable demand for both luxuries and staples. As a terminus to the Grand Trunk road, it witnessed a great inflow of merchandize both from land and sea routes. Decca, an important centre of textiles, was just 15 miles away from it. Better interconnectivity between land (through the Grand Trunk road) and sea (through river Meghna) routes placed Sunargaon in an advantageous position. Though Bengal was infested with robbers and pirates, the presence of the governors and fortifications ensured better protection to merchants and their cargoes in Sunargaon. The merchants were offered security and fair deal. Things were available at cheap rates in the markets. Ibn Battuta provides the following price list of some commodities (Yule and Cordier: 81-82):

COMMODITY	QUANTITY / PRICE
Milch cow	----- Three silver <i>dinar</i>
Fine cotton cloth	----- Thirty cubits in length for two dinars
A beautiful girl (Marriageable age)	----- A dinar of gold

Ibn Battuta bought a young slave girl Ashura for one *dinar* and his comrades bought a slave called Lulu for two *dinars*. Both luxuries and staples were available in plenty. Merchants could divide their risks fairly between costly and cheap products. Thus, Sunargaon was the chief trading emporium of Bengal.

CONCLUSION:

From the preceding discussion, it becomes evident why certain ports surpassed others to emerge as trading emporiums? Trade in medieval period, like any other time, was based on one consideration: profits. Merchants crossed seas and undertook tremendous risk to earn profits. If they were promised better facilities by a certain port, they could be easily lured into it. Better facilities could easily double their returns with low risks. Their visit was determined by multiple factors. These factors existed right from Aden to Canton during the period of our study.

Political patronage was an essential priority in developing a trading emporium. Security and neutrality of the ports could only be ensured by the ruling elites. Sea merchants shunned oppressive and cruel rulers. We have a ruler of the fourteenth century Ceylon named Chakarvati. He was despised by the sea merchants. On the other hand, the port of Quilon was a favourite

destination of sea merchants. Here taxes were low and the ruler, like other princes, did not rob the merchants. We have reference of the Balharas (the Rashtrakutas) who were very considerate towards the Arab merchants. Indian rulers always maintained a distinction between the invaders and traders. Muslim merchants were always welcomed. In the first half of thirteenth century, Rai Jai Singh of Cambay personally intervened to dispense justice to Muslims when local miscreants burnt their houses and mosque. Only the rulers could ensure the neutrality of ports, giving it a true cosmopolitan character. It was the first step towards becoming a chief trading emporium. Geographic suitability was the next factor. The chief trading emporium should be ideally located. It must promise deep harbours. Navigation should not be a dangerous enterprise. It must be well connected with its hinterlands. Aden provided security from the dangerous reefs of the Red Sea. Hormuz replaced Basra because it provided shelter from the delta of Euphrates and Tigris into the Persian Gulf. Cambay replaced Somanath because it provided protection from piratical activities. Malacca was blessed because of its location between the ends of two different circles of monsoons.

Availability of profitable markets was another characteristic of chief trading emporiums. Foreign merchants were bound with the monsoon circle. They had limited time at hand. They preferred to visit ports specializing in a vast range of products. Ports that were well connected with their hinterlands thus had an added advantage. K.N. Chaudhuri in his work, *Trade and Civilisation in the India Ocean* (1985), finds the trade of Aden 'multi dimensional,' (but this characteristic was common to all chief trading emporiums). Merchants could procure both staples and luxuries there. This helped them to spread their risks.

Strong and autonomous mercantile organizations were also important. Merchants preferred to visit ports where mercantile organizations were offered autonomy. Presence of commercial organizations promised security and better deal in local markets. There were *fanduqs/mohallas* (residential places) in every trading emporium. Merchants were tied to their clans. Nationalities and, more importantly, religion formed strong ties among sea merchants. Ibn Battuta tells us about an Iraqi merchant who was ready to visit India, but afterwards moved towards China in the company of his native fellow merchants (H.A.R. Gibb, III: 548). No doubt, that Iraqi merchant was not a sea merchant, but merchants in general were guided by almost similar considerations. It is thus beyond doubt that sea traders, irrespective of their nation and religion, looked for similar circumstances to ensure their voyage a success. They favoured the ports promising autonomy, profits, security and better commercial transactions. Almost all the chief trading emporiums of the Indian Ocean displayed similar characteristics contributing to their success not only in India but also in Asia.

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