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# UNIT 1 AGRARIAN ECONOMY

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## Structure

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit you should be able to explain the :

- factors responsible for the expansion of agriculture in the Indian subcontinent,
- chronological pattern of land grant system,
- ideology behind land grants,
- character and role of various types of agrarian settlements,
- growth and nature of land rights,
- technological improvements in the sphere of agriculture,
- interdependence amongst different groups related to land,
- role of agriculturists in trade, and
- characterisation of early medieval agrarian economy.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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The early medieval period in Indian history marks the growth of cultivation and organisation of land relations through land grants. These grants began around the beginning of Christian era and covered practically the entire sub-continent by the end of the twelfth century. In the early medieval period agricultural expansion meant a greater and more regular use of advanced agricultural techniques, plough cultivation and irrigation technology. Institutional management of agricultural processes, control of means of production and new relations of production also played an important role in this expansion. With this expansion, new type of rural tensions also emerged. Commercial activities in agricultural and non-agricultural commodities increased. All these aspects have been dealt in this Unit which ends with a discussion on the characterisation of early medieval agrarian economy. Let us start with the aspects related to agrarian expansion.

## 1.2 AGRARIAN EXPANSION

The agrarian expansion, which began with the establishment of **brahmadeya** and **agrahara** settlements through land grants to Brahmanas from the fourth century onwards acquired a uniform and universal form in subsequent centuries.

The centuries between the eighth and twelfth witnessed the processes of this expansion and the culmination of an agrarian organisation based on land grants to religious and secular beneficiaries, i.e. Brahmanas, temples and officers of the King's government. However, there are important regional variations in this development, both due to geographical as well as ecological factors.

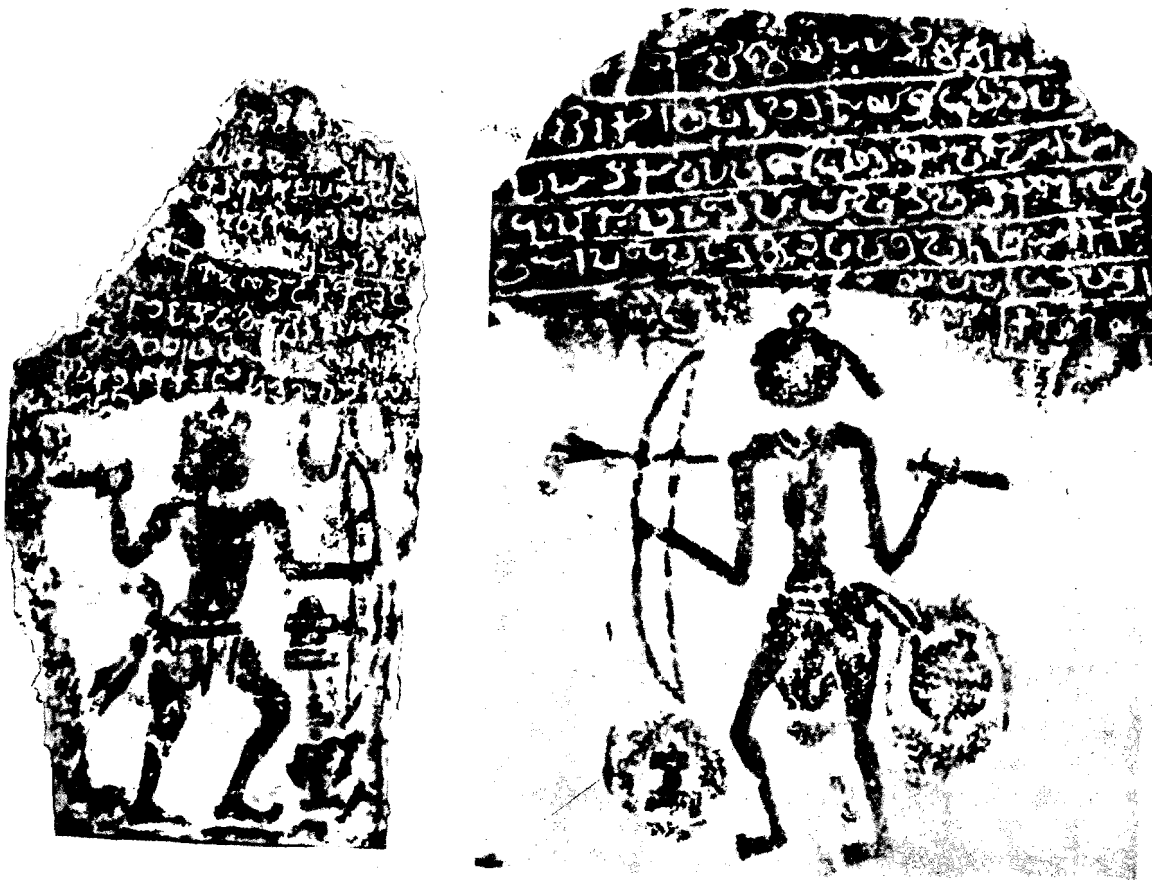
### 1.2.1 Geographical and Chronological Patterns

Cultivation was extended not only to the hitherto virgin lands but even by clearing forest areas. This was a continuous process and a major feature of early medieval agricultural economy.

There is a view prevalent among some scholars that land grants started in outlying, backward and tribal areas first and later gradually extended to the Ganga valley, which was the hub of the brahmanical culture. In the backward and aboriginal tracts the Brahmanas could spread new methods of cultivation by regulating agricultural processes through specialised knowledge of the seasons (astronomy), plough, irrigation, etc., as well as by protecting the cattle wealth. However, this is not true of all regions in India, for, land grants were also made in areas of settled agriculture as well as in other ecological zones, especially for purposes of integrating them into a new economic order.



1 A Telugu inscription of 10th century A.D. from Indu Kurupalle records the death of a hero after rescuing cattle.



2 & 3 Inscriptions from North Arcot in memory of those heroes who died protecting cattle during cattle raids.

The chronological appearance of the land grant system shows the following pattern:

- fourth-fifth centuries : spread over a good part of central India, northern Deccan and Andhra,
- fifth-seventh centuries : eastern India (Bengal and Orissa), beginnings in Western India (Gujarat and Rajasthan),
- seventh and eighth centuries : Tamil Nadu and Karnataka,
- ninth century : Kerala, and
- end of the twelfth century : almost the entire sub-continent with the possible exception of Punjab.

### 1.2.2 Ideological Background

Ideas relating to the gift of land emphasise the importance of *dana* or gift. The idea of *dana* or gift to Brahmanas was developed by Brahmanical texts as the surest means of acquiring merit (*punya*) and destroying sin (*pataka*). It appears to be a conscious and systematic attempt to provide means of subsistence to the Brahmanas. Grants of cultivable land to them and registration of gifts of land on copper plates are recommended by all the *Smritis* and *Puranas* of the post-Gupta centuries.

There were different items of gifts :

- food, grains, paddy, etc.
- movable assets like gold, money, etc. and
- the immovable assets, i.e. cultivable land, garden and residential plot

Among the gifts are also included the plough, cows, oxen and ploughshare. However, the gift of land was considered to be the best of all types of gifts made to the learned Brahmana. Imprecations against the destruction of such gifts and the resumption of land donated to a Brahmana ensured their perpetuity. Thus land grants began to follow a set legal formula systematised through law books (Dharmashastras).

While the early land grants were made mainly to Vedic priests (Shrotriya fire priests), from the fifth to thirteenth centuries, grants were also made to temple priests. The temple, as an institution, assumed a more central role in agrarian expansion and organisation from the eighth century A.D. Grants to the temple, either plots of land or whole villages, were known as **devadana** in the south Indian context. It needs to be stressed that what began as a mere trickle, became a mighty current. The process of acquiring landed property was not confined to brahmanical temples. The non-brahmanical religious establishments such as the Buddhist and Jain monasteries (samghas and basadis) too, specially in Karnataka, Andhra, Gujarat and eastern India (Bihar and Orissa), vied with one another to become landed magnates (you will read more about this in Units 6-7 in Block 2).

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Below in column 'A' time periods are given. Pick the regions given in brackets and put in Column 'B' against time period when land grant system appeared in that region (Central India, Bengal, Orissa, Northern Deccan, Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka).

A)	B)
i) 4th - 5th centuries	i) _____
ii) 5th - 7th centuries	ii) _____
iii) 7th - 8th century	iii) _____
iv) 9th century	iv) _____

- 2) What were the different items of **dana** (gift) to Brahmanas? Which was considered as the best gift.

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## 1.3 AGRARIAN ORGANISATION

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The agrarian organisation and economy were highly complex. This can be understood on the basis of intensive studies of the regional patterns of land grants and the character and role of the **brahmadeya** and **non-brahmadeya** and temple settlements. The growth and nature of land rights, interdependence among the different groups related to land and the production and distribution processes also help in a better understanding of the situation.

### 1.3.1 Character and Role of Various Types of Agrarian Settlements

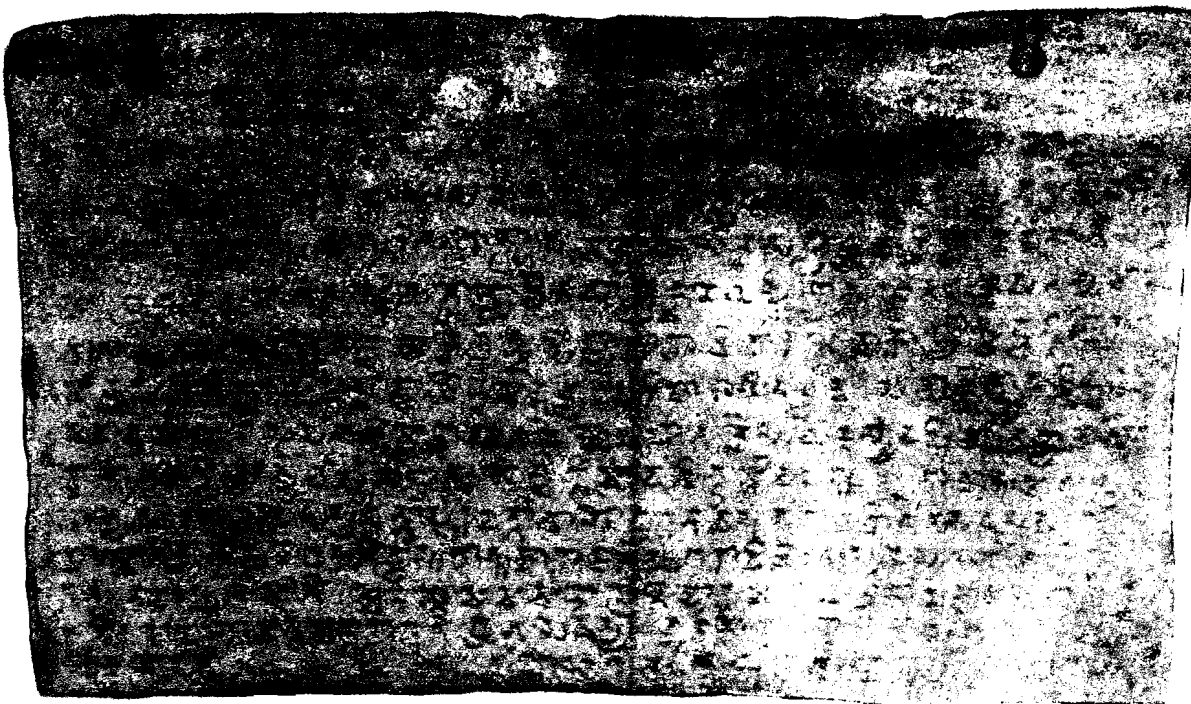
**Brahmadeya** : A brahmadeya represents a grant of land either in individual plots or whole villages given away to Brahmanas making them landowners or land controllers. It was meant either to bring virgin land under cultivation or to integrate existing agricultural (or peasant) settlements into the new economic order dominated by a Brahmana proprietor. These Brahmana donees played a major role in integrating various socio-economic groups into the new order, through service tenures and caste groupings under the Varna system. For example, the growing

