

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

State of Historiography

Historiography on Indian maritime trade in the early modern period has undergone a significant change in the last three decades or so. Contributions came from distinguished historians who worked both at micro and macro level on the four important trading zones of India namely, Gujarat, Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal. In spite of regional variations between these trading zones in early modern period, the underlying question whether India was able develop on the capitalist lines on the eve of British colonialism has been the main field of enquiry for historians to study various facets of Indian commercial history. A rigorous economic analysis was therefore called for in all facets of early modern economic history be it agrarian structure and surplus extraction, non-agricultural production, the development of markets, inland and overland networks of trade, and finally the overseas commerce itself.

It is now recognised that trade, both overland and overseas was dictated by three fundamental and mutually dependent processes of commercialisation, monetisation and urbanisation. These three interrelated processes are also identified as the main harbingers of change or more especially to understand the transition from pre- capitalist socio economic formation to that of capitalist one. Among others, Irfan Habib opened up a debate on nature of 'Indian capitalist development' before the actual integration of India into Europe based capitalism prior to the establishment of British dominion. Irfan Habib's 'Potentialities of

Capitalist Development in Mughal India' has argued that in spite of high rate of urbanisation and monetisation, India failed to develop on capitalist lines independent of colonial intervention of the eighteenth century. According to him, the intense exploitation of peasantry by the state and by numerous economic intermediaries such as *jagirdars* and *Zamindars* in Mughal India had actually hindered the capitalist accumulation of money in spite of high degree of money and market production.¹ In fact he says, that "the subversion of peasant agriculture did not directly lead to a semi-capitalist forms of agriculture" as it happened in Europe. He then introduces the inevitability of crisis of "economic crisis transformed itself into a political crisis, marked by agrarian uprisings and with it weakened the economic and social structure that it sustained".² His argument rests on the notion that India failed to accumulate capital largely due to the nature of Mughal state formation, while the money generated by trade, be it internal or external, failed to intensify the commodity production on capitalist lines because most of it was appropriated by the "reckless" ruling intermediaries and the state without any corresponding economic benefits to the rural and manufacturing sectors. In a way then, 'Potentialities' became a major conceptual base particularly for economic historians concerned with non-agrarian production and overseas trade in the early modern period. Irfan Habib's analysis of Mughal India influenced a host of writings at regional level, especially on

1. Irfan Habib, 'Potentialities of Capitalist Development in Mughal India', *Journal of Economic History (JH)*, XXIX,1, 1969.

2. *Ibid.*, p.50.

Gujarat and Bengal, where the Mughal Empire reached its high point in the seventeenth century. In fact one can see a remarkable similarity of attempting to find nascent capitalist forms through external trade in different regions which had access to coastline and overseas markets. Thus Gujarat, Bengal and Coromandel were/are identified as main testing grounds for capitalistic growth but concluded that these regions failed to develop on capitalist lines correspondingly in spite of high density of commodity production for export markets. On the other hand, it has been postulated, that these trading regions seemed to have given way to English East India company trade and its subsequent domination after the fall of Mughal empire in the eighteenth century. This similarity is striking in spite concrete regional differences between say Coromandel and Bengal. Further it is assumed that the period between 1700-1820 saw the steady subjugation of the indigenous manufacture and it was left to the English East India company to integrate India into a capitalist system. Thus, the 'origins of capitalism in India' and the failure of it to develop on modern lines has been the single most important concept of analysis for historians of early modern India. Further, studies on capitalist growth, it is supposed, would lead to a better understanding of colonial intervention which was grounded, at least in initial stage, in subjugating the Indian merchant in the main trading regions of India. While the question of capitalist growth is as important as the historiography itself, one then needs to take stock of the present research in the field so as to identify various forms and shapes the studies on Indian mercantile history have expounded by historians.

Having identified the basic conceptual base for the study of economic history with a special emphasis on non-agrarian production and external trade; such as commodities and markets, rural and urban credit, role of merchants and brokers, indigenous and European trade in India, all of which being necessary inputs for capitalist development, it is necessary then, to elaborate on the nature of the existing historiographical trends and their influence over the prevailing and current notions on the actual nature of India's pre-colonial economy and society. This will clarify one hopes, to delineate 'regions', which is our concern here, from the 'dominant Historiography,' on early modern period. Further more, it is notionally found that majority of historians concerned with trade directly borrowed concepts from the dominant historiography on pre-colonial India not only at the empirical level but relied heavily at a theoretical level as well.³ Here dominant historiography refers to a particular group of historians whose writings on Mughal India influenced a host of scholars irrespective

3.We are particularly referring to the influential writings of Iran Habib, Satish Chandra, M. Athar Ali, Shireen Moosvi and N.M.Siddiqi. These historians are an important group not only because of their highly critical and productive writings on Mughal India, but also formed as a cohesive group with a definite methodological coherence given to the Mughal studies. The grid 'formulae' given to the understanding of the Mughal system, its decline and the subsequent domination of the English East India company was borrowed willy-nilly by the trade historians as well. Thus the Mughal 'formulae' remains, for any understanding of trade system, the main 'theoretical' base for any understanding the pre-colonial socio-economic formation and in identifying the early subjugation of Indian economy by the English East India company in the eighteenth century. See, Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal Empire, 1556-2707*. Bombay 1963, M.Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangazeb*, Bombay, 1966., Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal court, 1707-1740*, Bombay, 1959 and Noman Ahmed Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals, 1700-1750*, New Delhi, 1970, Shireen Moosvi's highly sophisticated economic study based on the persian sources, *The Economy of the Mughal Empire, c.1590*, New Delhi, 1989.

of the disciplines they attempted to explain on early modern period of Indian history⁴

Though the primary focus of the works of Irfan Habib, Satish Chandra and Athar Ali has been on the agrarian and political history such as the structure of the state, revenue and surplus extraction, the role of numerous categories of political and economic intermediaries, ranging from *jagirdars*, *Zamindars* and other tributary chieftains across the empire, and finally the fall of the Mughal empire, their writings nevertheless provided the basic theoretical base for the history of external commerce as well. But it must be remembered that the relationship between the Mughal history and the history of external commerce is more implicit rather than being explicit.

