CHAPTER IX

TRAPS AND COMMERCE

The records of the age do not throw much light upon the objects and the extent of India's internal and foreign trade during the age. Hiuen Tsang and Bāna are not much helpful, but they casually refer to commodities of trade, means of transport, centres of trade, co-operative activities in trade, medium of exchange and general economic conditions of the people. As already noted, Hiuen Tsang and Bāna state that the Indian countries of the period abounded in crops such as rice and wheat, metals like gold and silver, certain animal and forest products and precious stones. Hiuen Tsang informs us that rare gems and various kinds of precious stones of different types were collected from the islands of the sea. Both the authorities mention that various types of cotton cloth were extensively used throughout the country. According to the testimony of Hiuen Tsang there was extensive sheep rearing in Paryātra and Sindh. Naturally wool must have been one of the important items of export from these places.

From the above discussion it appears that

a. Items of Trade: India during the age were mainly

(1) Exports:

rice, wheat, gold, silver, precious
stones, pearls, ivory, sandal wood, medicinal herbs, spices, perfumes, animal skins and cotton cloth. Paryātra and Magadha exported rice, while Mālawā and Sindh exported wheat to other regions of India. Pears, plums, grapes and other fruits were sent to other parts of India from Kāśmīr. The North Western regions sent out gold, silver and precious stones. Both men and women used many types of ornaments as is noted by Hiuen Tsang. This proves that there was a flourishing trade in precious metals in this age. Gold and silver coins, cowries and small pearls were the media of exchange. Ānālaka (Pāndya) region was a great depot of sea pearls.

Ivory may have formed an important item of trade because Hiuen Tsang and Bāṇa state that Indian kings of the age had several thousand elephants. Kalinga elephants were much prized by the neighbouring countries. Corroborating the statements of Kalidāsa and the Amarakośa Hiuen Tsang states that sandal, camphor and other trees grew on the Malaya mountain south of the Ānālaka (Pāndya) region near the sea-coast. Sandal and other fragrant woods were widely used during the age. Therefore we may suppose that these objects formed items of extensive trade between their places of origin and the rest of India. From Kāśmīr and Kulluta, their original homes, valuable medicinal plants and herbs must have been exported in
great quantities to other regions. Atali a great centre for pepper and perfumes sent out these items to other places. Commerce was the principal occupation of the people of Atali.

The principal imports seem to have been silk, glass vessels, copper, lead, iron, gold, silver, precious stones, ivory articles, pigments, spices, coral, horses and slave girls. Both Hiuen Tsang and Bana state that Chinese silk was very popular in Indian markets. The word 'Chinamauka' was famous at the time. It was probably imported from China and other eastern countries. Dandin also refers to it. Hiuen Tsang names several countries between China and India which produced most of the articles named above. The people of these countries were great traders. Probably these articles were sent to India through well known land as well as sea-routes. Though Hiuen Tsang mentions several places in India producing gold and silver, he rarely refers to territories which supplied copper, iron and other metals. But these metals were certainly in use in India during the period as tools made of these metals are casually referred to by contemporary authorities.

According to the Amarakosa copper was obtained from Malechha countries. (Probably meaning
Western countries). Ivory was imported from Ethiopia to India in the 6th century A.D., according to Cosmòs²² who states that Ethiopia had plenty of elephants whose tusks were larger than those of the Indian elephants.²³ The extensive use of ivory articles during the 7th century²⁴ indicates that this trade was well advanced in the period. Horses were imported from Vanāyu (Arabia), Pārasika (Persia), Kamboj (Pāmir), Āratta (Punjab), Bhāvanāvāya (North Gadhavāl) and Sindh.²⁵ Kāshmir was famous for breeding dragon stock of horses.²⁶ Samarkand was a great commercial centre exporting many fine horses.²⁷ Kapisā produced excellent horses and many rare commodities from other regions were collected here.²⁸