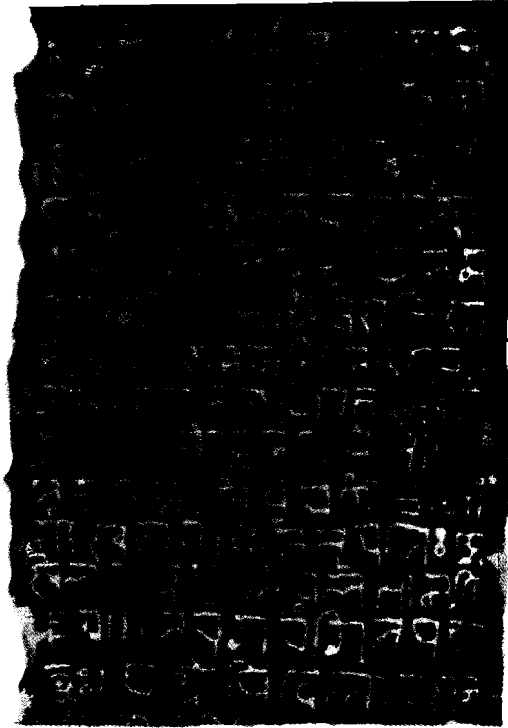
peasantisation of shudras was sought to be rationalised in the existing brahmanical social order.

The practice of land grants as **brahmadeyas** was initiated by the ruling dynasties and subsequently followed by chiefs, feudatories, etc. **Brahmadeyas** facilitated agrarian expansion because they were:

- exempted from various taxes or dues either entirely or at least in the initial stages of settlement (e.g. for 12 years);
- also endowed with ever growing privileges (**pariharas**). The ruling families derived economic advantage in the form of the extension of the resource base, moreover, by creating **brahmadeyas** they also gained ideological support for their political power.

Lands were given as **brahmadeya** either to a single Brahmana or to several Brahmana families which ranged from a few to several hundreds or even more than a thousand, as seen in the South Indian context. **Brahmadeyas** were invariably located near major irrigation works such as tanks or lakes. Often new irrigation sources were constructed when **brahmadeyas** were created, especially in areas dependent on rains and in arid and semi-arid regions. When located in areas of intensive agriculture in the river valleys, they served to integrate other settlements of a subsistence level production. Sometimes, two or more settlements were clubbed together to form a **brahmadeya** or an **agrahara**. The taxes from such villages were assigned to the Brahmana donees, who were also given the right to get the donated land cultivated. Boundaries of the donated land or village were very often carefully demarcated. The various types of land, wet, dry and garden land within the village were specified. Sometimes even specific crops and trees are mentioned. The land donations implied more than the transfer of land rights. For example, in many cases, along with the revenues and economic resources of the village, human resources such as peasants (cultivators), artisans and others were also transferred to donees. There is also growing evidence of the encroachment of the rights of villagers over community lands such as lakes and ponds. Thus, the Brahmanas became managers of agricultural and artisanal production in these settlements for which they organised themselves into assemblies.





5. Inscriptions of Kakatiya Ganapati (A.D. 1199) from Karimnagar District records a land grant made by the Governor of Chuneridesa to Manchi-Bhattopadhyaya, the priest of king Ganpati.

**Secular Grants :** From the seventh century onwards, officers of the state were also being remunerated through land grants. This is of special significance because it created another class of landlords who were not Brahmanas.

The gift of land on officials in charge of administrative divisions is mentioned as early as c. A.D. 200 (the time of Manu) but the practice picks up momentum in the post-Gupta period. Literary works dealing with central India, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bihar and Bengal between the tenth and twelfth centuries make frequent references to various kinds of grants to ministers, kinsmen and those who rendered military services. The **rajas, rajaputras, ranakas, mahasamantas**, etc. mentioned in Pala land charters were mostly vassals connected with land. The incidence of grants to state officials varies from one region to another. To illustrate, while we hear of about half a dozen Paramar official ranks, only a few of them are known to have received land grants. But very large territories were granted to vassals and high officers under the Chalukyas of Gujarat. The available evidences suggest that Orissa had more service grants than Assam, Bengal and Bihar taken together. Further, the right of various officials to enjoy specific and exclusive levies—irrespective of the tenure of these levies—was bound to create intermediaries with interests in the lands of the tenants.

**Devadanas :** Large scale gifts to the religious establishments, both brahmanical and non-brahmanical, find distinctive places in inscriptional evidences. These centres worked as nuclei of agricultural settlements and helped in integrating various peasant and tribal settlements through a process of acculturation. They also integrated various socio-economic groups through service tenures or remuneration through temple lands. Temple lands were leased out to tenants, who paid a higher share of the produce to the temple. Such lands were also managed either by the **sabha** of the **brahmadeya** or **mahajanas** of the **agrahara** settlements. In non-Brahmana settlements also temples became the central institution. Here temple lands came to be administered by the temple executive committees composed of land owning non-Brahmanas. e.g. the Velalas of Tamil Nadu, the Okkalu, Kampulu, etc. of Karnataka

different groups were assigned a caste and ritual status. It is in this process that people following "impure" and "low occupations" were assigned the status of untouchables, kept out of the temple and given quarters at the fringes of the settlement.

The supervision of temple lands was in the hands of **Brahmana** and non-Brahmana landed elite. The control of irrigation sources was also a major function of the local bodies dominated by landed elite groups. Thus the **Brahmana**, the temple and higher strata of non-Brahmanas as landlords, employers and holders of superior rights in land became the central feature of early medieval agrarian organisation.

The new landed elite also consisted of local peasant clan chiefs or heads of kinship groups and heads of families, who had **kani** rights i.e. rights of possession and supervision. In other words, several strata of intermediaries emerged between the King and the actual producer.

### 1.3.2 Rights in Land

An important aspect relating to land grants is the nature of rights granted to the assignees. Rights conferred upon the grantees included fiscal and administrative rights. The taxes, of which land tax was the major source of revenue, theoretically payable to the King or government, came to be assigned to the donees. The reference to **pariharas** or exemptions in the copper plate and stone inscriptions registering such grants indicate that what was theoretically payable to the King was not being completely exempted from payment but the rights were now transferred to the grantees. This was apparently based on the sanction of the **dharmashastras**, which sought to establish the royal ownership of land and hence justify such grants, creating intermediary rights in land.

Although there is some evidence of a communal basis of land rights in early settlements, the development of private ownership or rights is indicated by the fact that the grantees often enjoyed rights of alienation of land. They also enjoyed other hereditary benefits in the settlements. Land gifts were often made after purchase from private individuals. Hereditary ownership seems to have developed out of such grants, both religious and secular.

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## 1.4 TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS

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During the early medieval period there was an increase in irrigation sources such as canals, lakes, tanks (**tataka, eri**) and wells (**kupa** and **kinaru**). That the accessibility to water resources was an important consideration in the spread of rural settlements is shown by regional studies. **Keres** or tanks in south Karnataka, **nadi** (river), **pushkarini** (tank), **srota** (water channel) etc. in Bengal and **araghatta-wells** in western Rajasthan used to be natural points of reference whenever distribution and transfer of village lands had to be undertaken. Naturally, the concern for water resources contributed to the extension of cultivation and intensification of agricultural activities. Water-lifts of different kinds operated by man and animal power were also known. Epigraphic sources record the construction and maintenance of such irrigation works between eighth and thirteenth centuries. Many of the lakes/tanks of this period have survived well into the modern times. Some of them were repaired, revived and elaborated under the British administration. The step wells (**vapis**) in Rajasthan and Gujarat became extremely popular in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries. They were meant for irrigating the fields as well as for supplying drinking water.

The increase in the number of irrigation works was due to an advance in irrigation technology. There is evidence of the use of more scientific and permanent methods of flood control, damming of river waters, sluice construction (with piston valve and cisterns) both at the heads of canals and of lakes and tanks. Flood control was achieved gradually through breaching of rivers for canals and mud embankments which ensured the regulated use of water resources.

Lakes or reservoirs were more commonly used in semi dry and rain fed areas, as well as river basins, where the rivers dried up in summer. Construction of water reservoirs

was initiated by ruling families and maintained by local institutions such as the **sabha** (Brahmana assembly) and **ur** (non-Brahmana village assembly) in Tamil Nadu. Maintenance of lakes/tanks etc. i.e. desilting, bund and sluice repair was looked after by a special committee of local assemblies and cesses were levied for the purpose.

Royal permission was accorded for digging tanks or wells, when gifts were made to Brahmanas and temples. Land was demarcated for construction and maintenance of canals and tanks, etc. Digging of tanks was considered a part of the privileges enjoyed by the grantees and an act of religious merit. Hence, resourceful private individuals also constructed tanks.

No less significant were the improvements in agricultural implements. For example, a tenth century inscription from Ajmer refers to "big" plough. Similarly, separate implements are mentioned for weeding parasitic plants. **Vrikshayarveda** mentions steps to cure diseases of trees. Water lifting devices such as **araghatta** and **ghatyantra** are mentioned in inscriptions and literary works. The former was specially used in the wells of Rajasthan in the ninth-tenth centuries. The **Krishisukti** of Kashyapa prescribed that the **ghatyantra** operated by oxen is the best, that by men was the worst while the one driven by elephants was of the middling quality.