Mughal studies pertaining to trade rests on two fundamental assumptions. That the Mughal empire by nature was a landlubber and showed least inclination for sea and its activities but provided the much needed infrastructural facilities such as peace and political security, development of transport facilities etc., all augmented the growth of trade in the seventeenth century. Being primarily dependent on the agrarian surplus and hence indifferent towards mercantile operations, port economies were left in the hands of local administration thus leaving the merchant to the arbitrary fiscal exaction by local officialdom. Thus, merchants of the Mughal empire, the central figure in maritime commerce is caught in a dichotomy of the Mughal fiscal system and the apathy of the

⁴See, Peter Hardy, 'Symposium, Decline of the Mughal Empire, Commentary and Critique', *Journal of Asian Studies*, (JAS), Vol XXXV, No. 2, February 1976, pp.257-262.

state towards commerce. On the one hand, we see a provision for infrastructure which bettered the prospects of Indian merchant while on the other hand, he was at the mercy of local administration which was rapacious and arbitrary which seemed to have had official sanction as well. In such a schema of analysis, the Indian merchant had to constantly negotiate for space between Mughal fiscal regime in the hinterland and the European presence on the sea front.

Imperial officialdom intervened in the ports and with merchants only as adjudicators of disputes and were merely seen as agents to create a market economy or to centralize the taxation system rather than "controlling the fiscal administration."⁵ One then fails to understand why the Mughal state in spite of its centralized character failed to balance its agrarian surplus and commodity production with that of external commerce and merely depended on 'nebulous' alliances its prebendaries forged with the mercantile elements in Gujarat or in Bengal (mostly European)?⁶

Turning into the actual historiography on external commerce with the above mentioned portrayal of Indian merchant, it is necessary to focus therefore, on how studies on Indian maritime trade seemed have originated as a by product of above mentioned schema. In order to illustrate the point we will take only random samples of how some of the most influential trade historians have

⁵ The Mughal Fiscal System in Surat and the English East India Company', *Modern Asian Studies*, (MAS)27,4, 1993 pp. 711-718. and K.N.Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from Rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge, 1985 p. 16

⁶ Hasan, Farhat, Conflict and Cooperation in Anglo-Mughal Relations During the Reign of Aurangzeb', *Journal of Economic and Social History of the orient*, (JESHO), Vol xxxiv, pp. 351-360.

actually traced the maritime commerce in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Further it will also try to evaluate the works of "Indian Ocean" historians and looks at them critically from a regional perspective. Lastly, the contributions of the so called "revisionist approach" will be taken as an useful model for reconstructing maritime commerce in the second half of the seventeenth century.

Maritime trade and its important component, merchant, has come a long way from a 'Peddler' or that who traded in bulk goods to that of rich and powerful merchants, independent ship owners who traversed from say, the port of Masulipatnam to Bandar Abbas to south east Asia in a single voyage. The word "merchant" in pre-colonial context did not refer to one homogenous class or caste nor did they come from a single community, say komaties and Chetties on the Coromandel coast, banias and Khattris on the west coast. Commerce was by no means a monopoly of any single community in the pre-colonial context. On one extreme, we have great merchant princes such as Vriji Vora and Mir Jumla, members of royalty, professional class of merchants who participated in the oceanic trade. A peddler too was an important component of this high seas commerce who participated in trade for meagre profits and income. On the other extreme were small and medium peasants and itinerant merchants such as *banjaras* who brought bulk goods and raw material from the frontier to distant ports for export who can be termed as seasonal merchants.⁷ Then there were the

⁷ Inscriptions of *Chidipirala and jammulmadugu Kaifiyat*, A.P. State Archives, Hyderabad. 1964, cited in Srinivasulu, *Gandikota Charitra Mariyu Sanskruti*, Proddatur, 1994. For the activities of Banjaras in trade in south India,

great continental communities such as Persians and Armenians who dominated the Indian ocean. Persians, in particular were instrumental in forging close ties with the internal political structures of south India which further enhanced their trading prospects in spite of severe competition from European companies. In fact this was the only group of merchants that the European companies dreaded most in the Indian ocean. Though cannot be categorised as merchants per se, regional elite of the Coromandel as also of other regions, emerged as lending entrepreneurs not necessarily on the sea front but as those who closely monitored external commerce through their collaboration with merchants on the coast. The latter group who can be termed as 'politico- military entrepreneurs' were making inroads into the commercial world firstly through their direct intervention in agrarian expansion and local trade and secondly by controlling the port economies. However, it must be stressed that these people took recourse to trade only in special circumstances when their internal political position was threatened by other contesting groups or state.

Considering the flexibility of participation in trade, and the skills adopted at a very competitive level, it was also possible to find a peddler becoming a trans-oceanic trader, while new entrants into trade may have made huge profits or losses depending on the nature of demand and supply structures and may not have returned to trade at all. It was a very competitive world and fortunes fluctuated depending of diverse factors which ranged

see, Joseph. J Brenning, *The Textile Trade in India, A Study of Pre-modern ?Export Industry on the northern Coromandel in the Late Seventeenth century*, Ph. D Thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1975. Chapter III.

from purely economic to political and social. What drove such a varied category of persons into trade is extremely difficult question to answer. Profit maximization does seem to have been the single most important factor for such a wide participation in trade.⁸

While the historiography on the Indian maritime merchant is relatively voluminous, thanks to the regional studies conducted during the last three decades or so, It must be noted however, that very few historians were instrumental in situating the Indian merchant within the regional political economy of pre-colonial India or in region specific. In other words, as Ashin Das Gupta and M.N.Pearson has recently pointed out 'that maritime history is part of a larger interaction with the continental hinterland and any 'history of Indian Ocean area had to focus on 'some land area'.⁹ Further noting on the same lines, Frank Perlin wrote a " systematic treatment of how production fitted into and was adopted to these

⁸Tapan Raychaudhari does not totally agree with the notion of profit maximisation as the single most important factor for 'entrepreneurship' in pre-colonial India. According to him, traditional occupational structure, family honour, communal status all played a crucial role in determining the participation of such a wide variety of men in trade. However, as we shall see subsequently, Indian trade was highly individualistic oriented and seemed to have fewer pretentions of community participation. Persian merchants are a case in point. See, Tapan Raychaudhari, *The Entrepreneur in Pre-Colonial India: Aspirations and Expectations A Note*, in Rodrich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund, Ed., *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400-1750*, Stuttgart, 1991, pp. 339-351, For the study of Indian merchants See, S. Arasaratnam, " Aspects of the Role and Activities of South Indian merchants, c. 1650-1750, *Proceedings of the First International Conference/Seminar of Tamil Studies*, Kaula Lampur, Malaysia, April 1966 and 1968 and a good bibliography see, A.J. Qaiser. *The Role of Brokers in Medieval India*, *Indian Historical Review (IHR)*, 12, 1974, Ashin Das Gupta, *The Merchants of Surat c. 1700-1750* in E. Leach Ed, *Elites in South Asia*, Honolulu, 1978.

