CHAPTER - IV

DECLINE OF URBAN CENTRES
On the basis of trade, commerce, coins, structures and town-planning system, we can confidently say that urbanism reached its peak in ancient India in the post-maurya period. In the post-maurya period, the growing crafts and commerce and the increasing use of money promoted the prosperity of numerous towns. Most of the towns flourished during the Kuśāna period¹ in the first and second centuries A.D. This may be said on the basis of excavations which have revealed better structures belonging to the Kuśāna period. After A.D. 300 the process of decline started.² There were two phases of decline: one around A.D. 300 and the other around A.D. 600. The decline of trade led to the decay of towns.³ From the Gupta period, however, we have unmistakable evidence of the decline of number of urban centres and port-towns which developed in early period.

Inscriptional evidence shows the process of decline of trade and urban centers in ancient period. The literary and epigraphic sources give us a clear picture about urban decline. In post-gupta period the practice of land

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² Indu Banga (ed.), *The city in Indian History, Urban Demography, Society and Politics*, P. 14.

grants by the kings and chiefs for religious purposes became a common thing, but generally urban artisans and merchants were not consulted in making grants. In many early charters the consent of the official, dignitaries and other classes of people was sought for the land grant. The participation in administration of the merchants, traders and artisans living in the town has not been mentioned in the charters. Therefore the non-participation of the merchants, traders and artisans in administration demonstrates the sharp decline of trade and urban centres.⁴

The decline of trade and urban centres in Gupta times can be inferred from the Vṛhatsamhitā of Vārāhamihira, an astronomer who lived in the last quarter of the fifth and first half of the sixth century A.D.⁵ Vṛhatsamhitā speaks of the decline of the towns, trade and traders, and also of crafts and craftsmen.⁶ The economic condition of the people in the Gupta period was very precarious due to poverty, commercial failure, family ruin etc.⁷ Therefore the Vṛhatsamhitā strongly confirms the archaeological evidence in urban decline in Gupta times.⁸ During this period the industrial

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⁶. Vṛhatsamhitā, XI. 59.
⁸. Vṛhatsamhitā, XI. 59.
workers or craftsmen were neglected by the rulers. It is significant that smiths who were engaged in various types of metallurgical works involving the production of iron ware for home use and long distance trade are shown in a bad plight. It indirectly affected the process of urban development.

Several texts give less importance to towns and far more importance to village. The Arab geographers of the ninth and tenth centuries, who were more familiar with India refer to the fewness of the town in the country as a whole. Merchant Sulaiman (A.D. 851) states that the greater part of India was without towns though large fortified towns were found in every part of China. K.A. Ashrafyan identifies twenty-two important pre-kusān towns, which cover not only northern India but also parts of Central and Western India. Most of these towns existed as religious centres when other lost their urban character. Thus the process of the decline and disappearance of ancient towns is very clear. It will be seen that Indian literary evidence for urban decline in Gupta and Post-Gupta times is not


10. Ibid., p. 193.


strong. On the other hand indigenous texts are not totally giving references to urban decline. What is far more important is that the inscriptions, and foreign accounts broadly corroborate the decline indicated by excavations.

Another theoretical aspects of the decline of urban centres was most probably the corruption in early Indian trade. The corruption in trade in market places was very acute during the Gupta period. As a result many towns were deserted. The ancient Indian trades men resorted to all kinds of corrupt practices to accumulate wealth. Trade had become vitally connected with the growth of urbanization. With the growing popularity of trade among the Vedic Aryans, a wealthy class of merchants came into existence. These group of merchants were known as Pani. The Panis became very unpopular because of their unscrupulous profiteering.

During the post-vedic period trade and industry had almost come to be localized. We have references to the localized guilds of traders and industrialist in the Jātakas and other literature of the period. Kautilya gives us clear idea about city planning, the settlement of merchants, trading in different commodities in different sectors of the town. With the tremendous

16. Ibid.
rise of the trade in the sixth century B.C. it attracted the notice of the kings, who regarded it as their sacred duty to provide financial help only to encourage the development of production and its distribution. As a result the governmental patronage and governmental interference in the trade was increased. In order to avoid the governmental interference, the traders formed their own organizations (guilds)\(^{19}\) to finance them in time of need. This resulted in the rise of class of wealthy merchants, known as Setthis,\(^{20}\) Who gradually gained control over the trade systems and finance, both individually and on a partnership basis, giving rise to trade monopoly in later days.