Advanced knowledge about weather conditions and their use in agricultural operations is noticeable in such texts as the **Gurusamhita** and **Krishinarashwara**.

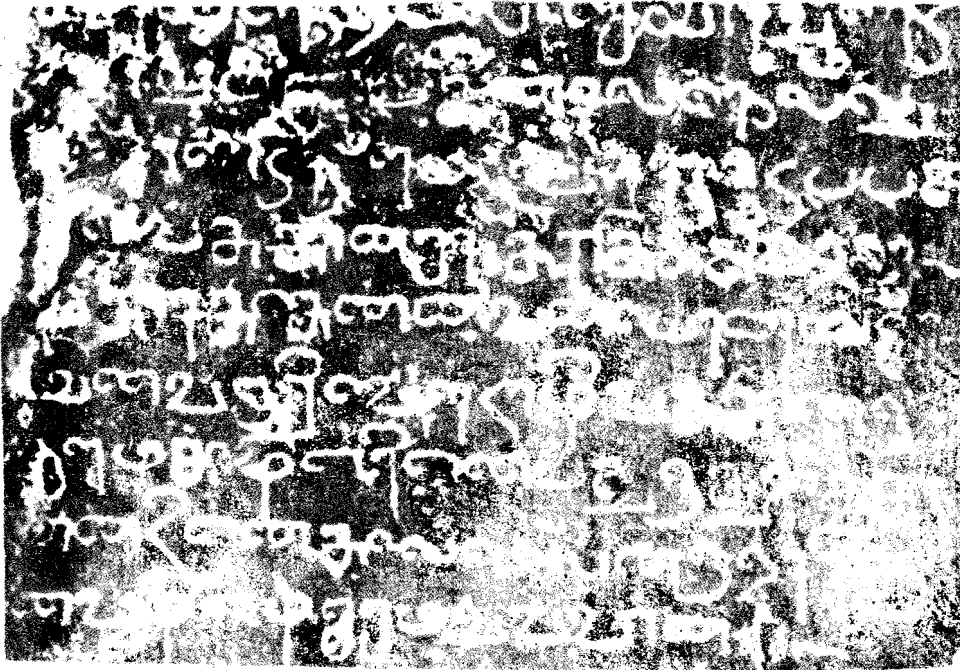
More than one hundred types of cereals including wheat, barley, lentils, etc. are mentioned in contemporary writings on agriculture. According to the **Shunyapurana** more than fifty kinds of paddy were cultivated in Bengal. The knowledge of fertilizers improved immensely and the use of the compost was known. Cash crops such as arecanuts, betel leaves, cotton, sugarcane, etc. find frequent mention. **Rajashekhara** (early tenth century) tells us about the excellent sugarcane of north Bengal which yielded juice even without the use of pressing instrument. Commodity production of coconut and oranges assumed special importance in peninsular India during this period.

Marco-Polo hints at increased production of spices when he says that the city of Kinsay in China alone consumed ten thousand pounds of pepper everyday which came from India. He also mentions the great demand for Indian ginger in European markets. Harvesting of three crops and rotation of crops were known widely. Thus, advanced agricultural technology was being systematised and diffused in various parts of the country causing substantial boom in agricultural production.



6. A Kannada Inscription (on hero-stone) of 9th century A.D., from Navali, records the construction of a tank in memory of hero in the reign of Viru Nalimha





7. A Tenth century Tamil Inscription from Erode which mentions about the construction of a tank and giving of money for its maintenance by a person named Vanji-Vel Tali.

**Check Your Progress . 2**

1) How did brahmadeyas helped in agrarian expansion?

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2) What is the difference between brahmadeya, secular, and devadana grants?

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3) What was the nature of rights enjoyed by land grantees?

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4) Describe briefly the main methods of irrigation.

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## 1.5 RURAL TENSION

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Notwithstanding agrarian expansion, the rural landscape was far from being a homogeneous scene. There is, to begin with, heterogeneous and stratified peasantry. Unlike the age old and pre-Gupta **gahapatis** we now have graded personnel associated with land: **Kshetrik, karshaka, halin** and **ardhik**. Regrettably, there is hardly any indication of landownership in these terms, which seem to be referring to various categories of cultivators. The conversion of the **brahmadeyas** into non-**brahmadeyas** and that of the latter into **agraharas** were potential sources of tension in rural areas. The **damara** revolts in Kashmir, rebellion of the Kaivarthas in the reign of Ramapal in Bengal, acts of self immolation in situations of encroachments on land in Tamil Nadu, appropriation of donated land by shudras in the Pandya territory, are indices of distrust against the new landed intermediaries. The fact that donors often looked for land where cultivation was not disputed also shows the seeds of turmoil. The possibility of the hero-stones in and around **agraharas** also has the potential of throwing light on rumblings beneath the surface in agrarian settlements. Why does the concept of **brahmahatya** (killing of a Brahmana) become very pronounced in early medieval times? Answers to this question raise doubts about the validity of “brahmana-peasant alliance” and “peasant state and society” (see Sec. 1.7). This is, however, not to deny other possible areas of tension within rural society between Brahmanas and temples and within ranks of secular land holders.

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## 1.6 AGRICULTURE AND THE EXCHANGE NETWORK

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It is sometimes maintained that in the early medieval economic organisation, which was a predominantly agrarian and self-sufficient village economy, production was mainly subsistence oriented and was not in response to the laws of the market. Hence there was little scope for economic growth. Craftsmen and artisans were attached either to villages or estates or religious establishments. Hence there was no significant role for traders and middlemen, who only procured and supplied iron tools, oil, spices, cloth, etc. to rural folk. In other words the functioning of the market system was extremely limited.

The aforesaid picture is certainly true for the period 300-800 A.D. However, the subsequent 500 years witnessed a rapid increase in the number of agrarian settlements and the growth of local markets (see Unit 2) initially for local exchange. Subsequently, the need for regular exchange within a region and with other regions led to organised commerce. This in turn led to the emergence of merchant organisations, itinerant trade and partial monetisation from the ninth century. Though the relative importance of these features varied from one region to another (See also Units 3 and 4) the increasing role of agriculture in this new economy is easily seen.

Agricultural products came to be exchanged with items of long distance trade carried on by itinerant traders. This development also led to a change in the pattern of landownership towards the close of the early medieval period. Merchants and economically influential craftsmen, like weavers, invested in land i.e. purchased land

called the **Jagati-kottali** (community of weavers) and the community of **Telligas** (oil pressers) were active participants in agriculture. The former are repeatedly mentioned as excavating tanks and laying out gardens.

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## 1.7 THE CHARACTERISATION OF EARLY MEDIEVAL AGRARIAN ECONOMY

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Different views have been put forward regarding the nature of the overall set up of early medieval agrarian economy. On the one hand, it is seen as a manifestation of feudal economy, while on the other it is dubbed as a peasant state and society.

The salient features of 'Indian Feudalism' are:

- 1) Emergence of hierarchical landed intermediaries. Vassals and officers of state and other secular assignees had military obligations and feudal titles. Sub-infeudation (varying in different regions) by these donees to get their land cultivated led to the growth of different strata of intermediaries. It was a hierarchy of landed aristocrats, tenants, share croppers and cultivators. This hierarchy was also reflected in the power/administrative structure, where a sort of lord-vassal relationship emerged. In other words, Indian feudalism consisted in the gross unequal distribution of land and its produce.
- 2) Another important feature was the prevalence of forced labour. The right of extracting forced labour (**vishti**) is believed to have been exercised by the Brahmana and other grantees of land. Forced labour was originally a prerogative of the King or the state. It was transferred to the grantees, petty officials, village authorities and others. In the Chola inscriptions alone, there are more than one hundred references to forced labour. Even the peasants and artisans come within the jurisdiction of **vishti**. As a result, a kind of serfdom emerged, in which agricultural labourers were reduced to the position of semi-serfs.
- 3) Due to the growing claims of greater rights over land by rulers and intermediaries, peasants also suffered a curtailment of their land rights. Many were reduced to the position of tenants facing ever growing threat of eviction. A number of peasants were only **ardhikas** (share croppers). The strain on the peasantry was also caused by the burden of taxation, coercion and increase in their indebtedness.
- 4) Surplus was extracted through various methods. Extra economic coercion was a conspicuous method. With the rise of new property relations, new mechanisms of economic subordination also evolved. The increasing burden is evident in the mentioning of more than fifty levies in the inscription of Rajaraja Chola.
- 5) It was relatively a closed village economy. The transfer of human resources along with land to the beneficiaries shows that in such villages the peasants, craftsmen and artisans were attached to the villages and hence were mutually dependent. Their attachment to land and to service grants ensured control over them by the beneficiaries.

In brief, a subject and immobile peasantry, functioning in relatively self-sufficient villages buttressed by **varna** restrictions, was the marked feature of the agrarian economy during the five centuries under survey.

The theory of the existence of autonomous peasant societies is put forward in opposition to the theory of Indian feudalism. It is based mainly on the evidence from South Indian sources.

According to this theory, autonomous peasant regions called the **nadus** evolved in South India by early medieval times. They were organised on the basis of clan and kinship ties. Agricultural production in the **nadus** was organised and controlled by the **nattar**, i.e. people of the **nadu**, organising themselves into assemblies, i.e. **nadu**. Members of this assembly were **velalas** or non-Brahmana peasants. Their autonomy is indicated by the fact that when land grants were made by the kings and lesser

chiefs, orders were issued with the consent of the **nattar**. Orders were first addressed to them. They demarcated the gift-land and supervised the execution of the grant because they were the organisers of production. The Brahmanas and dominant peasants became allies in the production process. Apparently, the exponents of this hypothesis share the notion of rural self-sufficiency, which is an important component of Indian feudalism. The theories of Indian feudalism and autonomous peasant societies have their adherents and claim to be based on empirical evidence. However, early medieval agrarian economy was a highly complex one. In order to understand its character and to provide a general framework for its study, detailed studies of its regional patterns will have to be worked out.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Give a few causes for tensions in rural areas during the period under review.

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- 2) What was the pattern of commerce in early medieval period? Did it effect the pattern of land ownership?

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- 3) Give five salient features of Indian feudalism.