⁹ Ashin Das Gupta and M.N.Pearson Ed, *India and the Indian Ocean*, Calcutta, 1987 pp. 11-14 See, Laxmi Subramanian, *Alternative Approaches to Maritime India*, Book Review of Ashin Das Gupta, *Merchants of Maritime India 1500-1800*, **Variorium**, 1994, *Indian Economic and Social History Review (IESHR)*, 33,2,1996 p. 210.

markets (overseas markets) and to competition between industries and regions is left much more obscure". Elaborating further he says that " the growth of commercial manufacture in particular region must be contextualised within the larger framework of subcontinent itself and its must be extended beyond the sub-continent at the level of growing inter Asian nexus and that of the new international trading system".¹⁰

The extension of peasant production for local markets and its subsequent transformation into external trade through a hierarchy of markets starting from village fairs, to qasba towns to big centres of consumption and redistribution and finally to port towns all went hand in hand in the over all process of continental dynamics which became crucial for maritime merchant operating in the coastal areas. Indian merchant was connected inextricably with localised demand and supply curves as he was dictated by similar trends elsewhere in the Indian ocean. The neglect by historians of connecting these internal sectors of production and manufacture with that of external commerce stemmed from uncritical dependence on the dominant historiography for analysis on the relationship between land and sea in the pre-colonial India. In other words, maritime historians failed to enquire in *first hand* the internal production and manufacturing systems on their own but

10 See, Frank Perlin, 'Proto-Industrialisation and pro-Colonial India', *Past and Present (P&P)*, 1983 pp. 41,59. Some major exceptions to this neglect came from the so called revisionists historians such as C.A.Bayly and Sanjay Subrahmanyam who empirically worked within the regional economies and situated the Indian merchantile operations in the inter-continental dynamics. See, C.A.Bayly, *Riders, Townsmen and Bazaars, North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion*, Cambridge, 1983 and the articles and monographs written by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, see, in particular, *The Political Economy of Commerce, Southern India*, Cambridge, 1990 passim.

relied heavily for aspects of peasant production and internal markets on the borrowed wisdom, in this case the Mughal studies. The problem is further compounded when such as burgeoning economy is linked directly to the political histories of contemporary India. This has been a classic portrayal of Mughal empire and its inevitable collapse.

In spite of considerable revision amongst historians working both at macro and micro levels, the reasons for the collapse of Mughal empire and its impact on the economy of India still tend to dominate even the logic a maritime historian as well. We shall illustrate the problem by taking some apparent examples on how maritime historians have time and again borrowed from the Mughal studies.

First and foremost has been the characterization of trade as a direct consequence of state fiscal needs. Trade merely existed for state as a source of revenue in spite of the state's apparent indifference to directly develop trading systems within its political control has been taken up willy-nilly by historians of maritime India. In the work on Surat, Ashin Das Gupta, the merchant is precariously placed between the fiscal regime of Mughal empire and the European competition .¹¹ This notion of revenue squeeze which is extended to merchants as well is grounded in the Aligarh notions of Mughal state as being highly centralised, bureaucratic

¹¹ . See, Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat*, Weisbaden, 1979, Introduction and Chapter 3, 'The Logic of Decline. There seems to have been a change in his position recently. To cite only one example, Das Gupta now identified differences in the character of Asian Shipping at Surat, Hoogly and Masulipatnam. See, for details, Ashin Dasgupta, 'Changing Faces of the Maritime Merchant', in Rodreich Ptak and Deitmar Rothermund, *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asia*, pp. 353-362.

which was predominantly an extractive body primarily existing on the revenues coming from civil society at large.¹² In this scheme of interpretation, merchants and his operations were more or less moribund and acted rather mechanically to needs of the state or its prebendaries.¹³ On the contrary, we shall see from Golconda's experience that internal and external trade and fiscal systems were mutually dependent and complementary to each other which was reflected in the rise of Masulipatnam as a major emporia port in the seventeenth century. In spite of being extractive system, Golconda state was instrumental in forging inextricable links with trading communities and developed alternative forms of economic mediation for the appropriation of social surplus. Secondly, the state did not show indifference towards trade but actively developed collaborations with mercantile groups which in turn expanded the share of revenues for the state. Thus the state, it will be seen, provided a space for a large informal sector dominated by fiscal mediators who stood outside the purview of the state and beyond its official reach but at the same time reaped economic benefits from the participation of these entrepreneurs.

There is yet another way in which one can display the relationship between dominant notions on internal political /fiscal systems and the historiography of external commerce. This stems specifically from the notion of decline of the Mughal empire; of

¹² See, Irfan Habib, *The Agrarain System of Mughal India*, and J. F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, The New Cambridge History of India, 1992. For a very critical analysis, See, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Introduction', of *Merchants, Markets and the State in Early Modern India*, New Delhi, 1992. passim.

¹³ See, Ashin Das Gupta, "Indian Merchants and the Trade in the Indian Ocean", in Tapan Rauchaudhari and Irfan Habib, ed, *The Cambridge Economic History of India c. 1200-1750*, Hyderabad, 1982 pp. 407-432

political crisis transforming into economic crisis in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. According to the historians of Mughal India, the intense exploitation of the producer by *jagirdars* and the state led to many peasant uprisings, the economic squeeze on account of the increase in the number of *jagirdars* without any corresponding increase in the resource base of the empire, the Mughal aggrandizement into southern states of Bijapur and Golconda all made the decline inevitable in the last decades of the seventeenth century.¹⁴ Though the decline oriented studies seem very simple and apparently does not have any direct bearing on the maritime history of India, at least at a regional level, its complex extension of 'structural crisis' into the regional political economy and the subsequent collapse of all economic activity had a direct bearing on the writings on external commerce. For example, Ashin Das Gupta and S. Arasaratnam have argued that Surat on the west coast and Masulipatnam on the Coromandel declined largely due to the collapse of the Mughal imperial system in the second half of the eighteenth century.¹⁵ It is significant to note that Masulipatnam which was outside of the Mughal empire for most part of the seventeenth century suddenly confronts decline in the wake of Mughal intervention in the last decades of the seventeenth century, Surely, Masulipatnam declined (or at least showed signs of

¹⁴ The exploitation of the peasantry has been the view point of Irfan Habib, while Satish Chandra and Athar Ali both trace it the crisis brought out by the Jagridari crisis as the cause for the decline of the Mughal empire. See, Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 269-71, Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court*, pp. 92-94 and M Athar Ali, 'The Passing of Empire: The Mughal Case', *MAS*, IX, 1975, pp. 385-396.