In ancient period the main feature of business transaction was *Kraya-Vikraya*\(^{21}\) (purchase and sale). As in modern times, so in early days, guilds and big partnership were formed mainly by wholesale dealers where as the daily transaction in different commodities were largely conducted by individual merchants. According to Panini the main motive of a business man carrying on business was profit on the capital invested by him.\(^{22}\) So it indicates that the greatest satisfaction of a trader was more and more profit. The *Smriti* literature and *Jātakas* make it clear that the traders usually

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resorted to the practice of haggling to settle the prices of different commodities.23 This evil practice in the trading centres created a lot of problem in the business transaction. However, *Arthasastra*24 clearly expressed this type of practice in Mauryan period. Like modern trading community, the traders of those days also hoarding the daily needs in order to sell them at higher price.25 The monopoly of business men in hoarding the commodities was yet another evil practice prevailing in the trading centres.

Like the modern traders, the traders of ancient India followed the evil practice of the adulteration of different articles. It is clear from the *Jātaka* stories that adulteration was condemned by all sections of society in ancient times.26 Most of the *Smriti* texts and *Arhasāstra* of Kautilya mentioned different types of adulteration and the king is advised to inflict heavy punishment on the adulterators.27 There is a reference of adulteration of different commodities like butter, salt, scent, rice and molasses. Even the medicine was not spared by the traders.

Besides adulteration, wrong weights and measures were yet another evil practice indulged in all trading community in early days. Dishonest dealings in the market and wrong weights and measures were the most easy methods of cheating the common masses. The practice had become so rampant that the state had taken number of steps to check this type of unfair business dealings.\(^{28}\) In this direction the Mauryan state was so particular that special officers were appointed to examine weights and measures from time to time.\(^{29}\) In the Kautilya\(\bar{\text{n}}\) state, the use of correct weights and measures was a legal necessity. He therefore, wanted to have a reasonable regulation in the larger interest of all classes.\(^{30}\) He believed in a just price, just profit and just remuneration. It is the mauryan state which appears to have made remarkable achievement in fixing the market prices and also controlling the market regulations from time to time.

The \textit{Purānas} and other texts which had been completely developed by the 4th century A.D., i.e., the Gupta age\(:\) present a clear picture of the standard of trade and the condition of the markets. Viewed in this context it will be seen that dishonest dealings were rampant everywhere in the

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30. Ibid., P. 70.
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market during the Gupta period and afterwards. During the Gupta period and after, it was realized that gain on purchase and of merchandise of every sort should be in proportion to the price already paid. With this end in view the merchants were directed to fix a just price of their merchandise according to the locality and season, and not to indulge themselves in dishonest dealings. So a merchant must always strictly follow these principles to carry on an honest business. But unfortunately, however, we have no direct or indirect reference about the price fixation by the Gupta rulers as we have in the age of Mauryas.

In the Gupta period or in the later periods the prices of the different articles were not stable, and fluctuated according to the supply and demand of the commodities in the market. The prices of corn, oil, gold, sea products, honey and other commodities, some times rose rapidly to double and triple the normal price. Under reverse conditions, however, merchandise became very cheap, sometimes resulting in heavy losses to the merchants.

The literature and inscriptions of this period mentioned the weights such as

32. Ibid. 12.
34. Ibid.
pala, adhuka, prastha, khāri, drona, etc., which were used for measurement of food grains and other similar articles. Kalidas and other writers of the period mention about the weighing balances and measuring rods for weighing different articles and measuring length etc.\textsuperscript{35} We can safely say that this fall in the standard of morality of the trading community and corruption in trade system reflects an all-round deterioration in trade and urban character during this period.\textsuperscript{36}

We cannot ignore the role of urbanism in developing the ancient Indian economy. A large number of people were involved in urban activity, even when a large section of population was left out of it. Urbanism did mean something in terms of economy and something of polity and society in as much as soldiers, Brahmanas, artisans and merchants who lived in towns are supported by means of what was gathered by way of taxes and exchange.\textsuperscript{37} The towns were equally relevant to the country side. To meet the need of the towns the peasants living in the hinterland supplied their surplus food grains, while the artisans supplied the tools to the peasants. We hear from a \textit{Jātaka}\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} \textit{Raghuvaṁśa}, VIII, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{36} V.K. Jain, "The Role of Arab Traders in Western India During Medieval Period", \textit{PIHC}, Vol II, pp. 164-171.
\item \textsuperscript{37} R.S. Sharma, \textit{Urban decay in India}, p. 148.
\item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{Jātaka}, II, p. 181.
\end{itemize}
story how a village trader deposited 500 plough shares with the town merchants to sell them to the farmers.