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## 1.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit the survey of agrarian economy during the five centuries between the eighth and thirteenth highlights :

- Perceptible expansion of agriculture in practically all over the Indian sub-continent as a result of land grants. While the hitherto virgin lands and forested areas attracted this expansion, grants were also made in regions which were already under cultivation,
- the deep rooted ideological interests of religious establishments—both brahmanical and non-brahmanical, which sang praises of gifts of land,
- the emergence of various types of agrarian settlements with graded land rights,
- growing interests of non-agriculturists in land, specially those of state officials, traders, artisans, etc.,
- the spurt in technological improvements—in irrigation, agricultural implements, crops and cropping pattern etc

- the mutual relationships amongst different groups related to land underlining seeds of rural tension, and
- the debate on the characterisation of early medieval agrarian economy focussing on the distinguishing traits of "Indian feudalism" and "Peasant State and Society".

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## 1.9 KEY WORDS

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**Agrahara** : Primarily a rent free village in the possession of Brahmanas.

**Ardhika** : A cultivator who tills land of others and gets half the crop as his share.

**Basadi** : Jaina monastic establishment.

**Brahmadeya** : Generally tax free land or village given as gift to Brahmanas.

**Damar** : Powerful officials in Kashmir who developed landed interests and were opposed to Brahmanas.

**Devadana** : Rent free land gifted to brahmanical temples deities. Its Jain and Buddhist counterpart is **pallichanda**.

**Dharmashastra** : Brahmanical scriptures, law books.

**Halin** : Ploughman

**Karshaka** : Tiller of soil.

**Mahajana** : A sort of assembly of Brahmanas.

**Mahasamanta** : The "great chieftain", feudatory of a higher rank than **samanta**.

**Parihara** : Exemptions from taxes and obligations (privileges granted to the donees of rent-free land).

**Peasant State and Society** : A set-up where peasants are "free" to own means of production and cultivate land according to their interests.

**Peasantisation** : Process through which people unconnected with land were encouraged to undertake cultivation as a profession.

**Ranaka** : Title of feudatory ruler.

**Shrotriya** : Brahman, learned in the Vedas.

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## 1.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) Central India, Northern Deccan and Andhra  
ii) Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat and Rajasthan  
iii) Tamil Nadu, Karnataka  
iv) Kerala
- 2) You should include in your answer items like foodgrains, gold, money, cultivable land, garden, plough, cows, oxen, etc. Gift of land was considered the best. Also see Sub-sec. 1.2.2

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) **Brahmadeya** could help in agrarian expansion because these were exempted from land revenue and enjoyed other privileges, therefore, the grant holders had more incentives to develop these lands. Besides most of these lands were virgin and making them cultivable helped in expanding the cultivable area. Also see Sub-sec. 1.3.1.
- 2) **Brahmadeya** grants were given to Brahmanas only while secular grants were given to state functionaries in lieu of their salaries and **devadana** grants were given to brahmanical as well as non brahmanical temples. Also see Sub-sec. 1.2.1

- 3) The grantees had such rights as collection of land revenue, other taxes and maintain administrative control. See Sub-sec. 1.3.2.
- 4) Your answer should include such devices as wells, tanks, lakes, canal. You should also mention the water lifting devices such as **ghatyantra**, **araghatta** and the use of animal power. See Sec . 1.4.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) The main reasons for tension were the conversion of **brahmadeya** lands into non-**brahmadeyas** and **agraharas**, encroachment on other land and number of intermediaries. See Sec. 1.5.
- 2) The commercial activities within a region, and with other regions were undertaken. Agriculture produce was exchanged with other products often from distant regions. The investment in land by merchants and influential craftsmen changed the pattern of landownership. Also see Sec. 1.6.
- 3) Your answer should include such features of Indian feudalism like emergence of hierarchical landed intermediaries, prevalence of forced labour, curtailment of land rights of peasants, economic subordination by surplus extraction and existence of a relatively closed village economy. Also see Sec. 1.7.

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# UNIT 2 URBAN SETTLEMENTS

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## Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Form and Substance of Urban Centres
- 2.3 The General Pattern
- 2.4 Regional Variations and Types
  - 2.4.1 Rural Centres Transformed into Urban Centres
  - 2.4.2 Market Centres, Trade-network and Itinerant Trade
  - 2.4.3 Sacred/Pilgrimage Centres
  - 2.4.4 Royal Centres or Capitals
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises.

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## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit you should be able to explain the :

- factors responsible for the rise of urban centres,
- various phases in the history of urbanism,
- criteria for identifying settlements as urban,
- general pattern of the post-Gupta urban growth,
- regional variations in urban settlements, and
- types of towns.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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The study of urban settlements is an indispensable element in the understanding of socio-economic history of the post-Gupta centuries. It should be taken as a complementary component along with the agrarian economy. Recent writings have particularly focussed on the place of urban settlements in the overall framework of Indian feudalism. This and the two subsequent Units make an attempt to review the problems associated with such developments.

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## 2.2 FORM AND SUBSTANCE OF URBAN CENTRES

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Study of urban centres is an important aspect of socio-economic history. Urban centres in early medieval India have generally been studied in two ways :

- i) As a part of economic history i.e. history of trade, commerce and craft production, etc., and
- ii) as a part of administrative or political history, i.e. as capitals, administrative centres, centres of major and minor ruling families and fort towns.

Hence the focus of urban studies has so far been mainly on types of urban centres. Accordingly towns or cities have been listed under various categories such as market, trade or commercial centres, ports, political and administrative centres, religious centres, etc. However, there has been no sufficient attempt to explain the causes behind the emergence of towns. In other words the form of an urban centre is studied but not its meaning or substance. In order to understand both the form and substance of urban centres and to define their nature and categories, it is necessary

to study the processes of urban growth as a part of the broader socio-economic changes.

### Phases and Definition

How do we define an urban centre and what are its essential traits; are some of the questions that we take up here. Prior to the coming of the Turks, the Indian sub-continent experienced at least three phases of urban growth:

- 1) During the bronze age Harappan civilization (fourth-second millennium B.C.),
- 2) Early historic urban centres of the iron age (c. sixth century B.C. to the end of the third century A.D.),
- 3) Early medieval towns and cities (c. eighth/ninth to twelfth centuries A.D.).

Amongst the earliest attempts to define an urban centre one can easily mention Gordon Childe's notion of "Urban Revolution". He listed monumental buildings, large settlements with dense population, existence of such people who were not engaged in food production (rulers, artisans and merchants) and cultivation of art, science and writing as prominent features to identify an urban centre. Further, Childe laid great stress on the presence of craft specialists and the role of agricultural surplus which supported non-food producers living in cities. Not all these traits, which were spelt out in the context of bronze age cities, are to be seen in the towns of iron age. There has been no dearth of urban centres with sparse population and mud houses.

Though agrarian surplus collected from rural areas is almost indispensable for the existence of a town, merely a settlement of non-agriculturists cannot be regarded as an urban centre. Early medieval literary texts refer to towns inhabited by people of all classes surrounded by a wall and moat and marked by the prevalence of the laws and customs of the guilds of artisans and merchants. A recent study based on excavated data from 140 sites spread over the entire Indian sub-continent (R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India, c.A.D.300-1000*) focusses on:

- Quality of material life and the nature of occupations, and
- need to study urban centres not as parasites thriving on agricultural surplus but as centres integrally linked with rural hinterland.

Accordingly, some prominent traits of urban centres which can be applied to early medieval settlements as well, are identified as:

- i) Size of a settlement in terms of area and population.
- ii) Proximity to water resources—river banks, tanks, ring wells, etc.
- iii) Presence or absence of artefacts representing activities of artisans, e.g. axes, chisels, plough-shares, sickles, hoes, crucibles, ovens, furnaces, dyeing vats, moulds for beads, seals, sealings, jewellery, terracotta, etc.
- iv) Evidence of coin moulds signifying mint towns. The discovery of metallic money, when listed with the presence of artisans and merchants, certainly lends a clear urban character to such sites.
- v) Presence or otherwise of luxury goods such as precious and semi-precious stones, glassware, ivory objects, fine pottery etc. The possibility is not ruled out that luxuries of ancient towns might become necessities for superior rural classes of early medieval times.
- vi) Considering the moist, rainy climate of many alluvial plains such as the middle Ganga plain, baked brick (not just burnt bricks) structures on a good scale assume special importance. Though in Central Asia towns consisting of mud structures are also not unknown.
- vii) Streets, shops, drains and fortifications also give a good idea of the nature of the urban settlement. At several places in the Deccan and elsewhere silos and granaries occur at historical sites, like at Dhulikatt in Andhra Pradesh. Apparently such structures were meant to store surplus foodgrains for feeding



**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) List the three main phases of urban growth in India prior to the coming of the Turks.

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- 2) What are the important features of a town spelt by Gordon Childe?

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- 3) List the important traits of urban centres applicable to early medieval India.

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## 2.3 THE GENERAL PATTERN

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The post-Gupta centuries witnessed a new socio-economic formation based on the system of land grants. The gradual expansion of cultivation and agrarian economy through land grants (for details, see Unit 1) had an impact on the growth of towns and cities between the eighth and twelfth centuries. Though the overall picture of the Indian sub-continent is that of revival of urban centres, there are some regional variations as well. Such variations are seen in the nature, category and hierarchy of such centres due to operative economic forces, ecological and cultural differences and the nature of political organisation. Regional studies of urban centres are, therefore, essential for providing the correct perspectives. Such studies are available only for a few regions like Rajasthan, Central India and South India.

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## 2.4 REGIONAL VARIATIONS AND TYPES

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In a vast country like India there are a lot of regional variations in the pattern of emergence and growth of urban centres. In this section we will discuss some important variations.

### 2.4.1 Rural Centres Transformed into Urban Centres

The **brahmadeyas** and **devadanas** which are seen as important sources of agrarian expansion of the early medieval period, also provided the nuclei of urban growth. The Brahmana and temple settlements clustered together in certain key areas of agricultural production. Such centres, initially rural, became points of convergence for trade in a variety of commodities. Some of the most important of these centres

Examples of such centres of urban growth are datable from the eighth and ninth centuries and are more commonly found in South India. The Cola city of **Kumbakonam (Kudamukku-Palaiyarai)** developed out of agrarian clusters and became a multi-temple urban centre between the ninth and twelfth centuries. **Kanchipuram** is a second major example of such an urban complex. While **Kumbakonam's** political importance as a residential capital of the Colas was an additional factor in its growth, **Kanchipuram** too had the additional importance of being the largest craft centre (textile manufacturing) in South India.