¹⁵ See, Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat*, Chapter 3'. and Chapter 5'. and S. Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740*, New Delhi, 1986.

regressin) by the second half of the eighteenth century, but the causes were to be found elsewhere firstly, in the restructuring of the hinterland in the last decades of the seventeenth century and secondly in the breakup of port complex' of Masulipatnam on the northern Coromandel during the same time. Further, the rise of smaller ports such as Divi and Ingeram into independent ports within the vicinity of Masulipatnam's accelerated the decline, while the rise of Vizagpatnam in first half of the eighteenth century may have been an additional cause for the decline of Masulipatnam on the northern Coromandel coast which became more pronounced in the eighteenth century. The rise of smaller ports on the northern Coromandel plains can be attributed to the failure of the Mughal imperial system in northern Coromandel, while their rise into prominence must be placed within the context of regional dynamics which came to be dominated by *Zamindars* and other tributary chiefs. Vizagapatnam, for instance, was a product of the consolidation of power by small *Zamindars* and other tributary chieftains who earlier served the Sultanate of Golconda. Contrary to these regional developments, it is of the opinion of S. Arasaratnam that no port of importance grew on the northern Coromandel sector in the last decades of the seventeenth century largely due to collapse of administrative apparatus in Ganjam and Srikakulam sectors.¹⁶ But this seem contrary to the developments on the northern Coromandel. In fact, this period saw intensifying

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, See in particular "Ports and Ocean" for the causes given for the inability of the ports to come into prominence in the last decades of the seventeenth century. J.F.Richards, *Mughal Administration of Golconda*, New Delhi, 1975. and 'European City States on the Coromandel coast', in Nayeem Ed, *Studies in the Foreign Relationships of India*, Hyderabad, 1975.p. 618.

of commercialisation of agriculture under ruling chieftaincies who though concurred with official state authority, nevertheless retained the freedom to impose their own fiscal structures at the local level. The intervention of the chiefs in the local economy had a direct bearing on the port economy of Vizagpatnam.

In the wake of Mughal intervention, these chieftains asserted their position in their respective localities. The tributary chiefs were able to forge links with the immediate production economy and local trade and to some extent on the overseas commerce as well which led to rise *of* small but independent port towns in northern Coromandel in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. In fact no other port on the Coromandel showed such an influx of Madras pagodas as was in Vizagpatnam which meant considerable monetisation *of* the local economy. However, the monetary benefits were used to refinance in the wars against the Mughal imperial structure. The combination of factors such as the Mughal intervention, the role of tributary chiefs and the English commerce helped in the rise of Vizagpatnam as a major port in the eighteenth century. In fact as Frank Perlin has commented, it was the 'informal economy' which existed beyond the 'official administrative economy' whose relationships "transcend political frontiers and whose interest included a complex of activities much more extensive than those related to taxation and financing of the regimes".¹⁷

The above elaboration on the rise of Vizagpatnam has been given to demonstrate that the Mughal decline (or for that matter

¹⁷ Frank Perlin, 'State Formation reconsidered', p. 465.

any political decline) did not necessarily lead to a general decline of regional economic formations. However, it is not the intention to deny 'crises' in the pre-colonial context. It is only to draw to the resilience of local and regional economies which saw localised forms of commercialisation and monetisation which was inextricably linked to external commerce in those areas where the economy had access to sea.

Interest in maritime history of India has witnessed a sudden crop of literature in the last decade with what is popularly called as 'Indian Ocean Studies'. Apparently influenced by Fernand Braudel's *Mediterranean* as an unified concept, maritime historians of India too tried to integrate Indian Ocean as a cohesive unit albeit with regional variations within it.¹⁸ Though they do not constitute any specialised school or category, Indian ocean studies did contribute immensely to the rich maritime tradition of India and its relation with other trading societies. There is no doubt that the Indian Ocean studies expanded the scope of maritime history of Asia in the on going debates on overseas trade and its impact on the Asian continent. The questions asked are related to activities of Asian and European companies, the latter only reinforcing the already expanding commerce in India, textile based export markets with seafarers as central figures, actions and reactions of Asian

¹⁸ For thematic influence of the Indian Ocean studies, see, Fernand Braudel, *Mediterranean and Mediterranean in the Age of Louis Phillpe*, London, 1979. For Indian ocean studies, See, K.N.Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge, 1985, Ashin Das Gupta and M.N.Pearson Ed., *India and the Indian Ocean*, Calcutta, 1987 and Satish Chandra, Ed., *The Indian Ocean: Exploration in History, Commerce and Politics*, New Delhi, 1987.

states towards merchants, and finally identifying India within the larger world's capitalist trends.

M.N. Pearson who wrote a major introduction to "India and the Indian Ocean" has identified six unifying factors for Indian Ocean as a cohesive unit of analysis. They are climate (monsoons), ports (their character and nature), shipping, and sailing, religion (particularly referring to Islam) and lastly to the similarity of specialisation's across Asian and African continents.¹⁹ In spite of integrating Indian ocean as a whole, the studies are not without limitations. Though these historians stress on the symbiotic relationship that existed between land and sea as a major field of enquiry, a closer reading of the contributions on the other hand, reveals inadequate attention paid to 'land economies' and the hierarchy of links between peasant and artisanal production, internal trade systems, local commodity production transforming itself into continental trade are particularly glaring. In fact as we have already mentioned the dichotomy between agrarian expansion and commercial history is maintained even in the writings of Indian ocean scholars. The problem lies, one supposes in the very nature of contributors. For, the contributions to Indian Ocean studies has been a major outcome of the individual scholars we have mentioned earlier, like Ashin Das Gupta, M.N. Pearson, S. Arasaratnam, Satish Chandra *et al*, did not show any qualitative difference in analysis from their individual monographs and articles published elsewhere.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-17 and these factors are reiterated in the work of K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, pp. 1-20.