If we analyse the settlement patterns of the town in ancient period we find that it was surrounded by a group of villages. Though there was difficulty of transportation in ancient times, towns could not receive their day-to-day requirements from distant places. The Pāli texts speak of forests in the vicinity of several towns. There was a wide gap between the interland and the towns. It can not be ignored that the towns played an important role to develop the ancient Indian economy. But why did the towns decline? The process of decline was started after A.D. 300 and again after A.D. 600. Trade with the Roman empire ended in the third century and silk trade with Iran and the Byzantium stopped in the middle of the sixth century. India carried on some commerce with China and South-East Asia but its benefits were reaped by the Arabs who acted as middlemen.39

In the pre-muslim period the Arabs practically monopolized the export trade of India. The decline of trade for well over three hundred years after the sixth century is strikingly demonstrated by the practical absence of gold coins in the country. The paucity of coins after the sixth century is true not only of north India but also of south India. The Sātavāhana empire, which

39. R.S. Sharma, Urban decay in India, p. 149.
brought a lot of gold from outside, also ended; the central Asian trade also tapered off. On the other hand the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Bhāgya Purāṇa* and some other *Purāṇas* which are attributed to the end of the third century A.D. and the beginning of the fourth century A.D. India faced a kind of social crisis. The *Purāṇas* vividly describe about the *Kali Age* (*Kaliyuga*), which unfortunately seems to be unending in this country.

The first and second centuries A.D. was marked by bumping trade and urbanism. The climax of the old order was reached in about third century. Then its progressive role seems to have been exhausted. Around the third century A.D. the old social formation was affiliated with a deep crisis. The crisis is clearly reflected in the description of the *Kali-Age*.⁴⁰ The *Kali Age* is characterized by *Varnaśamkara*, which means the inter mixture of *varṇas* or social orders, which implies that the Vaiśya and Śūdras either refused to perform their duties or the vaiśya peasants declined to pay taxes and the Śūdras refused to do their works.

Another social crisis was land grants. This crisis ultimately changed the ancient Indian society into medieval society. This crisis severely affected the ancient social order. Land grants⁴¹ became frequent from the

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fifth century A.D. According to this system the brahmanas were granted villages which were free from taxes. All the taxes which were collected from the villages by the king were transferred to the brahmanas. In addition to this the Brahmanas were given the right to govern the people living in the donated villages. Even the government officials and royal officers were not allowed to enter into the gift villages. So the brahmanas not only collected taxes from the peasants and artisans but also maintained law and order in the villages granted to them. Villages were granted to the brahmanas for ever, Consequently the power of the king was heavily undermined at the end of the Gupta period. In the Maurya Period taxes were assessed and collected by the agents of the king and law and order was maintained by them.42 In the Maurya period the officers of the state from the highest to the lowest were generally paid in cash. This practice continued under the Kusānas, who issued a large number of copper and gold coins, and it lingered under the Guptas.

But from the sixth century A.D. the position seems to have changed. With practice of land grants, there also began the practice of granting shops: even whole towns were granted,43 as recorded in inscriptions and also by HsuanTsang. The grant of shops, towns and villages meant restrictions on trade and commerce and on the free operation of trader.44 It

42. R.P. Kangle, op.cit., p. 12.
43. Indu Banga (ed.) op.cit. p. 16.
44. S. Beal, The Life of Hsuan Tsang, op.cit. pp. 210-212.
was a process of feudalization of towns. But the most significant consequence of land grants was the emergence of a class of land lords living on the produce of the peasants. This prepared the ground in about the 5th-6th centuries A.D. for a new type of social formation which can be called feudal.

So it appears that if town declined, their technology diffused. Artisans migrated from the urban to rural areas. When the town declined, the Brahmanas too migrated to the country side and thus contributed towards the spread of technology. Thus, a different type of socio-economic pattern existed in early medieval India. While the towns existed, goods and services were evaluated and obtained in terms of money, but when the towns disappeared, goods and services might have been evaluated in terms of money but they were obtained through land grants. The early medieval period did not exactly have a self sufficient economy, but most local needs were locally met. This type of system continued upto about A.D. 1000. When there was a mild revival of urbanism which became prominent by the fourteenth century.

The decline of trade led to the decay of towns. Town flourished in west and north India under the Sātavāhanas and Kuśānas. A few cities

47. R.N. Nandi, op.cit., pp. 80-89.
continued to thrive during Gupta period. But the post-Gupta period witnessed the ruin of many old commercial cities in north India. Excavations show that several towns in Haryana and east Punjab,\textsuperscript{49} Purānā Qilā (Delhi),\textsuperscript{50} Mathurā,\textsuperscript{51} Hastināpur (Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh), Śārvastī (Uttar Pradesh), Kauśāmbī\textsuperscript{52} (Allahabad in U.P.), Rājghat,\textsuperscript{53} Chirand\textsuperscript{54} (Bihar), Vaiśālī and Pāṭaliputra\textsuperscript{55} (Bihar) began to decline in the Gupta period and mostly disappeared in Post-Gupta times.\textsuperscript{56} The Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang visited several towns in India but he found them almost deserted or dilapidated conditions.\textsuperscript{57} On account of restricted market for Indian exports, artisans and merchants living in these towns flocked to the countryside and engaged themselves in cultivation. On account of the decay of trade and towns the villagers had to meet their needs in respect of different articles like salt, 

\textsuperscript{49} B.B. Lal, "Excavation at Hastināpura and other explorations in the upper Gaṅgā and Sutlej Basin." \textit{AI}, no.5, pp. 5-151. 