## 2.4.2 Market Centres, Trade-Network and Itinerant Trade

Early medieval centuries also witnessed the emergence of urban centres of relatively modest dimensions, as market centres, trade centres (fairs, etc.) which were primarily points of the exchange network. The range of interaction of such centres varied from small agrarian hinterlands to regional commercial hinterlands. Some also functioned beyond their regional frontiers. However, by and large, the early medieval urban centres were rooted in their regional contexts. This is best illustrated by the **nagaram** of South India, substantial evidence of which comes from Tamil Nadu and also to a limited extent by the existence of **nakhara** and **nagaramu** in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh respectively. The **nagaram** served as the market for the **nadu** or **kurram**, an agrarian or peasant region. Some of them emerged due to the exchange needs of the **nadu**. A fairly large number of such centres were founded by ruling families or were established by royal sanction and were named after the rulers, a feature common to all regions in South India. Such centres had the suffix **pura** or **pattana**.

**Nagarams** located on important trade routes and at the points of intersection developed into more important trade and commercial centres of the region. They were ultimately brought into a network of intra-regional and inter-regional trade as well as overseas trade through the itinerant merchant organisations and the royal ports. Such a development occurred uniformly throughout peninsular India between the tenth and twelfth centuries. During these centuries South India was drawn into the wider trade network in which all the countries of South Asia, South-east Asia and China and the Arab countries came to be involved (See also Units 3 and 4). The **nagarams** linked the ports with political and administrative centres and craft centres in the interior.

In Karnataka **nagarams** emerged more as points of exchange in trading network than as regular markets for agrarian regions. However, the uniform features in all such **nagarams** is that they acquired a basic agricultural hinterland for the non-producing urban groups living in such centres. Markets in these centres were controlled by the **nagaram** assembly headed by a chief merchant called **pattanasvami**.

A similar development of trade and market centres can be seen in Rajasthan and western parts of Madhya Pradesh. Here, the exchange centres were located in the context of the bases of agrarian production i.e. where clusters of rural settlements occur. In Rajasthan these centres were points of intersection for traffic of varying origins, giving rise to a certain measure of hierarchy. The network was further elaborated with the growth of generations of well-known merchant families in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They are named after their places of origin such as **Osawala (Osia)**, **Shrimalis (Bhinmal)**, **Pallivalas** and **Khandelvalas**, etc. The resource bases, the main routes for the flow of resources and the centres of exchange were integrated through the expansion of these merchant families. Rajasthan provided the main commercial links between Gujarat, Central India and the Ganga valley. Such links were maintained through towns like **Pali**, which connected the sea coast towns like **Dvaraka** and **Bhrigukachcha (Broach)** with Central and North India. Gujarat, with its dominant Jain merchants, continued to be the major trading region of Western India where early historic ports or emporium like **Bhrigukachcha (Broach)** continued to flourish as entrepots of trade in early medieval times. **Bayana**, another notable town in Rajasthan was the junction of different routes from different directions. The range of merchandise started probably with agricultural produce (including dairy products) but extended to such high-value items as horses, elephants, horned animals and jewels.

In Karnataka, the steady increase in towns during the period under review is marked

Shimoga. In the trade with the West i.e. Arabia, Persian Gulf and beyond, the West Coast of Peninsular India played a consistently dominant role from the early historic period. Several ports such as Thana, Goa, Bhatkal, Karwar, Honavar and Mangalore developed during the revival of long distance trade, between the tenth and twelfth centuries, with evidence of coastal shipping and ocean navigation. Surprisingly, this commercial activity was taking place (see also Unit 3) only through limited monetization. Incidentally, the Konkan coast (under the Shilaharas) does not even show any signs of rise of markets and their network.

Wider trade networks also existed between Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil Nadu, for the presence of Kannada, Tamil and Telugu merchants is well attested in several towns such as Belgaun (Karnataka), Peruru in Nalgonda district (Andhra Pradesh) and coastal towns of Visakhapatnam and Ghantasala. The Andhra coast turned to the south eastern trade with Motupalli, Visakhapatnam and Ghantasala acting as the major outlets. Market centres of inter-regional importance are represented by places like Nellore, Draksharama, Tripurantakam and Anumakonda in Andhra Pradesh. On the northern and southern banks of Kaveri in its middle reaches arose a number of exchange points between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu such as Talakkad and Mudikondan.

Kerala developed contracts with the West and foreign traders such as the Jews, Christians and Arabs who were given trading towns under special royal charters. Coastal towns such as Kolikkodu, Kollam etc., became entrepots of South Asian trade. The location of such trading groups as the Anjuvannan and Arab horse dealers enhanced the importance of coastal towns in Karnataka and Kerala.

Major craft centres which developed in response to inter-regional trade were weaving, centres in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Some of the craft and commercial centres of the early historic urban phase survived till the early medieval period and were brought into the processes of re-urbanisation which linked them with the new socio-economic institutions like the temple. Kashi (Varanasi) in the north and Kanchipuram (near Madras) in the south are two very prominent examples of such processes.

### 2.4.3 Sacred/Pilgrimage Centres

The idea of pilgrimage to religious centres developed in the early medieval period due to the spread of the cult of **Bhakti**. Its expansion in different regions through a process of acculturation and interaction between the Brahmanical or Sanskrit forms of worship and folk or popular cults cut across narrow sectarian interests. As a result, some local cult centres of great antiquity as well as those with early associations with brahmanical and non-brahmanical religions, became pilgrimage centres. The pilgrimage network was sometimes confined to the specific cultural region within which a cult centre assumed a sacred character. However, those cult centres, which became sacred **tirthas** attracted worshippers from various regions. Both types of pilgrimage centres developed urban features due to a mobile pilgrim population, trade and royal patronage. The role of emerging market in the growth of **tirthas** is now being recognised by historians in a big way.

Pushkara near Ajmer in Rajasthan was a sacred **tirtha** of regional importance with a dominant Vaishnava association. Kasi (Banaras) acquired a pan-Indian character due to its greater antiquity and importance as a brahmanical sacred centre. In South India, Srirangam (Vaishnava), Chidambaram (Shaiva) and Madurai (Shaiva) etc. developed as regional pilgrimage centres, while Kanchipuram became a part of an all India pilgrimage network. While Melkote was a regional sacred centre in Karnataka, Alampur, Draksharama and Simhachalam show a similar development in Andhra Pradesh. Tirupati was initially an important sacred centre for the Tamil Vaishnavas but acquired a pan-Indian character later in the Vijayanagara period.

Jain centres of pilgrimage emerged in Gujarat and Rajasthan where merchant and royal patronage led to the proliferation of Jain temples in groups in centres such as Osia, Mount Abu, Palitana, etc.

In South India the elaboration of temple structures in sacred centres show two types of urban growth:

- First, it was organised around a single large temple as in Srirangam, Madurai, Tiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu), Melkote (Karnataka), Draksharama and Simhachalam (Andhra Pradesh).
- The second type involves the growth around several temples of different religions such as Shivaism, Vishnuism and Saktism.

The early medieval urbanisation is sometimes characterised as “temple urbanisation” particularly in the context of south India. Sacred centres also provided important links in the commerce of a region as temples and the **mathas** attached to them were the biggest consumers of luxury articles and value goods.

#### 2.4.4 Royal Centres or Capitals

Royal centres of the seats of power of the ruling families were a major category of urban centres in early medieval India. Some of them had been the seats of royal power even in the early historic period, for example, in the **Janapadas** of North India or in the traditional polities of South India. Royal families also developed their own ports, which were the main ports of entry into their respective territories and which also linked them with international commerce. Thus, the commercial needs of royal centres created new trade and communication links and built up much closer relationships between the royal centre and their agricultural hinterlands or resource bases. In all the regions south of the Vindhyas, where brahmanical kingdoms came to be established by the eighth century A.D. there is substantial evidence of the growth of such royal centres. Some representative examples are:

- Vatapi and Vengi of the Chalukyas in the northern Karnataka and Andhra.
- Kanchipuram of the Pallavas with their royal port at Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram).
- Madurai of the Pandyas with Korkai as their port.
- Tanjavur of the Colas with Nagappattinam as their port.
- Kalyana of the Western Chalukyas, Dvarasamudra of the Hoysalas, and
- Warangal of the Kakatiyas with Motupalli at their port.

Warangal was a rare example of a fortified royal city in South India.

Examples of royal centres in North India are:

- the Gurjara Pratihara capital at Kanyakubja (Kanauj).
- Khajuraho of the Candellas.
- Dhara of the Paramaras, and
- Valabhi of the Solankis.

A fairly large number of cities emerged under the powerful Gurjara-Pratiharas, Chahamanas and Paramaras in Rajasthan. Most of them were fortified centres, hill forts (**garhkila** and **durga**). Examples of fort-cities in Rajasthan are:

- Nagara and Nagda under the Guhilas.
- Bayana, Hanumangarh and Chitor under the Gurjara-Pratiharas, and
- Mandor, Ranathambor, Sakambhari and Ajmer under the Chauhans and so on.

On the basis of various sources, a list of 131 places has been compiled for the Chauhan dominions, most of which seem to have been towns. Nearly two dozen towns are identified in Malwa under the Paramaras. Gujarat under the Chalukyas was studded with port towns. The number of towns, however, does not seem to be large in Eastern India although all the nine victory camps (**jayaskandavars**) of the Palas (Pataliputra, Mudgagiri, Ramavati, Vata Parvataka, Vilaspura, Kapilavasaka, Sahasgand, Kanchanapura and Kanau) may have been towns. To these may be added four capitals of the Senas in northern and eastern Bengal, viz. Lakhnauti,

in the Candellas records. The Palas and the Candellas also account for nearly twenty and twentyfour fortresses respectively.

Sometimes, important trade and market centres were also conferred on feudatory families. Examples of such minor political centres are numerous in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) What led to the transformation of some rural centres in to urban?  
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- 2) How did the trading activities help in the growth of towns?  
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- 3) Did religious centres play a role in the process of urbanisation?  
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- 4) Write five lines on "administrative centres as towns".  
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**2.5 LET US SUM UP**

The changes introduced by the system of land grants in the post-Gupta centuries were not confined to a new agrarian economy. Urban settlements, which had been in the state of decay in the few centuries after the arrival of the Guptas, saw a new life infused into them. The revival of trade, rise of new markets, dispersal of political authority and consolidation of economic power by religious establishments had given rise to numerous towns and cities in different regions of the Indian sub-continent with only minor variations noticeable in the relative importance of causative factors.

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**2.6 KEY WORDS**

**Kurram** : sometimes the same as **nadu** (see below) but sometimes only a part of a **nadu**.

**Nadu** : a district or a sub-division; also used in the sense of the local assembly to

**Nagaram/Nakhara/Nagarama** : a sort of merchant assembly located in market towns with wide ranging commercial interests.