It appears from the testimony of the Chinese travellers that the trade of India was greatly facilitated by the existence of regular land routes and water ways. There was a great land route between China and India. In the beginning of the 6th century A.D., Fa-hien, coming to India, passed through Tārtar countries, Kotan, Kāshgar and Kāfīristān. There after crossing the Indus and passing through Udyāna, Gāndhāra and Punjāb, he arrived at Mathura.²⁹ Afterwards he reached the called the middle Kingdom and then he visited several
places of Northern India.\textsuperscript{30} He also used the water ways of the Indus, the Ganges and the Jamanā.\textsuperscript{31}

Hiuen Tsang, two centuries later, following in the footsteps of Fa-Hien, passed through almost the same countries as Fa-Hien and arrived at Samarkand. He notes that it was a great commercial centre and the inhabitants were skilful craftsmen.\textsuperscript{32} Hiuen Tsang travelled along the banks of the Oxus, visiting Tokhāra and other countries, and came to Bālkh which was a great commercial centre.\textsuperscript{33} Afterwards passing through Bamiyan and other regions he reached Kapisā which was a flourishing centre of trade.\textsuperscript{34} Then crossing the Indus he visited almost all the important regions of Northern India, most of which were very prosperous and had commercial relations both with south India and with foreign countries. In conversation with Bhāskaravarman Hiuen Tsang expressed his desire to return to China by the same land route.\textsuperscript{35} Starting from Prayāg and passing through Jāñdhara and Taxilā, he again reached Kapisā after crossing the Indus.\textsuperscript{36} Taking almost the same land route he reached China after a most adventurous journey of 17 years.\textsuperscript{37}

From the records of these two travellers, it may be concluded that there were regular caravan routes between Asian countries including China and India. These routes followed the course of the rivers Oxus and Indus. This land route was extended to mid-India. It followed the course of the Ganges and probably connected the chief
centres of trade in India. Kapisa seems to have been the chief trading centre connecting India with Europe and other Asian countries including China. India's trade with China and other Asian countries was carried on through Kāshmir also. From the description of Hiuen Tsang it appears that possibly the chief centres of trade such as Kapisa, Kāshmir, Sīndh, Atali, Valabhi, Kānyakubja, Ayodhya, Vārānasī (Benāras) and Tāmralipti (modern Tāmluk) were connected by land and river routes. From Ayodhya merchants usually went to Tāmralipti. The road between Ayodhya and Tāmralipti seems to have been one of the main routes of India. When I-Tseng went to mid-India from Tāmralipti about one hundred merchants accompanied him. According to 'Bṛhatkathāmanjari' and 'Kathāsaritsāgara' (probably written during 6th or 7th century A.D.) Devasena of Magadha went to Valabhi for trade leaving his home and his wife Kīrtissendevi who joined her husband after completing a long journey.

The testimonies of the Chinese travellers show that there were also well-known water ways during this age. Fa-Hien, embarking in a large merchant vessel from Tāmralipti, sailed south west and reached Simhala (Ceylon) after a voyage of 14 days. Then he, again took a large merchant ship and reached Java after a journey of 90 days. From Java he boarded another
large merchant vessel and reached China after a voyage of several days. There is also a hint about this sea-route in the reply of Bhāskaravarman to Hiuen Tsang. Bhāskaravarman proposed to Hiuen Tsang that if he wanted to return by the southern sea route, he would send some officials to accompany him. I-Tsing also embarking from Tāmralipti and sailing by the same southern sea route reached China. There seem to have been well marked halting places during this long and perilous voyage. The period of stay at these halting stations and the time taken to reach the destination depended upon trade winds, which were well understood by the mariners of the age.

C. Important ports and centres of Trade:

Fa-Hien and I-Tsing mention Tāmralipti (modern Tamluk) as an important sea port on the Eastern side of India. Bhāskaravarman also refers to the southern sea route from India. Dandin too refers to the two notable centres of maritime trade, Tāmralipti on the east and Valabhi on the west coasts.

As already noted, from Tāmralipti sea-farers left for the islands of Indo-China, of East Indies and finally for China itself. Hiuen Tsang writes that the country (Tāmralipti) formed a bay where land and water communications met; consequently rare valuables were collected in it and so its inhabitants were generally
prosperous. This explains the flourishing trade of Tamralipti in those days.