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{IAR}, 1969-70, p.5. 

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{IAR}, 1954-55, pp. 15-16. 

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{IAR}, 1953-54, p.9. 


\textsuperscript{54} \textit{IAR}, 1970-71, p.7. 


\textsuperscript{56} Y.D. Sharma, 'Remain of Early Historical cities', \textit{Archaeological Remains, Movements and Museums}, Pt. 1, p. 61. 

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Si-yu-ki}, I, p. 179 and 235.
oil, spices, cloth etc. As a result this gave rise to smaller units of production, each unit meeting its own needs.

From the sixth century A.D. onwards some changes occurred in the social organization. During this period old brahmanical order was modified. This modified social order spread from north India into Bengal and south India.\(^{58}\) Thus in the sixth and seventh centuries we notice certain striking development in polity, society, economy, language, and religion. This shows that in this period ancient India was coming to an end and medieval India was taking shape.

The Indian sub-continent is sea-girt on the east, west and south. Its geographical setting presented ideal opportunities for the development of Indian maritime activities. Literary and archaeological evidences bear ample testimony to this.\(^{59}\) The contribution of ancient Orissa is not easy to access, but it is now generally admitted that it exerted great influence on the development of maritime trade of India. Orissa's maritime trade received a great setback when Rājarāja Chola, a ruling king in the south, captured a large territories of Kalinga in south-East Asian countries between A.D. 985

\(^{58}\) R.S. Sharma, *Urban decay in India*, p. 112-114.

to 1014. Later on, because of the Arab interference in the Indian ocean, the maritime trade was disturbed. The Gangas could not protect it because at the time they were very busy in solving the internal disturbances. The decline of the oceanic trade was also due to the loss of demand for the Orissan commodities exported from the coastal ports. Further, lack of metals and currency might have reduced the price line of commodities and failed to enhance the saving capacity of the individual farmers thus contributing to the decline in trade of ancient Orissa.

The literary and religious texts mention Chilikā, Paloura-Dantapura, Pithunda, Tāmralipti, Che-lī-tā-lo as the big ports of Orissa providing shelter to the sea-going vessels. Ships from these ports plied to Jāvā, Sumātrā, Mālaya, Bāli, China, Thiland, Srilanka and other places. The Jaina Uttarādhyañyana Sūtra and the Hātiguṇīpā inscription mention that the deserted pithunda port was renovated by king Khāravela. The trade relation of Orissa with other countries has been discussed in Chapter II. These ports

60. N.K. Sahu, Maritime Trade and Travell of Orissa (Oriya), pp. 292-93.
63. Ibid.
were in a flourishing condition up to 4th century A.D. How these ports and trade centres could have gone into disuse?

The unrestrained expansion of the administrative machinery, increase of office personnel, introduction of metallic currency to meet the increased burdens of the Government. Within two centuries the size of Orissan army increased immensely. The greater part of revenue was spent in maintaining army organisation. The only alternative to save the empire from the economic crisis was the imposition of heavy taxes over the primary producers, trade and business. Due to heavy imposition of taxes by the rulers, the sailors as well as traders of Orissa lost their interest in maritime trade in business.

The decline of towns under mined the ability of the tradesmen to pay taxes in Gupta and post-Gupta times. Like agriculture, trade and industry had also to bear its own burden of taxation. The general name Sulka seems to refer to the taxes on trade in the form of customs, excise and octroi charges. Octroi Tax was levied on almost all articles imported to the town.