The problem of borrowing from the dominant historiography out rather openly in the article of Immanuel Wallerstein's 'Incorporating Indian Subcontinent in the world capitalist Economy'. His assumptions focuses on the structural characteristics of dependence and interdependence of the capitalist world which thrives on profit and is grounded firmly in Europe. Though he finds the actual incorporation of India into Europe based world economy since 1750's, he however traces its origins to the seventeenth century. In large part of his work he ignored the local variables and depended mainly on secondary works, particularly of Irfan Habib and Satish Chandra's analysis of growth and decline in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively ; former being a period of growth and the latter decline and hence incorporation'.²⁰ In order to prove Indian Ocean as a cohesive unit, and perhaps to show it as a comparative category with the western developments, the contributors seemed to have relegated regional history into margins. Thus, we have titles such as "Indian Ocean in the fifteenth century", "sixteenth" century", "seventeenth century "

One hopes, in future, that the rich contributions of Indian Ocean studies would also integrate regional differences and similarities in their further analysis.

it is clear from the above paragraphs that Indian maritime history can be distinguished into two major categories. First belonged to works of historians focusing on trading regions with a

²⁰ See for details, Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Incorporating the Indian subcontinent into Capitalist World Economy,' in Satish Chandra ,ed., *The Indian Ocean*, pp.223-253.

specific question of enquiry i.e. India's inability to develop on the capitalist lines. This, as we have seen, is actually a by product of a dominant historiography on pre-colonial India and how it influenced the writings of maritime historians at large. The second school/ group which is primarily concerned with maritime trade *per se* have attempted in a rather grand scale to reconstruct 'total' history through the concept of 'Indian Ocean'. Between these two categories of historians, is the so called revisionist approach. Though they do belong to a definite school of thought, this group of historians, with their thrust on regional histories challenged the dominant historiographical notions prevalent on pre-modern India. In fact, revisionists have come as strong critiques to the state oriented histories' and as well as against the theories of 'incorporation'.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam has identified four features of revisionist approach to early modern history. It stood on a) "that India in the early modern period was not caught up in a high equilibrium trap "as developed by Tapan Raychaudhuri b) that commercial activity, though most conspicuous in Bengal, Coromandel and Gujarat, was by no means limited to them, c) that not all commercialisation and money use was a function of purely and simply of state's revenue and d) that south Asia was not a passive entity 'merely' waiting to be incorporated into capitalist world economy".²¹

²¹ See, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Ed., *Merchants, Markets and state in Early Modern India*, New Delhi, 1992, Introduction p.14.

The Revisionist approach has its antecedents in the writing of A.I. Chicherov who characterised the period between 1500-1800 as one that of commodity market relations and that India had all "prime socio-economic prerequisites for the rise of capitalist manufacture and that this was a period of transition and that the European trade was only one of the factors"²² This theme was recently revised by Frank Perlin with the notion of 'proto-capitalism based on the local merchant capital and commercial manufacture which emerged independently of Europe. Thus, the main trading zones of Gujarat, Coromandel and Bengal are studied within the context of subcontinental structure of relations also embracing peasant production in "ostensibly remote regions and in the context of increasing character of international commerce".²³

The contribution of the revisionists to early modern history of India lay firstly in giving importance to regional economic development within the context of expanding international trade. Regional economy in their writings, include not only the local production and marketing for local and domestic needs but also its transformation into export commodity for overseas markets. In fact commercialisation and trade form an integral part of political economy and merchants, in particular, are not seen as mere 'impotent appendages' but as a main complementary group *vis a vis* state.

²² A.I.Chicherov, *India Economic Development between 16th and 18th centuries*, New Delhi, 1971 pp. 9,160, 174 &234 cited in Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Incorporating the Indian Subcontinent', p. 224.

²³ Frank Perlin, 'Proto-industrialisation and pre colonial India', p.33.

The revisionist approach is especially refreshing because commercial economy and mercantile operations are not mechanistically linked to state appropriation but are seen as major mediators of surplus at various levels of economic activity within the structure of the state. The state does not show indifference to trade but was involved in the ongoing process of commercialisation and even perhaps stood on the threshold of mercantilism. The participation of state in trade was both direct and indirect. In south polity of Golconda at least, the state actively mediated in trading sector by way of royal monopolies and through collaborating with mercantile elements in the coastal areas. The Golden *Firman* issued by Abdullah Qutb shah to the English East India company in 1634 is particularly instructive to this collaboration. In this *firman*, Abdullah consciously tied the concessions given to the English company with those of Persian merchants which in reality proved beneficial to the latter group rather than the company.

Thirdly, the revisionists have redefined the concept of entrepreneurship in the context of developments in the early modern South Asia. As mentioned earlier, commercial enterprise and trade was by no means a monopoly of any single category of people. Merchants formed an extremely heterogeneous group in early modern Asia; they included the traditional merchant classes such as Chetties, komatis, Bania's, and khattris, foreign elements like the Arabs, Armenians, Persians who traded regularly with India, and lastly the regional elite who took recourse to trade for profit

²⁴ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Introduction, in *Merchants, Markets and state in Early Modern India*, pp. 3-9.

maximization to invest the money thus made in political aggrandizement.²⁵ Thus, if Golconda depended for money on revenue farming as a response to crisis, the tributary *raju* clans of Srikakulam and Vizianagaram on the northern Coromandel took recourse to local trade and forged alliances with the European companies in the last decade of the seventeenth century again a kind of local responses to local crisis from the Imperial structure. Coastal politics on the Coromandel came to be dominated by politico-military entrepreneurs who established small marketing towns and organised local trade and revenue and thus put a check on the Mughal *faujdari*. The concomitant development of territorial control and the collapse of Mughal *faujdari* system was a crucial factor in the local economy, Thus by bringing mercantile economy within the ambit of political structures, the revisionists, have demonstrated that the early modern Indian merchant and other entrepreneurs were not a part of the periphery of production economy but as integral social components who mediated between state and economy.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam has convincingly argued for south India, the existence of 'portfolio capitalists' who traversed between worlds of commerce and politics as the primary agents of mediation in the overall state formation.²⁶ For north India too, C.A.Bayly has argued for the existence of portfolio capitalists who were involved in revenue farming not necessarily through overseas trade but who included the small merchant who controlled inter-

²⁵ C.A.Bayly, Ibid. p. 259.

²⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, See, Chapter, 'Asians and Europeans in an age of Contained conflict'.

locality trade, great merchants and their role in state financing and patrimonial households who controlled huge revenue farms.²⁷ On the Coromandel one finds, apart from the great sea faring portfolio capitalists like Mir Kamaluddin and Mir Jumla, the existence of warrior elite who intervened in the production economy and local trade who were actually the products of the imperial crisis in the Deccan. Thus, for a small time renter's like Appa Rao of Divi island, to big proto-dynastic figures like Pusapati Anandaraju and Koliandar *Rajus* of Mogalteru, trade became a major source of revenue which in turn brought the European commerce into focus.

Ports , Hinterlands, and state on the Coromandel

The study of ports and port economies is still at a nascent stage for the students of Indian history. Unlike in the west, paucity of any written sources, maps or any systematic representations of cartography are perhaps some of the reasons for the lack of any study on the development of ports in early modern India. Geographers too are crippled in providing any concrete spatial distribution of the port town in the pre colonial India. However, with the coming of European companies to India, sources on port administration and economy more or less got systematized.²⁸ Further, the establishment of European factories and fortifications along the coastline of India and the necessity of the respective companies to minutely record the developments in Asia further provides useful information on ports in Asia. Information on the

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 255-256.