Valabhi on the west coast of India seems to have been an important centre of trade. The rare and valuable products of distant regions were stored up there in great quantities. The population was very dense. The establishments were very rich. There were some hundred families who possessed a crore. Hiuen Tsang notes that the people of Saurashtra derived their livelihood from the sea by engaging in commerce and exchanging commodities.

Bharukachha (modern Broach) was another important port on the west coast. Hiuen Tsang writes that the people were supported by the sea. Dr. Basham states that Broach was one of the chief ports of India for carrying on trade with foreign lands. The direct sea route between the ports of Saurashtra and Simhala (Ceylon) was well known in the age. Most of the trade with western countries and Ceylon was carried on through Valabhi, Broach and other centres, while commercial relations of India with Ceylon, South East Asian countries and China were through Tamralipti. Ratnāvali mentions close relations between Mālavā and Simhala, Western India had trade
relations with Indo-China and East Indies also. It appears that India continued to maintain maritime trade with foreign lands through the ports of Gujerat, Malabara, Simhala, Chola-country, Andhra, Kalinga and Samatata.

According to Huen Tsang, near the shore of the ocean in the south east of Udra (Orissa), there was a sea port town called She-li-ta-lo (Charitra - The town of embarkation) which was a thoroughfare and a resting place for the sea-going traders and strangers from distant lands. The city was naturally strong and it contained many rare commodities. Cunningham thinks that 'Charitrapura' was probably the present town of 'Puri'. Dr. Harikrishna Mehta confirms it. The supposition of Fergusson that 'Charitra' may be taken as 'Tamralipti', is not accepted by the scholars. Dr. Waddell believes that 'Caitra' was 'Caitratola' a village near the mouth of the Mahanadi river. This seems far-fetched. In the absence of more positive evidence in establishing the identity of the town, we may assume that the town of Charitrapura was located at the site of the present city of Puri, on the last coast of India. Konyodha contained some tens of towns which stretched from the slopes of the hills to the edge of the sea. As this country
was on the sea-side, it abounded in many rare and valuable articles. Hiuen Tsang states that Kanchipura (The capital of Dravida) was the sea port of south India and the Voyage from Kanchipura to Ceylon took three days.

Hiuen Tsang notes that Malkūta was a depot for sea-pearls. The people were indifferent to culture and good only at trade. According to the remarks of Hiuen Tsang Simhala (ceylon) was a great trading centre of the age. Merchants from India and from distant lands frequently came there to seek for gems. This country was known as 'Rataadvipa' because precious pearls were found there. It is to be noted that Hiuen Tsang did not personally visit Malkūta and Simhala but these remarks of Hiuen Tsang are confirmed by the sources of the Gupta age.

Cosmas describes Kalyana as one of the chief ports of western India during the 6th century A.D.

Probably it continued as such because it may have been a halting station for traders sailing from Bharukachha to Simhala. Along with Bharukachha Hiuen Tsang describes Surat as a rich and flourishing city where the people earned mostly from maritime business. Kachha also seems to have possessed a port where the population was dense and the
establishments were wealthy. Atali had a sea-port or an estuary on the south west side of its capital. Commerce was the principal occupation of the people. A great quantity of gems and precious stones was stored up at Atali. U-Tien-Po-Chi-lo, a dependency of Sindh, had a capital named Khie-Tsi-Shi-Pa-Lo (probably Khajisvara or Kachchhesvara) which was situated on the river Indus, bordering on the sea. The people possessed rare and costly substances.

Moreover Huen Tsang and Bāna take note of some important centres of trade where commerce flourished. Kapisa, Kashmir, Mathura, Sthaneswar, Kānyakubja, Vārānasi, Magadha, Karnasuvāraṇa, Orissa, Kalinga, Mālawā and Sindh were the centres which had an extensive trade in different articles and rare commodities. Next to Kapisa, Persia also seems to have been an important centre of trade between India and central Asian countries. It yielded valuable metals and precious substances. Its artists were skilful in weaving brocaded silk, woollen stuffs and carpets. In commerce the people used large silver pieces, Persian horses and probably its woollen stuffs and carpets also fetched high prices in Indian markets.
Dr. R. K. Mookerji remarks that the eastern maritime enterprise of India reached its climax in the age of the Gupta emperors, when India once more, as in the days of Chandragupta Maurya and Asoka, showed symptoms of a colonising activity that culminated in the civilization of Java, Sumatra and Cambodía and laid the foundation of greater India. Towards the end of the Gupta period, there was extensive maritime activity in the eastern waters not only with farther India and the islands of the Indian Archipelago, but also with China. There was a regular and ceaseless traffic by way of sea with China. The sphere of this eastern naval activity was extended further during the days of Harṣḥavardhana and Pulakesin, finally colonizing Jáma by the end of the 7th century A.D. 78