68. Ibid. p. 160.
69. *Aṣṭadhyāyī*, V.1, p. 47.
The state charged this duty on the ground that it had to spend huge amounts on the maintenance of the roads which were used by merchants to carry their goods from one place to another place.\textsuperscript{70} The octroi duties were usually collected at the entrance of the town by an officer known as Saulkika.\textsuperscript{71} The payment was made either in cash or kind. The octroi tax varied on different articles. There was no fixed octroi tax for the entire country and its rate differed in different states and under different rulers. Kautilya mentioned that essential goods like grain, oil sugar, pots were taxed at one-twentieth of their value, while other goods were taxed between one-fifteenth and one-fifth. The commodities intended for religious ceremonies as well as presents for the bride were exempted from octroi taxes. People had also to pay ferry for tax for goods, cattle carts etc. This tax was however very nominal. In addition to above taxes the businessmen and traders had to pay certain other taxes.\textsuperscript{72} They paid fee for the testing and stamping of the weights and measures. In certain areas shop tax was also charged, and we get frequent references about this tax in the \textit{smritis} as well as different inscriptions.\textsuperscript{73} People engaged in industry were also subjected to a number of taxes.\textsuperscript{74}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} U.N. Ghosal, \textit{A History of Indian Public Life}, p. 257.
\item \textsuperscript{71} R.P. Kangle, op.cit., pp. 12-14.
\item \textsuperscript{72} U.N. Ghosal, op.cit., pp. 258-259.
\item \textsuperscript{73} S.C. Ray Choudhury, \textit{Social, Cultural and Economic History of India (Ancient times)} pp. 210-212.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
In ancient period villages were not free from the taxes. The village was oppressed with eighteen types of taxes. During the Gupta and Post-Gupta period the burden of taxation was so heavy that the traders, merchants and villagers could not pay their dues in time. At the same time the king maintained a large standing army. This practice can be inferred from the account of an Arab merchant Sulaiman. He states "The troops of the kings of India are numerous, but they do not receive pay". These large army were maintained by taxes collected from the peasants, traders and businessmen. When the king imposed and forcefully collected different types of taxes from the urban area it was unbearable on the part of the businessmen to meet the demands. A far more important consequence was the migration of the businessmen and artisans from towns to the village-side. As a result of this migration the towns became deserted. Such migrations and changes in profession seems to be a natural phenomenon. Migration seem to have assumed several forms. Most artisans may have migrated to the hinterland whose raw produced supported them. In view of the decline of the towns, we may assume that artisans migrated for short or long distances and earned their livelihood by serving the rural population. In the process they dispersed their


76. H.M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, I. p. 7.

crafts in the rural areas so that villagers could become self contained and self reliant. As a consequence of urban decline the occupations of artisans were ruralized.78

When the village became self sufficient, automatically the town lost its importance. As a result a number of rural settlement developed due to the decay of the main town. Just as the elements of the Harappan culture spread in rural settlements in Sind, Gujrat, Haryana and Rajasthan after the disappearance of the main centres, a similar development may have taken place after the urban phase of Kuśāna and Satavāhana times and also after the decay of urbanism in Gupta times.

The Buddhist and sanskrit texts describe that the decay of towns affected the source of livelihood of Brāhmaṇas.79 So the Brāhmaṇas left the towns and moved to the rural areas for finding sources of subsistence which comprised land grants.80 The epigraphs of the fourth seventh centuries mention the migration of Brāhmaṇas from a good many towns,81 including

81. Ibid., pp. 80-84.
Ayodhya, Kanauj, Mathurā, Śrāvastī, Ujjain, Vidisha and Valabhi. It is significant that there was a large scale migration of brāhmanas from towns to countryside during post-Gupta period. The sites of many towns from where the brāhmanas migrated have been excavated, and they appear in a state of decay in Gupta and post-Gupta times. Unlike the brāhmanas the buddhist monks did not live within the boundary of the city. At that time most of the Buddhist monasteries were situated near to the town. The Buddha generally spent the rainy season in the city. In early historic times the town was a strong centre of Buddhism. It was obvious that when towns declined the neighbouring monastories declined. Town was the most important source of income to manage the monasteries. When town disappeared automatically the old monasteries faded away.

Large structures, called *Vihāras* or *Mahāvihāras* sprang up independently in towns during Gupta and post-Gupta times. These *Vihāras* or Mahāvihāras were managed by Buddhist monks with the support of land grants. Several examples of land grants to monasteries in Orissa have come

82. Ibid., pp. 84-88.
to notice. A copper plate of the sixth century records the grant of village for establishing a *Vihāra* or monastery at Bodhipadraka, for worship of the God *Arya-Avalokitesvara*. Excavations show that Ratnagiri, about seventy, five kms. to the south-west of Cuttack town of Orissa, was monastic establishment comparable to Nālanda. The place was obviously supported by land grants. Due to land grants early medieval Hindu temples as well as Jain and Buddhist establishments functioned as self-sufficient economic units in a large measure. The monks could no longer depend on ancient towns, which had either decayed or disappeared.