²⁸ For a good methodological survey of Indian ports see, Atiya Habeeb Kidwai, Conceptual and Methodological Issues: Ports, Port Cities and Port-Hinterlands;, in Indu Banga ed, *Ports and Hinterland in India, 1700-1950*, New Delhi, 1992 pp. 7-43.

European settlements which were exclusively under the respective companies like Madras, Bombay and Calcutta is particularly rich when compared to other ports where the companies had nominal presence. It must be noted however, that apart from raising some thematic questions, scholarship on Asian port towns is still western oriented.²⁹

Coming to specific regional studies, Coromandel coast is yet to catch on with west coast and Bengal so far as the study of port cities is concerned.³⁰ Part of the reason, one supposes, is embedded in the manner in which Indian urban history has been constructed by historians. That north India witnessed stable polities in Delhi Sultanate and Mughal empire which fostered institutions that favoured urban expansion can be identified as an important factor for high incidence of urban studies on north India. In Mughal India, for instance, historians have postulated a high level of urbanisation with urban classes taking as much as 60% of the gross agricultural produce. In south India on the other hand, it is assumed that stable polities were non-existent with two exceptions being Cholas and Vijayanagara. Even in these polities, it is argued, were based on peasant production and marketing in which external commerce was only incidental.³¹ Thus the segmentary approach of

²⁹ For some thematic questions raised by historians see, Ashin Das Gupta, 'The Maritime City', pp. 359-365 and S. Arasaratnam, 'Pre-colonial and Early Colonial Port Towns', pp.367-374 in *Ibid.* and Dilip Basu, ed, *The Rise and Growth of Colonial Port Cities in Asia*, Centre of South Pacific Studies, university of California, Santa Cruz, 1979.

³⁰ The only systematic survey of port towns is S. Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel 1650-1740*, New Delhi, 1986.

³¹ Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, New Delhi, 1980. For a specific critique related to nagaram and the neglect of external commerce in the segmentary approach of Burton Stein see, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The*

Burton Stein which focuses mostly on the 'ritual relationships' between the royal core and rural structure and the peasant-Brahmin alliance brought into focus the temple towns and *nagaram* as indicators of urbanisation. *Nagaram* which was the basic peasant marketing zone for short and long distance trade became a crucial determinant for overseas trade as well. In fact the thrust given to temple towns and the peasant marketing towns curiously led to a neglect of port towns instead of actually integrating these peasant zones with that of port towns. Thus in their period between 1000-1500 AD, there are no studies on the earlier history of the ports of Motupalli and Vizagapatnam on the Coromandel coast.

Coromandel which is defined as a macro region comprises broadly the whole of east coast starting from Ganjam in the north to Point Calimere in the south. Though the region covered under the rubric of 'Coromandel' seem too large for analysis, it is conveniently divided into north and south Coromandel with Pennar river dividing the two sub regions. This rough demarcation also has contemporary importance in the seventeenth century as the northern part was predominantly under the Sultanate of Golconda while the southern Coromandel, starting from Madrasapatnam, was under *Nayak* kingdoms. In this work we are concerned only with the northern part of the Coromandel and covers the whole of Andhra coast and spills into Madrasapatnam coast as well which was in Arcot region. This region is taken up for this study because of two major political developments which had

considerable impact on the regional economy. Coastal Andhra was consolidated by the Sultanate of Golconda by the beginning of the seventeenth century while its southward expansion along the coast was completed in 1656 which brought the whole of Coromandel up to River Pennar under one political control.³² This consolidation was of particular importance because of the high concentration of weaving economy which was the backbone of export markets in the seventeenth century.

The expansion of Golconda also integrated the frontier of Karnatic into coastal economy by the second half of the seventeenth century. This region regularly supplied raw cotton, grain and indigo to the newly developing port towns of Madrasapatnam and Pulicat. Secondly, even after the Mughal take over of Golconda, the whole of Andhra coast became a major arena for various contesting parties to consolidate their political power.

Ports on the Coromandel as S. Arasaratnam has observed, were mostly outlets on the river mouths with bad berthing facilities due to shallowness of sea and rivers, bad anchorage capacity, and hence did not allow big ships to berth in the main ports. Barring Vizagpatnam and Narsapore in the vicinity of Masulipatnam, there were no natural ports on the Coromandel coast. The Coromandel coast was clustered with small, middling and big ports catering to diverse functions in the seventeenth century. As many as forty two

³² For the history of Golconda See, H.K.Sherwani, *A History of Qutb Shahi Dynasty*, New Delhi, 1972, S. Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740*, New Delhi, 1986, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce, Southern India, 1500-1650*, Cambridge, 1990, J.F.Richards, *Mughal Administration of Golconda*, New Delhi, 1975. and Tapan Raychaudhari, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, Hague, 1969.

ports were identified between Ganjam in the north to Madrasapatnam in the Arcot region.³³ Most of the ports on the northern Coromandel were situated in close proximity to each other which perhaps was the main reason for frequent rise and fall of port towns in the period under study. To explain the rise and fall of the port towns on the Coromandel the concepts of "Port complexes, Port concentration and Port diffusion" is extremely useful.³⁴ Port complex simply means ports which are related to each other. This relatedness can be viewed both from maritime foreland and the hinterland as well. The relationship between related ports may be competitive and complementary: they compete for traffic in their common hinterland which in turn would affect the fortunes of a port within its complex. They tend to be complementary when the ports manage to streamline the nature of commodity export, say textiles from one port and grain from the other. In Masulipatnam sector, Madapollem, Narsapurpeta, Divi and Ingeram formed into one single port complex. Madapollem in particular was serving as feederpoint for textiles to Masulipatnam for most of the seventeenth century, while Narsapurpeta served the metropolitan port as the major ship repairing centre. Divi on the

³³ Contemporary European sources do not give us information on the ports which were outside the operations of company trade. However, observations of travellers like Thomas Bowrey, Strensham Master and other officials who were sent regularly to the coasts to identify new centres of productions have recorded the existence of ports on the coast. See, *RFSG, Letters to Fort St. George*. 1711, Memorials, of Strensham Master, *RFSG, Diary and Consultation Books*, for the years 1672-78 and Thomas Bowrey, *The Countreys around Bay of Bengal*, Hakluyt Society, 1907.