The representations of ships and boats in the Ajantā paintings, specially in cave No. 2 (probably excavated between 550-650 A.D.), indicate the maritime activities of the age. 79 The representations of ships among the sculptures of Borobudur hint at the same thing. The Javanese chronicles relate that about A.D. 603 a ruler of Gujarāt, forewarned of the coming destruction of his kingdom, sent his son with 5000 followers, among whom were cultivators, artisans,
warriors physicians and writers, in 6 large and 100 small vessels to Java, where they laid the foundation of a civilization that has given to the world the sculptures of Borobudur. After settling on the western coast of Java, the son soon asked his father for more men and received a reinforcement of 2000 men including carvers in stone and brass. Thus an extensive commerce sprang up with Gujrat and other states.

The native chronicles of Java and the accounts of some eminent scholars hint at the fact that Kalinga and Bengal also had a large share in the colonization of Java and the adjacent islands. The inscriptions corroborate these records and suggest that powerful Hindu rulers ruled at Prome, Cambodia, Champâ, Sumârâ, Java, Borneo and Bali during the 7th century A.D. Isanavarman of Cambodia (probably A.D.630) maintained diplomatic relations with China and perhaps with India as well. The kingdom of Sri-Vijaya in Sumârâ rose to great eminence in the 7th century A.D. It was ruled by a Buddhist king Jayanâga in A.D.684. The king possessed ships sailing between India and Sri-Vijaya. The most important kingdom in Java during 618-906 A.D. was known as Ho-ling (Kalinga) which suggests that colonists from Kalinga during this period dominated at least a part
of Jāva. The testimony of I- Ts’ang proves that Bāli also was a seat of a rich and civilised kingdom ruled by Hindu colonists professing Buddhism.

It has been noted that corporate activities played a great role in the economic life of the Gupta age. Narada (probably 5th century A.D.), Brihaspati (possibly 6th century A.D.) and Kātyāyana Smriti (7th century A.D.) mention various guilds and their multifarious rules. Contemporary evidences also supply us several important details about the activities of the trade guilds. The Kātyāyana Smriti frequently refers to traders' league. Along with other associations Kātyāyana mentions puga, which he interprets as a merchant-guild. Just like his predecessors Kātyāyana gives us an idea of the internal organisation and status of associations. The guilds carried out both executive functions and judicial duties. This is well supported by the story of the guild of merchants (vanigajanasaṃjāj) described by Dandhin. The story about a rogue, a merchant called Anantakīrti and the guild of merchants, reveals certain executive and judicial privileges possessed by the guild. It also indicates the democratic character of the guild.

The Smriti law throws important light on the organisation of both workers and capitalists.
In the case of artisans Brāhaspati and Kātyāyana state that their four grades namely apprentice (Sikṣhaka), advanced student (Abhijñā), expert (Kusala) and teacher (Achārya) shall divide the profit in the proportion of 1:2:3:4. Bāṇa also refers to the system of apprenticeship the apprentices being called Navasevakas. Bāṇa and Hiuen Tsang also mention guilds of merchants and workmen. Bāṇa states that on the occasion of Rājyaśri's marriage, guilds of skilled artists such as carpenters, painters, modellers and the like, were summoned from several countries to decorate the palace. Hiuen Tsang refers to the mixed castes and numerous clans formed by groups of people according to their kinds. Watters interprets them as guilds and groups of low craftsmen and workmen who probably included weavers, shoemakers, hunters, fishermen, and also water-carriers and scavengers.