**Skandhavar** : military camps—functioning as mobile capitals.

**Tirtha** : sacred/pilgrimage centre.

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## 2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sec. 2.2 under the heading phrases and definition.
- 2) Your answer should include features like large settlements, dense population, large sections of people engaged in artisan crafts and commerce etc. See Sec.2.2 also.
- 3) Seven such traits listed in Sec. 2.2. Please read them and write in brief five of them.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) In some cases the rural centres provided a nuclei for the growth of urban centres. At times rural centres became a point of convergence of trade and developed in to towns. See Sub-sec. 2.4.1.
- 2) Your answer should include factors such as the location of place on a major trade route, interaction of route or market for regional trade or inter-regional trade of a port. See Sub-sec. 2.4.2.
- 3) A number of religious centres developed in towns because these were visited by a vast number of people and in due course markets etc. developed. Also read Sub-sec. 2.4.3 again.
- 4) You should write as to how administrative centres or seats of power developed in established towns. See Sub-sec . 2.4.4.

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# UNIT 3 TRADE AND COMMERCE

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## 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

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## 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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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.

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## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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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 analysed 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 developments. 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

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## 3.2 TRADE : DEFINITION AND PHASES

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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.

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

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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 led to the emergence of a hierarchy of landlords. Even graded state officials such as *maha-mandaleshvara*, *mandalika*, *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:

- What was the nature and extent of such commercial activities?
- Were such activities capable of giving rise to stable commercialised class?
- Who took away the profits of this trade?
- 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 Vighraha, 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,

**Samaracchakaha** of Haribhadra Suri and the **Kuvalayamala** 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.



8. Coins of Tenth Century A.D.

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 upto the eighth century, were deserted thereafter. One can mention Ropar (in Punjab), Atranjikhera and Bhita (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.

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- 2) Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark (✓) or (×).

- 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) How did the Arabs influence the Indian trade between 8th-12th centuries A.D.?

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4) Give main reasons for the decay of towns between 7th-9th centuries A.D.

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### 3.4 THE SECOND PHASE (c.A.D.900 - 1300)

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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 aides to the growth of textile industry in these regions. Manasollasa, a text of the twelfth century, also mentions Paithan, Negapatnam, 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 (tallikas) 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

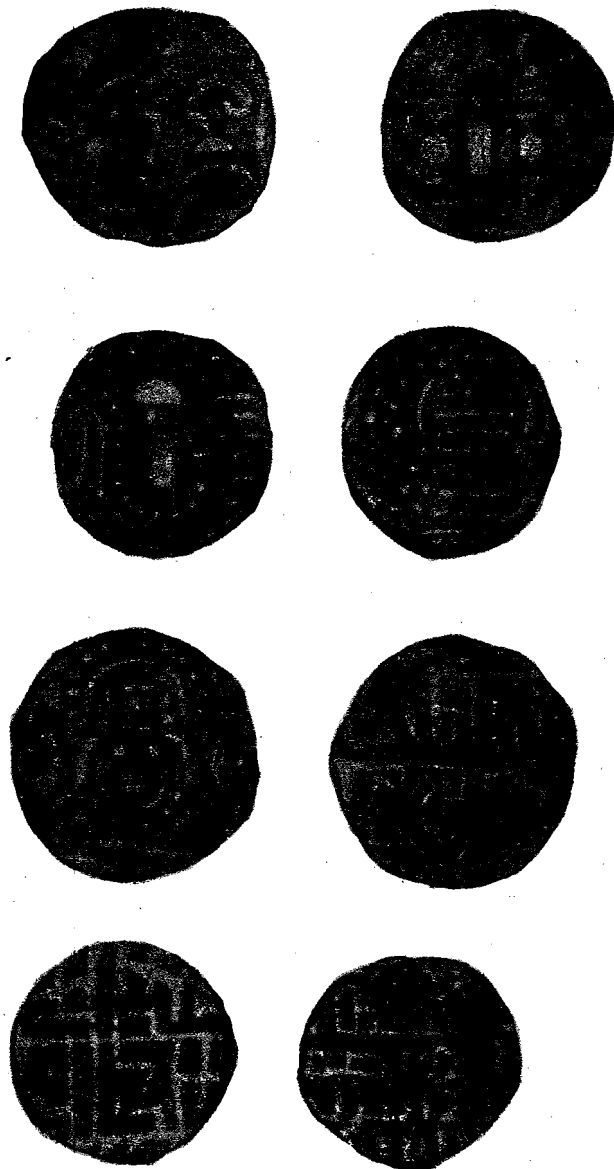
The revival of trade received considerable help from the re-emergence of metal money during the centuries under discussion. There is, however, substantial discussion about the degree and level of monetization. Very often the contenders of the penetration of money in the market invoke literary and inscriptional references to numerous terms purporting to describe various types of coins of early medieval India. Thus texts such as *Prabandhachintamani*, *Lilavati*, *Dravyapariksha*, *Lekhapaddhati*, etc. mention *bhagaka*, *rupaka*, *vimshatika*, *karshapana*, *dinar*, *dramma*, *nishka*, *gadhaiya-mudra*, *gadyanaka*, *tanka*, and many other coins with their multiples. No less prolific are inscriptional references. For example the *Siyadoni* inscription alone refers to varieties of *drammas* in the mid-tenth century. The *Paramara Chalukya*, *Chahmana*, *Pratihara*, *Pala*, *Candella* 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 inscriptional 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 Kirtivarman 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 prove the degree of penetration of

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 carvanas 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 instrument 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 **Lakhpaddhati**, 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.

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

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

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**3.5 ASPECTS OF TRADE**

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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 regional areas. Though both

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, candid 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 linsed 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 transshipment 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, benefices and rights. This new landowning 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 **prasadau**. 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-sec 2.4.3).

#### 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 Honavar (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 Sindh. 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 extremities of Asia, viz. the Persian Gulf and South China. India which lay midway between the two extremities 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

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 forceful 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.

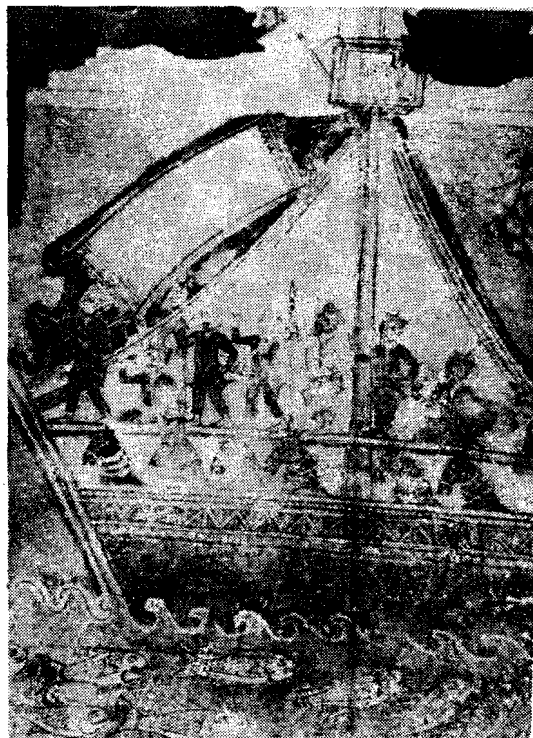
In return for eastern products, India sent its aromatics and spices, particularly pepper. According to Marco Polo pepper was consumed at the rate of 10,000 pounds daily in the city of Kinsay (Hang-Chau) alone. Chao Ju Kua, a Chinese port official of the thirteenth century, tells us that Gujarat, Malwa, 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 Bahrein, Muscat, Aden, Persia, etc. Besides horses, dates, ivory, coral, emeralds, etc. were also brought to India from the West.



10. A 16th century painting from Thirupudaimaruthur Temple in Tirunelveli district showing Arab traders and horses being brought on ships.

### 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 Bhrigukachha 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 Kalingapattam 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 merchants engaged in foreign trade. The

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 guaranteed protection to the storm strayed 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 in so far 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.

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

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

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- 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.

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- b) List 2 ports each of East, West, and South coasts of India during the period under study.

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### 3.6 LET US SUM UP

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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.

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### 3.7 KEY WORDS

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**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.

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### 3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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#### 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.

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# UNIT 4 TRADING COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATION

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## Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Trader as a Link
- 4.3 Position of Merchants during the First Phase (c.A.D.700-900)
- 4.4 Position of Merchants during the Second Phase (c. A.D. 900-1300)
- 4.5 Social Role of Traders
- 4.6 Organisation of Traders
  - 4.6.1 Guilds : Definition and Functions
  - 4.6.2 Organisation of Trading Guilds in South India
- 4.7 Relationship Between Merchants and Craftsmen
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Key Words
- 4.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

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## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you should be able to explain the:

- relative position of traders and merchants in the society during the two major phases of early medieval India, viz. c.A.D.700-900 and c.A.D.900-1300,
- regional characteristics of trading communities,
- major activities of traders,
- types of traders and merchants,
- character and conduct of traders,
- trading guilds and their functioning—both in the North and South India, and
- control of merchants on artisans and craftsmen.

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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Units 2 and 3 in this Block sought to explain the role of trade and commerce in the economic activity and its linkage with the growth of towns and cities. Their place in the overall growth of feudal tendencies was also emphasized. The present Unit ought to be seen as a complementary facet. An attempt has been made here to demarcate the role of traders and merchants in the society with reference to their organised economic activities. The fluctuations in their relative position through centuries have also been shown. The Unit also draws special attention to the overawing influence of big merchants on petty artisans and craftsmen.

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## 4.2 TRADER AS A LINK

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The traders form an important link between producers and consumers. They collect agricultural surplus and products of artisans and craftsmen from different regions and distribute them over a wide area. They trade not only in finished goods but also

During the early medieval centuries, the process of collection and distribution of goods involved a large number of merchants, big as well as small, local as well as inter-regional. There were hawkers, retailers and other petty traders on the one hand and big merchants and caravan traders on the other. The relative position of traders and merchants in the society is related to the two phases of commercial activity outlined in Unit 3. While their role was adversely affected during the first phase (A.D. 700-900) on account of limited commercial exchange, the revival of trade in the second phase (A.D. 900-1300) led to considerable increase in the status, effectiveness and power of merchant communities. The ancient Indian texts specify trade along with agriculture and cattle rearing as the lawful means of livelihood for vaishyas. In the seventh century, the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang distinctly mentions vaishyas as traders and shudras as cultivators. However, the process of the two coming closer had already started and shudras were undertaking trade in such articles as wine, honey, salt, etc. The barriers of brahmanical varna order were crumbling in the post-Gupta centuries and people were adopting professions cutting across varna divisions. Trade was followed by the people of all varnas and castes. Some were compelled to take it up while others found it more lucrative than other economic activities.