³⁴ B. Ogundana, 'Patterns and Problems of Seaport Evolution in Nigeria', in B.S.Hoyle, ed, *Seaports and Development in Tropical Africa*, Macmillan, 1970. cited in Atiya Habeeb Kidwai, 'Coceptual and Methodological Issues, Ports, Port Cities and Port-Hinterlands', pp. 23-25.

other hand', served Masulipatnam as port used exclusively for grain and wood. In varying degrees then, these ports assumed significance in different contexts of time, some times remaining as mere feeder points to the metropolitan port of Masulipatnam but by the end of the seventeenth century rose into prominence as independent ports with considerable autonomy from Masulipatnam. Divi and Ingeram came out the port complex of Masulipatnam which was a major cause for the decline of Masulipatnam. This "port concentration and port diffusion "in which a certain port gains in relative significance because either other ports have grown more modestly or declined in absolute terms or when high order ports decline and lead to an increase in the significance of new or previously smaller ports" was a common phenomenon on the northern Coromandel.³⁵ Thus, in the course of the seventeenth century Coromandel, there was a constant "changing of port hierarchies in which the ranking of ports changed over time and the composite pattern of the port complex showed an alternation of concentration and diffusion."³⁶ This seemed to have been the general pattern on the northern Coromandel stretching from Ganjam to Madrasapatnam which dictated the development and fall of port towns.

One of the major determinants for the rise of port towns in general and on Coromandel in particular was in the way in which they depended on hinterlands. Hinterland is a much loosely defined term which broadly means as a space which provided the

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 169-70.

economic input for the ports. Hinterlands are defined more in terms of economic rather than merely restricting it to a specific geography. Thus the immediate hinterland of Masulipatnam did not comprise of any economic activity that could be used for the exports from the port so much as its distant hinterland contributed for its export economy. According to Thomas Bowrey the hinterland of Masulipatnam extended as deep as 300 miles interior. It attracted merchandise from as far as Khammam and Hyderabad in the interior and from Ganjam and Orissa on the north till Vizagpatnam became a prominent port. Likewise, in the course of the seventeenth century, Masulipatnam even attracted merchandise often eating up other ports such as Nizampatnam. While studies on the hinterlands have concentrated on mere 'economistic' point of view, (a presumption that hinterland already exists and mechanically provides goods and services to the port) there are very few studies which have concentrated on the formation of the hinterlands itself which affected the ports on the coast.³⁷

The formation of a hinterland is dictated by a complex factors in a given society. They stem from a series of developments in the inland ranging from economic, social and political. Though the basic function of the hinterland is to provide goods and services to ports, the combination of developments in the internal political economy are often neglected. For example, what were the factors which made various categories of persons to participate on market oriented economy which in turn expanded the hinterlands of the ports in a given context of time and space? To what factors, for

³⁷ For various theories on the hinterland see, *Ibid.*

instance, can one attribute the growing commercialisation, monetisation in the interior and what was the impact of these processes on the overseas trade?

Metcalf for example, introduced the concept of 'social hinterland' in respect to the business communities of Bombay and its hinterland. According to him, the existence of number of business communities who constantly travelled from the country side to the ports with roots in communal and caste organisation as a major conjecture in the study of hinterlands. Metcalf's definition has its limitations. For instance, by tying up hinterland with a specific business community or group of communities, he ignores the rich diversity of people who were involved in trade and restricts the scope mercantile operations/operators involved in the maritime enterprise to mere caste basis. In Masulipatnam and Madras for example, trade was by no means dictated by caste or communal organisations but involved a wide range of category of people such as Persians, Armenians, local elite (both during the Golconda and Mughal phase) , state and its apparatus. All these men were involved in varying degrees in trade and its allied occupations. Furthermore, entrepreneurship in early modern phase was based on individual enterprise rather than on the community lines which is clearly reflected in the nature of their participation on the Coromandel coast.

In the seventeenth century south India, trade was emerging as major source of sustenance for different categories of people; from a small peasant to that of great continental traders and the highly mobile 'Diaspora' communities like the Persians and

Armenians. The transportation of grain and raw cotton was the preserve of *banjara* community and small peasants who marketed it in local fairs and qasba towns in the localities. Above them came the professional merchants like komatis and Chetties to procure their merchandise from these centres to port towns. Apart from the professional merchants, trade was actively mediated and conducted by revenue farmers, local Zamindars and other local landed potentates of the region.

The consolidation of eastern sea-board by Golconda in 1580's gave access to rich fertile tracts of Krishna and Godavari deltas which had already developed huge commercial manufacture needed for both domestic and external markets. The state was not only able to exploit rich revenue base of coastal Andhra but also was instrumental in forging political alliances with traditional ruling clans of the region which furthered fostered the political expansion of Golconda.³⁸ These tributary chieftaincies cushioned Golconda by steadily supplying men and money as long as central authority did not threaten their independence in their respective zones of control. But as the events unfolded in the seventeenth century, Golconda faced a severe political threat from the Mughals and from Adil shahis of Bijapur. The problem was further compounded in 1636 when the Kingdom of Golconda had to submit to a humiliating 'Deed of Submission' with Mughal emperor, Shahjahan. Golconda responded to the crisis in two ways, internal and external. Internally the state tried a more decentralized

³⁸ J.F.Richards, *Mughal Administration of Golconda*, New Delhi, 1975. and Burton Stein, *Vijayanagara, The New Cambridge Economic History of India*, Cambridge, 1992.

set up in the functioning of provincial economy by providing space private entrepreneurship and subsequently elevating them into quasi- official status within the administrative set up. Thus a revenue farmer whose primary function was to farm an area for a stipulated amount of money and time was also given the positions of *havaldars*, *Sar samutu's* and *seerlaskars*, etc. which benefited the revenue base of Golconda. Revenue farming became a crucial factor in developing links between the state and the provincial economy which witnessed large scale commercialisation. This classic response to crisis was to prove to be a major boon to the state, for on the one hand it was assured of regular income more than it would generate if extracted by state officials, and on the other hand, it fostered the expansion of the agrarian economy even in the frontier zones. The expansion of the agrarian economy through revenue farming had its impact on the localised forms of commercialisation of the economy which in turn was linked to Coromandel trade.³⁹

On the external side, Golconda went on a massive political aggrandizement on the ruling dynasty of Vijayanagara in 1650's