There is a common belief among the historians that the post-Gupta period marks the decline of the oceanic trade and urban centres. This period witnessed the evolution of feudalism in the land system. Feudalisation of the administrative machinery might have brought an end to the self-sustained politico-economic units in the villages. The period witnessed the decline of the Buddhist and the Jaina monasteries. Some of

88. Ibid., p. 232.
90. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism, C 300-1200*. pp. 64-76.
these monasteries survived with the Hinduisation of the Buddhist and the Jaina deities receiving patronage of the Hindu monarchs and rich devotees. This growth of intermediary interests in the land-ownership as well as quantitative increase in the wage-earner class brought an end to community-ownership over some particular types of landed estates. The decline in the trade and commerce possibly with the withdrawal of royal patronage from the ports and paucity of currency in circulation might have encouraged the tendency of conversion of the merchant and the artisan classes in to the land-owning classes.

Another important reason for the decline of urban centres is that in ancient period there was no specific banking system like today. In recent years scholars have also paid some attention to the problem of banking system, which indirectly affected the trade and commerce. Though there was no specific banking system the markets were under the control of a group of money lenders. These money lenders supplied financial help to the weak merchants living in the town. Though on the one hand the money lenders indirectly connected with the growth of the towns on the other hand they were

responsible for its decline. At the time the rate of interest was not the same. It varied form time to time and place to place. We get some reference about the different rates of interest from the literary texts and epigraphs, which changed the economic conditions including the state of money economy. Reference to rate of interest are found from the fifth-fourth century B.C. on wards. The Arthaśāstra of Kautilya mentions the rate of interest was 15 percent per annum. It was the normal rate of interest and commonly accepted. On the whole, during the first phase of early medieval period, the rates of interest were increased. The legal text of this period show that the normal rate of interest was shifted from 15 percent per annum to 24 percent. This interests was mostly applicable to ordinary loans in normal times. The loans given for trade and business purposes fetched higher interest. On Commercial loans the rates of interest i.e., 120 and 240 percent per annum is mentioned in the Arthaśāstra.

The above discussion reveal that, it was the general tendency of the money lender to increase the rate of interest from time to time, ignoring

96. L. Gopal, Economic Life of Northern India, A.D. 700-1200, Ch. VIII.
97. P.V. Kane, op.cit., pp. 411-461.
98. R.S. Sharma, Light on Early Indian Society and Economy, p. 121.
the condition of the society. The normal rate of interest was raised from 15 percent per annum to 24 percent between A.D. 600 to A.D. 1000. But it was reduced in the succeeding two centuries. The first phase of the early medieval period obviously coincides with languishing state of economy characterized by the paucity of coins, growing insecurity on account of political disturbances and robbery, poverty to the common people on account of repeated famines and floods and the oppressive features of taxation by the chief, officials and money lenders, who could not afford to pledge something against the loans taken by them. These phenomena appear to have been the main reasons for the increasing rates of interest. But the rates of interest were, generally, reduced to a considerable extent in the second phase of the early medieval period on account of redeveloping money economy and urban life. This phase may have partly been connected with the revival of trade and urban centres.

100. R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, p. 143.
The interference of foreign traders as well as invaders in the economic affairs of the state was also one of the major cause of the decline of trade and urban centres. Before the seventh century the Oceanic trade was being shared by the different countries. But with the rise of Islam and the advent of the Arabs in the soil of India, changed the economic position of the country. To understand the role of the Arab traders in India, two facts have to be borne in mind: (a) increase in the use of the sea route, and (b) decline in direct trade contact with other countries. Within a short period the Arabs established their trading centres all over the countries and became the most important and dominant group. Another factor which was partly helpful to the Arab traders to establish their monopoly trade that was the Arab invasion of India.

On the eve of Arab invasion of India, the country presented a spectacle of a house divided with different states involved in wars against each other. Infact after the death of Harshavardhan in 647 A.D., the country had broken into number of independent states. Economically the country was quite rich. Majority of the people lived in villages and depended on agriculture. Another notable feature of the economic life was that the villages constituted the basic unit of organisation. Each village was self-sufficient and

produced items of common use. At that time trade and industry also flourished and Indian goods found ready in the market of foreign countries. The trade was mainly the monopoly of the Vaiśyas. This was economic position of India before the invasion of Arabs.