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### 4.3 POSITION OF MERCHANTS DURING THE FIRST PHASE (c. A.D. 700-900)

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In view of the relative decline of trade during these centuries, the role of merchants in the society was considerably eroded. As trade slumped and markets disappeared, the merchants had to seek patronage and shelter with the temples and other emerging landed magnates. It robbed them of their independent commercial activity, and forced them to cater to the needs and requirements of their patrons. Some inscriptions from Orissa and Central India reveal that traders, artisans and merchants were amongst those who were transferred to donees. This must have meant a serious reduction in their free trading activities. Nor is there any significant evidence of administrative role being assigned to merchants between the eighth and tenth centuries. This is in obvious contrast to their role in administration evident from seals and sealings from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar during the Gupta period. However, trade did not disappear completely, some merchants were still active, particularly along the coast. But they were small in number and their activities were largely confined to the luxury articles required by kings, chiefs and temples. In South India too, trade was not a very important activity during the centuries under survey. This is indicated by the relative absence of the mention of merchants as a distinct class in the records of the period. In other words, it can be said that the first phase of early medieval India was marked by the thinning away, if not disappearance, of the prosperous and free merchant class.

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### 4.4 POSITION OF MERCHANTS DURING THE SECOND PHASE (c.A.D.900-1300)

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The second phase of early medieval India brought the mercantile community back into prominence, and we notice large number of merchants carrying luxury and essential goods from one place to another. They accumulated fabulous wealth through commercial exchanges and acquired fame in society by making gifts to temples and priests. Many of them took active part at various levels of administration, and even occupied the ministerial positions in royal courts.

The literature and inscriptions of the period refer to the large number of merchants who were known by the specialised trade they followed. Thus, we come across dealers in gold, perfumes, wine, grains, horses, textiles, curds, betels, etc. Some of the merchants employed retailers or assistants to help them in trading activities. As inter-regional trade developed a group of merchants specialised in examining and changing coins for traders.



Moneylending also became one of the major activities of merchants. Though people deposited money in temple treasury for the religious purpose of endowing flowers, oil, lamps, there are very few references to guilds accepting deposits and paying interest thereon. There emerged a separate group of merchants, called **nikshepa-vanika** in western India, who specialised in banking or moneylending. The **Lekhapaddhati**, a text from Gujarat, refers to a merchant's son who claimed his share in the ancestral property to start the business of moneylending. Medhatithi, a legal commentator, speaks of the association or corporation of moneylenders. The contemporary literature, however, presents a bad picture of moneylenders and describes them as greedy and untrustworthy who cheat common man by misappropriating deposits.

This period also witnessed the emergence of many regional merchant groups, i.e. the merchants who were known after the region they belonged to. They were mostly from Western India. As this region had a wide network of important land routes connecting coastal ports with the towns and markets of northern India, the merchants of certain specific places in this region found it more profitable to specialise in inter-regional trade. Thus, the merchant groups called **Oswal** derive their name from a place called **Osia**, **Palivalas** from **Patli**, **Shrimali** from **Shrimala**, **Modha** from **Modhera** and so on. Most of them are now a days collectively known as **Marwaris**, i.e. the merchants from **Marwar**. Apart from their functional and regional names, merchants were also known by various general terms, the two most common being—**shreshthi** and **sarthavaha**. Both these terms were known from very early times.

**Sresthi** was a rich wholesale dealer who lived in a town and carried on his business with the help of retailers and agents. At times he lent out goods or money to small merchants, and thus acted as a banker too, though, as we have already pointed out, moneylending was becoming a separate and specialised activity.

The **sarthavaha** was the caravan leader under whose guidance the merchants went to distant places to sell and purchase their goods. He was supposed to be a highly capable person knowing not only the routes but also the languages as well as the rules of exchange in different regions.

The expansion of agriculture and the availability of surplus from the 8th/9th century onwards led to increase in commercial exchanges in South India too. It resulted in the emergence of a full time trading community looking after the local exchange. This community also participated in wider inter-regional and inter-oceanic trade. As in the North, South Indian merchants too specialised in the trade of specific commodities such as textiles, oil or **ghee**, **betel leaves**, **horses**, etc. At the local level, regional markets called **nagaram** were the centres of exchange. They were situated in a cluster of agrarian settlements, and they integrated not only collection from hinterland but also commercial traffic from other areas.

The numbers of these **nagarams** increased considerably during the Cola period in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the term **nagarattar**, i.e. member of the **nagaram** assembly, became a generic term for all Tamil merchants (See also Unit 2, Sub-sec. 2.4.2).

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Mark (✓) on the right and (X) on the wrong statements given below.
  - i) The merchants had a prominent position in the society during the period c. A.D. 700-900.
  - ii) Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang mentions vaishyas as traders and shudras as cultivators.
  - iii) During the second phase (A.D. 900-1300) merchant community participated even in the state administration.
  - iv) **Sresthi** was a small retailer merchant.
  - v) **Nagaram** were prominent trading centres.

2. Write five lines on the practice of money lending during the period  
A.D. 900-1300.

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## 4.5 SOCIAL ROLE OF TRADERS

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As growth of trade brought economic prosperity to merchants, they sought to gain social prestige by participating in the maintenance of temples, priests and religious functions. Numerous inscriptions refer to the grant of cash or goods by merchants for these purposes. Some merchants became very influential and joined the ranks of state officials and ministers. A tenth century inscription refers to a merchant of Modha caste who was the chief of Sanjan (near Thane) in Maharashtra. In Gujarat, the merchant family of Vimala played an important role in the political and cultural life of the region. He and his descendants Vastupala and Tajapala occupied important ministerial positions at the court and are known for building the famous marble temples dedicated to Jaina gods at Mount Abu. A thirteenth century inscription from central Gujarat reveals that many important merchants, traders and artisans were a part of the local administrative bodies.

### Character and Conduct of Traders

The foreign authors and travellers such as Al-Idrisi (twelfth century) and Marco Polo (thirteenth century) praise Indian traders for their truthfulness and honesty in business dealings. But in the contemporary Indian literature we come across many instances of greedy and dishonest merchants. The Kashmiri author Kshemendra refers to a typically selfish merchant who used to feel overjoyed at the approach of a famine or some other calamity because he could expect good money on his hoarded foodgrains. A text of the eleventh century from Western India, divides merchants in two main class—on the basis of their position and character—high and low. It points out that rich merchants who indulged in large scale sea or land trade enjoyed great reputation while small merchants such as hawkers, retailers, etc. who cheated people by using false weights and measures were looked down upon in society. It also includes artisans in the list of dishonest people. It may, however, be noted that some of these views reflect the contemporary feudal tendency in which persons working with their own hands and resources were considered low in society.

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## 4.6 ORGANISATION OF TRADERS

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The merchants derived their power and prestige not only from wealth but also from the guilds or associations formed by them to protect their interests. In the first phase the decline of trade weakened the corporate activity of merchants, and many of the guilds were reduced to mere regional or occupational sub-castes. But as trade revived in the second phase, merchant guilds reappeared as an important feature of the contemporary economic life.

### 4.6.1 Guilds : Definition and Functions

What was a merchant guild? How did it function? What were the benefits which accrued to its members? These are important questions to be answered. Well the guilds were voluntary associations of merchants dealing in the same type of commodity such as grains, textiles, betel leaves, horses, perfumes, etc. They were formed by both local as well as itinerant merchants. The association of local merchants having permanent residence in town was more permanent in nature than

the association of itinerant merchants which was formed only for a specific journey and was terminated at the end of each venture.

The guilds framed their own rules and regulations regarding the membership and the code of conduct. They fixed the prices of their goods and could even decide that specific commodity was not to be sold on a particular day by its members. They could refuse to trade on a particular day by its members. They could refuse to trade in a particular area if they found the local authorities hostile or uncooperative. The guild merchants also acted as the custodians of religious interests. The inscriptions refer to numerous instances when they collectively agreed to pay an additional tax on the sale and purchase of their goods for the maintenance of temples or temple functions.

The guild normally worked under the leadership of a chief who was elected by its members. He performed the functions of a magistrate in deciding the economic affairs of the guild. He could punish, condemn or even expel those members who violated the guild rules. One of his main duties was to deal directly with the King, and settle the market tolls and taxes on behalf of his fellow merchants. The growth of corporate activity enabled guild-chiefs to consolidate their power and position in society, and many of them acted as the representative of their members on the local administrative councils.

A member of the guild worked under a strict code of discipline and was also robbed of some initiative or action but still he enjoyed numerous benefits. He received full backing of the guild in all his economic activities and was, thus, saved from the harassment of local officials. Unlike a hawker or vendor, he had greater credibility in the market on account of his membership of the guild. Thus, in spite of the fact that guild-chiefs tended to be rude and authoritative at times, the merchants found guilds an important means of seeking physical and economic protections.

The digests and commentaries of the period refer to the corporate body of merchants by various terms, such as **naigama**, **shreni**, **samuha**, **sartha**, **samgha**, etc. The **naigama** is described as an association of caravan merchants of different castes who travel together for the purpose of carrying on trade with other countries. **Shreni**, according to Medhatithi, was a group of people following the same profession such as that of traders, moneylenders, artisans, etc. though some authors considered it to be a group of artisans alone. The **Lekhapaddhati** indicates that a special department called the **Shreni-karana** was constituted by the kings of western India to look after the activities of the guilds of merchants and artisans in their region. Another text **Manasollasa** reveals that many merchant guilds maintained their own troops (**shrenibala**) for personal safety. Inscriptions too refer to the corporate activity of merchants. An inscription from western India refers to **vanika-mandala** which was probably a guild of local merchants.