³⁹ It is the opinion of Sanjay Subrahmanyam that revenue farming was limited the coastal regions of Coromandel coast and to manufacturing sector only. But evidence from *Kaifiyats* show that revenue farming was prevalent even in the frontier where the role of the state was hazy and dependent on local elite. This in fact was the technique adopted by the Golconda, that instead of outright political aggrandisement, it adopted the technique retaining the traditional elite or by fixing the place under revenue farming. Thus, Mir Jumla who took Gandikota in 1656 farmed the revenues from the local diamond mines while Podela Lingappa was involved in Grain trade largely due to his position in the same place. See, *Gandikota Kaifiyat*, *Munimadugu Kaifiyat*. See, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Aspects of State Formation in South India and South East Asia" *Indian Economic and social History Review*, 23,4, 1986 pp.357-377. Andre Wink on the other hand feels that revenue farming existed in the frontier of respective kingdoms in the eighteenth century. 'Maratha Revenue Farming' *Modern Asian Studies*, 17,4,1983 pp. 591-628.

and brought it directly under its dominion. This completed the process of consolidating the coastal areas from Ganjam to Madrasapatnam which gave Golconda unlimited scope to manipulate the rich trading tracts on the Coromandel. If we closely study the politics in early modern south India, one observes a general shift in the political arena towards coastal areas. This was an outcome of numerous layers of 'responses to crises' these polities faced in the context of seventeenth century political economy. To illustrate the point, we have already seen how Golconda pushed itself towards coastal region of Andhra as a step to consolidate its economic position. Beyond the 'formal' and recognised political structures such as Golconda and Vijayanagara, the existence of warrior clans such as Velugoti, Damerla, Matli lineage's who in theory were part of Vijayanagra were involved in expansion spree often feeding on the spoils of booty collected after overriding other ruling clans. These *Palegadu* elements who had already developed small and local microcosms of agriculture based on tank irrigation in their respective zones, were pushing into coastal strips to gain access to sea front which meant an enhancement in their economic status. The response to crisis was thus a part of larger changes in the hierarchies of power in the regional political economy of south India. This reflects in part the need to exploit revenues of the coastal regions which was an outcome of complex political realities of the time.⁴⁰ In order to do so, the states and other political authorities of the region had to necessarily forge links with the

⁴⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanya., *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1700*, New Delhi, 1990.

already established mercantile groups of coastal areas. Thus, if Golconda established links with Persian merchants, the local elite were depended on the Hindu professional merchants such as komatis and chettis. Though, the links between the state and merchants was primarily economic, the fluid political environment forced the polity to reorganise them even in the political matters.

The Golconda and Iranian links can be thus seen as case through which the state directly entered the mercantile arena which centered around the port towns. Thus, in the south Indian context the question whether Golconda was a centralised polity or not is not of fundamental importance. On the contrary, the formal kingdoms and the informal political layers which existed in Golconda and Vijayanagara can be studied as classic cases of encouraging 'private' entrepreneurship by accommodating these elements in the political apparatus.

The purpose of this rather elaborate discussion on the seventeenth century political situation in south India has been to establish the importance of commercial hinterlands in the working of the political economy. The formation of political hinterlands at various layers of polity by entrepreneurs with quasi-administrative powers was extremely crucial to the formation of regional political economy in south India. Political hinterlands can be characterised as a participation of various groups of persons who intervened in commercial production and trade and those who had access to state power either directly or indirectly. These included not only men in power such as Mir Kamaluddin, Mir Jumla, Neknam Khan etc., but also those who aspired for a position within or outside the polity. In

a much divided and hazy political situation which was dominated by forging alliances at various layers of mediation; like the *Palegadu* elements, tributary chieftains, professional merchants, both Indian and foreign, the political power was directly related to the amount economic resource base they commanded in the respective localities.

To sum up, entrepreneurship in south India was evident at four levels of political economy. 1) state and in its capacity to establish relations with mercantile elements such as Persians and Hindus 2) At the intermediate level, the existence of big and small revenue farmers who participated in trade and other allied activities by virtue of access to administrative power, 3) the active collaboration of Zamindars and tributary chieftains, on the one hand with mercantile groups such as komatis and chettis and with European companies on the other, and 4) the entry of European commerce which was trying to negotiate a space in an already competitive world of Asian commerce.

The present work is divided into three chapters, or more precisely into three case studies of Masulipatnam (1634-1724), Vizagpatnam (1682-1724) and Madrasapatnam (1649-1712) and tries to establish the complex inter linkages between various layers of economic mediation in the regional economy with that of English commerce on the Coromandel.

Masulipatnam forms the first case study for the period between 1634-1724 in which the interaction between Golconda and the port are studied. It analysis that rise of the port as a conscious policy of Abdullah Qutb shah (1626-72), while the activities of local

Zamindars in the Krishna and Godavari deltas brought Hindu merchants within the ambit of Masulipatnam economy. The collaboration of Hindu merchants with European companies mutually benefited their trading prospects while the *Zamindars* of the deltas reaped the benefits of burgeoning commercialisation on the northern Coromandel. The decline of the port in the last quarter of the seventeenth century is attributed to changing nature of 'port complexes' which was wrought by the Mughal intervention on the Coromandel. New ports such as Divi, Ingeram, and finally Vizagpatnam all contributed in varying degrees in the decline of Masulipatnam. In a way, it is argued that the changing character of relations between *Zamindars* and the Mughal *faujdars* on the northern Coromandel contributed to the decline of Masulipatnam. On the other hand, European commerce was only a part of the whole trading world of Masulipatnam but seemed successfully manoeuvred into the local economy by the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Vizagpatnam, which was situated in the northernmost part of Coromandel displayed a totally different picture during the period under study. The rise of Vizagpatnam is attributed not so much to the participation of trans-oceanic participation of Asian merchants nor due to establishment of links with other Asian networks of trade but was a product of Mughal intervention on the Coromandel. Its rise, is especially attributed to the activities of tributary *raju* clans which dominated the region and to their intervention in the local economy. The changing character of Mughal officialdom (notably the *faujdari*), from mere officials to

that of 'local satraps' furthered the growth of Vizagapatnam. In swift changing political situation on the Coromandel, the forging and breaking of alliances between the warring *raju's* and Mughals in turn brought English company to Vizagapatnam which proved crucial in the rise of this port town in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. In other words the rise of Vizagapatnam into a major port was due to break up of Mughal administrative structure on the Coromandel which gave opportunity to local merchants to participate in trade.

Our last case study, Madrasapatnam clearly showed the dominance of English commerce on the central Coromandel plains. The crucial factor for the rise of English commerce at Madrasapatnam was due to expansion of the hinterland into the frontier of Karnatic and secondly due slow but steady subjugation of the chief merchant into a company servant. Unlike in the earlier case studies, the trade at Madrasapatnam was largely an outcome of English east India company and its ability to integrate commerce with that of local revenues which heralded a new dynamics of trade based on fortifications on grid colonial pattern in early modern south India.