We have very little material to determine the exact rates of interest prevailing during the 7th century A.D. but Smritis including that of Kātyāyana state that the rate generally varied from 1% to 5%. Different rules were fixed according to the nature of the loan. But ordinarily interest accumulating at any time was not to exceed the principal. However maximum interest was allowed at special rates in case of selected articles. The rates allowed by Kātyāyana...
are twice the loan in case of jewels and precious substances, fruits, silken and wollen cloths; five times the same in case of metals other than gold and silver and eight times the same in case of oils, liquors, clarified butter, molasses, salt and land.  

According to the testimony of Hiuen Tsang several parts of India were rich in gold, silver and other precious metals. He notes that gold and silver coins, cowries and small pearls were the media of exchange. He also refers to the barter system. Hiuen Tsang remarks that the gold, silver and small copper coins of Kapisä differed in style and appearance from those of other countries. As Nepal yielded copper, it used copper coins as the medium of exchange.

Fa-Hien (5th century A.D.) remarks that people used cowries in buying and selling commodities. This seems to be partially true as it is proved by the numismatic evidences that at least from the reign of Samudra-gupta onwards the imperial Guptas had a regular system of currency. Various types of gold and silver coins of the Gupta emperors have been found. The history of Gupta coinage after Skanda-gupta becomes spasmodic. Only a few coins of the successors (6th century A.D.) of Skandagupta have been found and these
too are of the crude type. Unfortunately the coins of Harsha and those of his contemporaries are not found in sufficient numbers; therefore we are not in a position to determine the prevalence of coins as medium of exchange. But the immediate predecessors of Harsha, the Maukharis had also a good system of coinage. Naturally Harsha and his contemporaries must have inherited that system of currency from the Guptas as well as from the Maukharis.

Mr. Burn has described a find of silver coins (discovered from the District of Faizabad) out of which 9 are of Sri Pratapasila (Sri Pratapasila) 284 of Sri Saladata (Siladitya) and one of Harsha (not spelt as Harsha). These pratapasila coins may be taken to be those issued by Pratapasila, the name earned by Prabhakaravardhana because of his conquests, as Bana informs us and these Siladitya coins can be supposed to have been issued by his son Harsha who was also known by his title of Siladitya as Hiuen Tsang informs us. The objections of Dr. Hoernle to the ascription of these coins to Prabhakaravardhana and Harsha do not possess much force. Bana calls Prabhakaravardhana as Pratapasila and Hiuen Tsang mentions Harsha as Siladitya. Moreover the type of these coins, indicating a large head on one side and a peacock on the other (with long inscriptions)
tallies well with that of the coins of Isanavarman and other Maukhari kings and alike it is also modelled on the Gupta coinage. But Dr. Hoernle is sure that one coin among those mentioned above, is that of Harsha. There is a legend 'Harsadava' on the coin which is of gold. Harsha-carita, the Navaguni grant and the Apsad stone inscription call Harsha, Harsha-Deva. Thus it is almost certain that this gold coin is that of Harsha.

A hoard of copper coins mixed with silver, has been found at the ruins of Valabhi. They do not bear the names of any kings. Probably they were used as the media of exchange. Kalhan calls the Kashmir coin a 'Dinnara'. Stein explains it as a Roman Denari. It must originally have been the Indo-scythian coin. There were gold, silver and copper Dinnas. 

The above discussion shows that gold coins must have been very rare in the country during the period under review. Silver coins appear to have been quite common in the urban areas. Barter system was possibly more prevalent in rural areas. It was also well-known in Kashmir. Rice was one of the chief articles of barter in Kashmir. The Government due was paid in rice. Small pearls seem to have been used as media in the coastal territories. The use of cowrie as medium was also not uncommon. Gold or silver pieces also appear to have been used as media in large
transactions.119

Unfortunately contemporary sources are silent about the weights and measures prevalent during the age.