After acquiring an idea into the economic and political situation of the country the Arabs undertook an invasion of Sind in the beginning of the 8th century.\textsuperscript{108} On the other hand the Arabs were greatly attracted by the richness and wealth of India. The Arabs had maintained commercial contact with India for a long time and were greatly attracted by its material prosperity. This encouraged the Arabs to undertake an expedition to India.\textsuperscript{109} The conquest was undertaken in A.D. 712. This conquest was a great blow to the trade and commerce of India. The conquest of Sind by the Arabs in A.D. 712, however, altered the picture. The conquest marks the beginning of the ascendancy of their commercial dominance in India.\textsuperscript{110} It exhibited the superior naval power of the Arabs with whom the Indians found difficult to compete. It scared away the Indian traders to the interior where they developed new centres of trade.\textsuperscript{111} By the tenth century, the Arabs

\textsuperscript{108} H.M. Elliot and J.Dowson, op.cit., pp. 115-116, 415-461.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
were settled in large numbers in the coastal areas and carrying on the profession of trade and commerce. Slowly and gradually the Arabs started penetrating inside the country for the collection of local products. Different texts also confirm that the Arab traders and shippers hold commanding positions at the important ports and trade centres of India.\textsuperscript{112} It is pointed out that one of the factors for the decline in Indian shiping might have been the taboo against sea voyages.\textsuperscript{113} We, however, believe that religious restrictions must have been the main barrier to the desire of profit accruing out of sea trade and that the religious prejudice was the expression of the decay of Indian maritime activity. The decline in Indian navigation resulted in the loss of Indian control on foreign trade.

With the passage of time the Arabs strengthened their economic hold on the ports of Indian and the local kings were forced to come to an understanding with them. Driven away from foreign trade, the Indian merchants were now confined to the coastal and internal trade. It is true that the foreign invasion was one of the most important factors for the decline of urban centres and ports.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} A.L. Basham, "Notes on seafaring in Ancient India", \textit{Arts and Letter}, Vol. XX III, PP.66-96.
The interference of the Arabs in the Indian ocean disturbed the maritime trade of Orissan traders. They collected commercial taxes from the traders of Orissa. The ruler of Orissa could not protect the maritime trade interest due to internal disturbances. As a result the Orissan merchants had lost their interest in maritime trade. The absence of peace and order cut slowly at the roots of the seaborne trade of Orissa.

The tragedy lies when Orissa was frequently visited by droughts and famines. That completely ruined the age-old Oceanic trade which subsisted from a remote past and constituted an avenue for procuring precious metals from outside Orissa. On the other hand the recession of the sea water from the old port, lack of protection from the monarchs against heavy competition of the southern merchants, collapse of internal law and order system, occupation of sea-route by the foreign invaders and pirates and lack of surplus resources for trade\textsuperscript{114} were mainly responsible for the decline of Orissan maritime trade and its urban centres Other natural factors like coastal sedimentation, development of sand dunes in the navigational channels, change of river courses, floods, cyclones, sea level fluctuations etc. perhaps played a vital role in the destructions of Orissan port-cities.

The coast line was constantly affected by the physical process which were the net results of prevailing coastal currents causing

\textsuperscript{114} R.K. Mookherjee, op.cit., PP. 134-140.
sedimentation in a particular pattern. We can presume that these processes might have destroyed some of the important port-cities of ancient Orissa. Most of the port-cities of Orissa were situated on the coast of Bay of Bengal. Bay of Bengal is prone to heavy cyclones.

Depression in Bay of Bengal some times lead to cyclonic storms and cause havoc to coastal area. Heavy rainfall some time cause flood in the rivers which damage coastal settlements and agriculture. So heavy floods and cyclones might have washed out some of the coastal structures and port-cities.

The coastal area of Orissa is marked by sand dunes. These sand dunes have also been blown in land by the force of wind. This coastal dunes was the main obstacles to the river falling directly into the sea. As a result some times the rivers changed direction. This diversion of river course was the main hurdles to maintain the port area. This would have been the case perhaps with the port of paloura-Dantapura. Recent exploration and excavation at this site revealed pattern and other antiquities extensively scattered in the sand dunes.¹¹⁵ Another probable cause of the decline of the port-cities of Orissa was the fluctuation of the sea water. It has been calculated that the rise of sea level is 60 to 90 in the last 11,000 years on the

¹¹⁵ IAR, 1984-84, PP.56-61.
west coast of India. So it is clear that the coastal Orissa might have also been affected due to the same. In this direction the systematic study is necessary on the cost of Orissa.

Besides these scientific causes of the probable decline of Orissan port-cities we have also other evidences from different sources. Another important factor was the destruction of village level socio-economic units. From the ancient time the villagers, on the basis of community ownership of land and co-operative basis of production so long supplied sustenance to the ruler against foreign invasion and national crisis. This type of arrangement came to an end as the political and economic functions of the village were concentrated in the hands of the village chiefs. The village chiefs who were enjoying grants of non-revenue paying lands started to exploit the villagers. As a result there was wide gap developed between the villagers and rulers. Due to the exploitation by the chief the economic condition of the people became worst. So the common people could not provide any help when the state actually faced crisis.