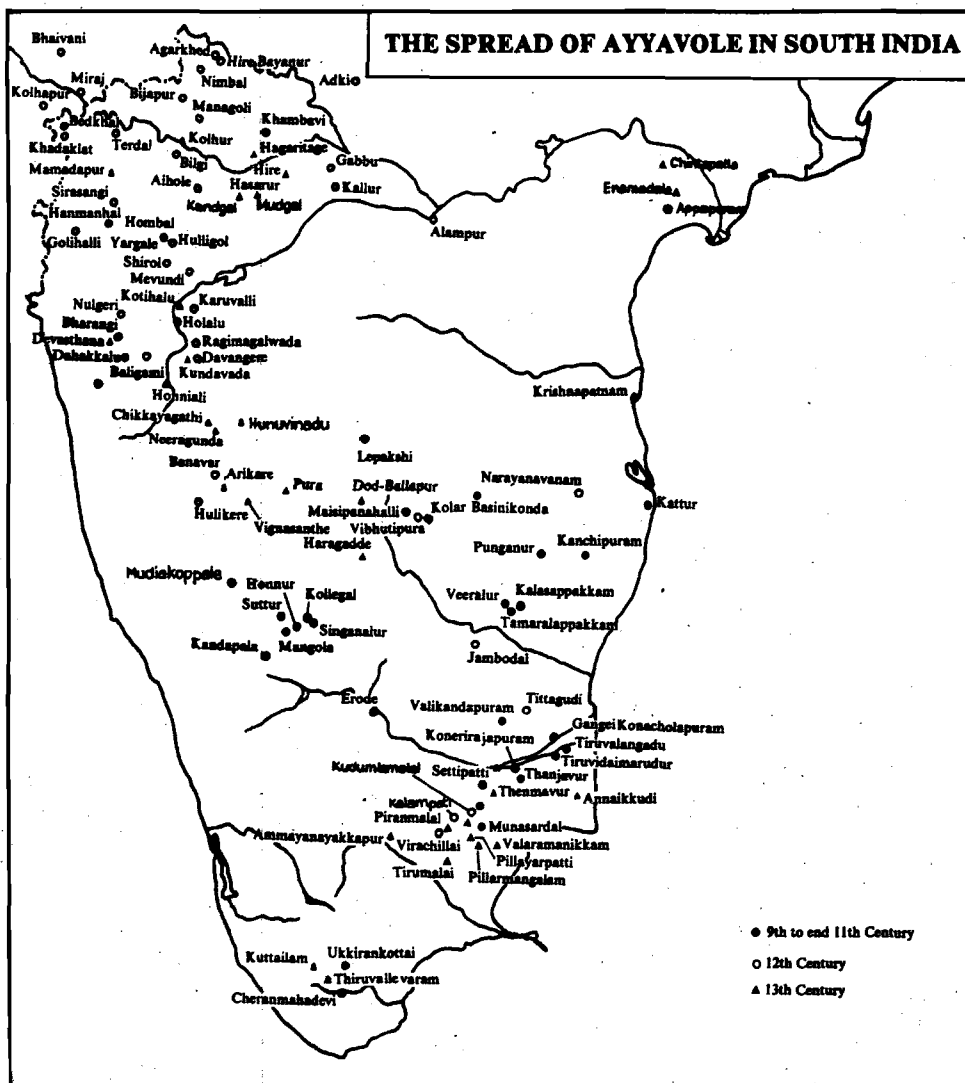
#### 4.6.2 Organisation of Trading Guilds in South India

The expansion of agriculture and the growth of trade from the tenth century led to the emergence of many merchant guilds or organisations in South India too. The inscriptions refer to these organisations often as **samaya**, i.e. an organisation born out of an agreement or contract among its members to follow a set of rules and regulations.

The two most important merchant guilds of South India were known as the **Ayyavole** and the **Manigraman**. Geographically, the area of their operation corresponded to the present day state of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and South Andhra Pradesh. The Cola kings from the tenth century onwards made a concerted effort to trade and commerce through trade missions, maritime expeditions, abolition of tolls, etc. It greatly increased the activities of these guilds which were involved in not only inter-regional but also inter-oceanic trade across the Bay of Bengal.

The merchant guild called **Ayyavole** was also known as the guild of "the 500 Swami of Aihole" **nanadeshi**. While some have argued that such organisations were primarily traders in various types of merchandise and not a single unified corporation of merchants, a detailed study of **Kannada Ayyavole** shows that the

The organisation might have had an initial membership of 500. But there is no denying the fact that with the growth of trade and commerce, the **Vira Bananjas** (representing the trading guild of **Ayyavole**) operated on a trans-regional plane and had developed deep socio-economic interests between the ninth and fifteenth centuries. They spread from Bhalvani (in Sangli district in Maharashtra) in the north to Kayalpattinam (in Tamil Nadu) in the South. The number "five hundred" also became conventional as the guild became a much larger body and drew its members from various regions, religions and castes. It is in this context that the term **nanadeshi** came to be used for this organisation.



In course of outward expansion, the members of the **Ayyavole** guild interacted with the local markets called **nagaram**, and promoted commercial activity by collecting agricultural goods from the hinterland and distributing the goods brought from elsewhere. The commercial influence of **Ayyavole** spread even beyond South India. It is indicated by the inscriptions found at Burma, Java, Sumatra and Sri Lanka. As the mercantile activities of **Ayyavole** increased, some of its members became quite rich and powerful, and acquired the title of **samaya chakravarti**, i.e. the emperor of the trading organisation. It may suggest that as in the North, certain individual merchants in South too were trying to establish their control on the working of

Another important merchant guild of South India was the **Manigramam**. It first appeared along the Kerala coast in the ninth century A.D. However, as it gradually came into close contact with the **Ayyavole**, it greatly improved upon its inter-regional activities and covered a large part of the peninsula. A ninth century Tamil inscription found at Takua pa on the West coast of Malaya indicates that it was engaged in the long distance sea trade from the very beginning.

**Anjuvannam** was another body of merchants in South India, which probably represented an association of foreign merchants, and not a group of five communities or castes as some scholars believe. Like the **Manigramam**, it also began its commercial activity along the Kerala coast in the eighth or ninth century, and gradually spread out to other coastal areas of South India by the eleventh century. It interacted both with local merchants as well as the **Ayyavole** and **Manigramam** organisations.

The importance acquired by trading guilds is apparent in the conscious attempt to trace exalted genealogies of traders of various corporations. The Vira Bananjas of the **Ayyavole**, for instance, are said to have been born in the race of Vasudeva and their qualities are compared with those of various epic heroes. A typical **prashasti** (panegyric) of the Vira Bananjas may be seen in the following description found in the Kolhapur stone inscription of the Shilahar King Gandarditya dated in A.D. 130 :

“Hail! They who are adorned by a multitude of numerous virtues obtained by following the religion of the Five hundred Heroic Men renowned in the whole world; who are virtuous by reason of the maintenance of the code of the heroic Bananjas consisting of truthfulness, pure conduct, agreeable behaviour, political wisdom, courtesy and mercantile knowledge.....who are exalted with their unflinching adventurous spirit....who are born in the race of Vasudeva, Khandali and Mulabhadra...who are invincible when they fight; who are like Brahma in respect of proficiency of the sixtyfour arts; like Narayana in the possession of **Chakra** (discuss); like Rudra, who is the fire of the world destruction in slaying their opponents by their gaze....who are like Rama in perseverance; like Arjuna in valour; like Bhisma in purity of conduct; like Bhima in adventurous spirit; like Yudhishtira in righteousness..... like Karna in charity and like the sun in brilliance.....”

In short, the vast trading network in South India was controlled by a number of merchant organisations which worked in close cooperation and harmony with one another. The guild-chiefs, on account of their control on trade and trading organisations, established close links with the royal houses and enjoyed great name and fame in the society.

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## 4.7 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MERCHANTS AND CRAFTSMEN

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The exact nature of relationship between the merchants and craftsmen, the two interdependent sections of commercial world, is not recorded in the contemporary sources. It is, therefore, not known whether craftsmen such as weavers, metal-workers, etc. acted independently or worked under the command of merchants who supplied them money or raw material or both. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that as merchants came to exert greater control on the mobilisation of raw material and finished products, their influence on the activities of artisans increased considerably.

Albiruni, who came to India in the eleventh century as well as Lakshmidhara, a jurist of the twelfth century, tell us that artisans lived in the midst of merchants. It may suggest that merchants supplied capital and raw material to artisans who were to produce goods as per the demand and specifications provided by merchants. An inscription of the 11th century from Erode in Tamil Nadu refers to an asylum given by merchants to the craftsmen, and thus indicates the dependence of the latter on the merchant organisations. As trade and commerce developed, merchants tended to

ability of artisans to market their goods personally. There are references to some oilmen and weavers who sold their goods themselves and became rich enough to make endowments to temples and priests. In general, the artisans and craftsmen during the early medieval period were economically dependent on big merchants.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) What role merchants played in Administration?

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2) Mark (✓) on the right and (X) on the wrong statements given below.

- i) Al-Idrisi and Marco Polo praise Indian merchants for their honesty.
- ii) During the period under study people working with their own hands were considered low in society.
- iii) Guilds were established by the state to regulate trading.
- iv) Manigramam, the merchant guild in South India came into existence along the Kerala coast.
- v) During the period of our study artisans controlled the merchant activities.

3) Define the Guilds of merchants. List their main functions.

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4) What was the role of Ayyavole in the expansion of trading activities in South India?

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**4.8 LET US SUM UP**

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Seeing trader as an important link between the producer and consumer, this Unit underlined:

- the ups and downs in the relative position of traders and merchants in early

- the centuries of relative decline in trade (c.A.D. 700-900), with the thinning away, if not the complete disappearance of the prosperous and free merchant class;
- the revival of trade and commerce during c.A.D. 900-1300 bringing the mercantile community back into prominence by accumulating fabulous wealth and acquiring fame in society by making gifts to religious establishments. Many traders also become influential with administrative set-up;
- emergence of regional merchant groups;
- organisations of traders, viz. guilds, which regulated corporate activity of merchants;
- trans-regional and inter-oceanic activities of guilds in South India;
- the role of itinerant traders; and
- growing hold of big merchants over artisans and craftsmen.

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## 4.9 KEY WORDS

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**Nagaram** : see Unit 2.

**Nagarattar** : member of nagaram.

**Naigama** : trading guild.

**Nandeshi** : guild of traders having a membership from different regions and castes.

**Prashasti** : descriptions of exaggerated praise.

**Sarthavaha** : caravan leader.

**Shreni** : general term for guild of traders, artisans and craftsmen.

**Shrenibala** : fighting force maintained by guilds.

**Shreshthi** : general term for trader.

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## 4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) × ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) × (Sreshti was a rich wholesale dealer ) v) ✓
- 2) During this period money lending was emerging as a specialised commercial practice. See section 4.4.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should include the influence of merchants in society and their position in administration. Also read section 4.5.
- 2) i) ✓ ii) ✓ iii) × iv) ✓ v) × (artisans were mostly dependent on merchants)
- 3) The guilds were voluntary associations of merchants dealing in the same commodity. The main functions of guild were to fix the prices, area of activity, decide market regulations, etc. See sub-section 4.6.1.
- 4) The Ayyavole was the guild of merchants in South India. This was a strong body of merchants and contributed to the expansion of trade not only in South India but overseas also.

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## SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

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