Kautalya mentions different types of weights and measures,120 which may be current in the Maurya and post-Maurya period. The following table is interesting:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12½ Karsha (200 Mashaka)</th>
<th>1 Kudumba (about 10 tolas)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Kudumba</td>
<td>1 Prastha (about 1 pound)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Prastha</td>
<td>1 Adhaka (2 shers = 160 Tolas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Adhaka</td>
<td>1 Droña (8 shers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Droña</td>
<td>1 Batta (2 mounds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Droña</td>
<td>1 Kumbha (4 mounds)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover there were small weights for weighing golden ornaments and other precious articles. All these weights were made of iron, mixed metals or rare stones.121 Kautalya also refers to the following measurers:122

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>42 Angula</th>
<th>1 Kishku (¼ of an inch approximately)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84 Angula</td>
<td>1 Vyama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108 Angula</td>
<td>1 Garhapatya or Dhanu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192 Angula</td>
<td>1 Danda (a stick for measurement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Danda</td>
<td>1 Rajju (Rope)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 Dhanu</td>
<td>1 Goruta or Krosha (2250 Gaja)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Goruta</td>
<td>1 Yojana (about 5 miles)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the weights and measures may be prevalent in the period under review also. Contemporary
evidences mention terms of measures like Danda, Rajju and Yojana.123

The evidence of Hiuen Tseng and of Bāṇa suggests that the high standard of living and economic prosperity enjoyed at least by the upper classes of the people in the Gupta age, continued during the times of Harṣa. Town life was luxurious.124 Most of the areas were densely populated and some town had rich families living in well decorated houses with beautiful parks.126 The upper classes put on rich garments and varieties of ornaments were worn by both women and men.127 Jālandhara had rich and well supplied houses.128 Govisana had a flourishing population and there was a succession of blooming woods and tanks everywhere.129 Kānyakubja had lofty structures everywhere. It had beautiful gardens and tanks of clear water. The inhabitants were happy and contented and there were families with great wealth.130 Bāṇa gives almost the same type of description about Thāneśwar and Ujjain.131 Vārāṇasi was densely populated and the families were rich with their houses full of rare valuables.132 Pundravardhana had a flourishing population, tanks and flowery groves.133 Tēmralipi, Karṇaṇavaṇa, south Kośala, Atali, Valabhi, Gurjjara, Ujjayini and other towns were thickly populated and prosperous.134

Though contemporary evidences say little about the condition of the common people, casual references suggest that their lot was not miserable. The monthly cost of feeding one individual sumptuously was about
rupees two. Living was very cheap. The people carried on their business honestly and no deceit was practised. This description of the age of the imperial Guptas, may be applied to the times of Harsha as well. The fact that even the guilds of manual workers played an important role in the economic life of the country, proves that the condition of workers was not unsatisfactory.

A few parts of the country were thinly populated and desolate. Some of the towns and villages of Gândhāra (owing to the ravages of the Hunas in the previous century) lay desolate, while a belt of regions lying along the foot of the Nepāl territories and comprising the ancient cities of Śrāvasti, Kapilavastu, Rāmagrāma and Kuśinagara lay deserted and was the haunt of robbers and wild beasts. An area along the east coast covering Kalinga, South-Kośala, Dhanakataka and Śkola was thinly populated and there were continuous forests.

This is by no means a complete picture of Northern India in the 7th century A.D. There seems to have been much difference between country life and town life. The houses were mostly made of mud, wood and bamboo. The streets and lanes in the villages as well as in towns were tortuous. The thoroughfares were dirty and stalls with suitable signs were arranged on both sides of the road. Thus the village of the 7th century A.D. of India did not differ much from the present village. on the other hand according to Bāna Śrīkanṭha was a fertile place. It had unbroken lines of sugar-cane.
enclosures. On every side its roads were packed with corn-heaps distributed among the threshing floors. Sometimes the portions of forest land inhabited by villagers, were converted into settlements. Farming was rare there. Wood-cutters cut and collected wood. In other places blacksmiths were burning heaps of wood for charcoal. In the forest people moved along with bundles of Sindhu bark, with sacks of Dhātaki flowers, quantities of honey and with peacocks' tail feathers. Village women bearing baskets of forest fruits hastened to sell them in the neighbouring villages.

Thus the town, village or the forest life of India during the times of Harsha did not differ much from the times of the Guptas. Mostly the people followed hereditary profession but there were some notable exceptions. The village life was not much disturbed by the political changes. Agriculture was practised on an extensive scale. Among the chief industries were textile, metal work, building and ivory. There were great land and water ways which facilitated both inland and foreign trade. Greater India reached the climax of its glory during the time of Harsha.