In the towns the royal chief started to collect revenue without any specific interest. At the same time the officers owning rent free land

117. R. Subrahmanynam, *The suryavamsi Gajapatis of Orissa*, pp. 142-144.
grants in the town. So the agrarian economy thus witnessed the development of a class of new owners of land with intermediary interests who were no primary producers of agricultural wealth. The militarisation of the administrative machinery, break down of internal and oceanic trade brought about extreme decentralization in the feudal hierarchy.\textsuperscript{118} On the other hand, it witnessed the increase of a large number of landless labour class connected with the productive system on the basis of share.\textsuperscript{119} There was also the heavy demands of the state through increasing number and types of taxation on different kind of products.\textsuperscript{120} That might have broken down the paying capacity of the individual and ruined the rural taxable capital. There was migration of population towards the neighbouring territories to escape from being tortured by the tax collectors.\textsuperscript{121} So there is a common belief among the historians that the Post-Gupta period marks the decline of the oceanic trade and urban centres. This period also witnessed the evolution of feudalism in the land system. This hypothesis may be partly true with regard to the overseas trade undertaken by the merchants.

\textsuperscript{118} OHRJ., Vol.II, No.3, p.54.
\textsuperscript{119} P. Mukherjee, op. cit., p.160.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p.161.
\textsuperscript{121} B.S. Das, "Studies in some aspects of the Economic History etc." JHR., Vol.XV., No.II.
Sisupalgarh, Jaugarh, Khalkapatanā, Manamundā, Mānikapatanā, Pāloura-Dantapura, Asurgarh, the important towns of ancient Orissa, were prosperous urban centres till the Kuśāna period. From the Gupta period, however, we have unmistakable evidence of the decline of all these settlements. Thus at Sisupalgarh while successive excavations have brought to light rich materials like Pūrī-Kuśāna coins, Raman coins, numerous terracotta seals and sealings, iron objects, shreds of rouletted ware etc. Although urbanism lasted from 200 B.C. to A.D 350, the Sisupalgarh culture reached its full bloom in 200 B.C - A.D.100, when it was marked by sophisticated pottery, and predominance of the bright red polished ware.¹²² On the other hand the Gupta period is comparatively poorly represented. Thus, not even a single Gupta coin has been discovered from this site. We can presume that this was perhaps due to the negligence of the Gupta officials in this region or the weak administration of the Guptas. It is apparent that although the city remained and formed one of the head quarters of the Orissan ruler, yet it lost its economic importance as well as property. The period A.D. 100-200 shows this culture in decline and transition.¹²³ Large scale excavations leave no doubt that the site of Sisupalgarh, which lies in the plains, did not remain occupied beyond 350 A.D.¹²⁴ Thus the archaeological

¹²³. Ibid., p.68.
¹²⁴. Ibid., p.67.
excavations is clear regarding the decline and virtual dissolution of this city in the Post-Gupta period.

Jaugada another urban centre in Ganjam district situated on the bank of the river Rishikulyā. The importance of this place is known for a set of the Fourteen Rock Edicts of Asoka. In this fortified site, period I represents a full-fledged iron using culture, and shows black and red ware as well as red polished ware. Period II is marked by brick and stone structures. From this site iron objects also have been discovered. Besides this a punch marked coin and eleven Pūrī-Kuśana coins were found. The material finds from the site lend an urban character to Jaugada, which is called a town by the excavator. The excavation make it clear that the area was materially rich but it did not last beyond third-fourth century A.D.

The pattern of dessolution and dissertation of urban sites of Orissa seems to have decayed after the Kusana period. The Kusana period covering from 100 B.C. to A.D. 250, is very rich in structural activities,

126. Ibid.
127. Ibid., pp.30-31.
128. Ibid., p.31.
whereas Gupta structures and antiquities are negligible. Most of the Urban centres of ancient Orissa were situated on the river bank. The pattern of urban decline of river bank was noticeable from the post-Kusana period. It was now been established that this development was a direct result of the stagnant feudal economy of the Gupta and Post-Gupta time which affected all the urban centres. But it is interesting to note that rivers which were so conducive for urban growth, also spelt disaster for towns in some cases due to erosion and recurrent flooding of the sites. The crucial role of floods in the destruction of the urban centres are explicitly referred to in many of the literary texts and at the same time, confirmed by archaeologists.

Based on the above facts, the history of the trade and urban centres of ancient Orissa and the probable causes of their decline is to be reconstructed. Man made causes for the decline of urban centres cannot be ignored. Whether natural causes collectively contributed to the decline of ancient port cities and urban centres or a particular fact is responsible of trade and urban centres in ancient Orissa marked the close of an era and heralded the beginning of a new phase or revival of trade and urban centres. The expansion of trade and commerce in the early medieval period made a class powerful in the urban sector.