Gujarat, situated on a strategic point on the Western Lithoral, has been a major attraction for the traders and foreigners to utilize and exploit its wealth. The presence of a large coastal belt and its related advantages has hastened the development of trade in this region. Moreover, the very geographical and physical features of this region brought about economic prosperity which in turn influenced the growth in trade.

Gujarat being a torrid region, the merchants went out of their way to exchange goods which were not produced or available there. This exchange has regulated the influence on the human habitat of this region. On exploration and excavation, large number of antiquities unearthed, gives an indication of the importance of this area as a prosperous region of trade and commerce.

The exchange of goods and services is a basic requirement of economic activity from the ancient times. The goods which were not produced or available within one's own locality were brought down from distant lands. The activity to satisfy human wants account for an extensive system of
exchange between the inhabitants of different places. There existed both direct movement of goods, when an individual exchanged the goods manufactured locally, and indirect movement of goods, when the necessities used to be brought from other places. In the earliest settled societies, distribution was through sharing of agricultural produce with the labourers and artisans by the farmers and from whom he obtained various services and implements. Thus barter system came into being within the village settlements, which was a distinct exchange.

The monetary system enabled trade to develop into a specialised social activity instead of non-specialised man-to-man relationship. The locally available specialised facilities and the crafts developed in an area helped in the expansion of trade catalysed by man's desire to obtain and own new things. This expansion of trade led to the development of certain industrial and commercial centres. The merchants traded goods and they moved in caravans. These activities led to the establishment of certain fixed routes as and when the need arose. As the routes developed, the halting establishments blossomed into commercial centres and were thronged by prosperous traders. Trade has been defined as the appropriative movement of goods between hands. Production and consumption are the two main activities of man. Both these activities depend upon their sphere of circulation. This process of circulation of goods is carried out by the merchant community. This exchange of goods led to the regional contacts which in turn led to mutual and cultural dissemination.
In this century, many Indian and foreign scholars have studied the various aspects of trade, as for instance H. D. Chakravarty, M.A. Saletore, A. Motichandra, S. Asthana, L. Prasad, H. M. Ray, E.H. Warmington, H. G. Rawlinson, M. P. Charlesworth, Wall and many others. They have made important and invaluable contributions to this subject.

However, after going through the previous works, it was felt that their scope was more general and there was not much of intensive study. The earlier works covered a much wider scale in terms of geographical area and time span. Consequently, the student, backed by field experience, decided to work on these aspects, in the geographical areas of Western India in general and those of Gujarat in particular, restricting the time bracket of 3rd century B.C. to 7th century A.D. Further some conclusions were based on literary evidences only whereas others concentrated on a particular cultural period restricting a time margin. Western India being the nuclear region for overseas as well as inland trade, offered a great potential to the student to work out in detail the various factors involved in its growth right from the Harappan times. It was a longfelt desideration to highlight various facets of trade in the light of recent discoveries incorporating both archaeological and literary sources. This exhaustive survey of a wide range of sources pertaining to Western India with specific reference to Gujarat, is carried out in order to give a broader perspective to the study under review.

The present work examines the aspects of industrial and mercantile activity along with character, composition and role of merchants in the
society of Western India during 3rd Century B.C. to 7th Century A.D. This analysis of Western Indian trade will help us to understand the pattern of commercial activities in adjoining regions of the Indian subcontinent on one hand and the outside world on the other.

The foreign trade in Western India has been viewed as a link in the long chain of mercantile activity. While doing so, the role of the foreigners have also been highlighted. The growth of commerce brought into prominence, alongwith the role of merchants who acted as middlemen for exchange and distribution. Through the process of commodity exchange, they were able to amass wealth and there was an upswing in profitability in this region. The chapters in brief are outlined below.

Chapter I - Introduction

This chapter deals with the general survey of trade, its significance and development. It also deals with the aim of the study carried out which is to examine on the different facets of trade carried out in Western India especially and to understand its role in society. The method of work adopted and sources of information are also discussed here.

Chapter II - Geographical And Political Background

An attempt has been made to project the political and geographical settings, which led the very foundations of commercial activities during
the period under review. A brief outline of geology, climate, drainage system, vegetation and soil has been examined in this chapter. The background of political history is based on both archaeological and literary sources. Both these sources have been updated in the light of recent discoveries.

Chapter III - Administration and Organisation of Trade

Thereafter, an attempt has been made to highlight the genesis and growth of mercantile corporations and their functions under the overall supervision and control of the State. In this Chapter, the formation of the guild corporates and their powers and functions are also highlighted. A brief comparison of the administrative units of Greece, Egypt, Rome and China is also reviewed. This will show how the merchant community fostered a free and healthy growth of trade during the period under review.

Chapter IV - Trade Routes and Trading Centres

In this Chapter, a detailed study has been made of the important trade routes, showing thereby how they proved very effective in unlocking the country’s wealth. An attempt has also been made to show, in a discursive manner, how under the various factors of geo-economic and political character, a number of places rose into prominence as important trade centers.
Chapter V - Commodities Exchanged and Antiquities

To present a consolidated picture of the scene, not only the means of communication and transport have been detailed, but the very organisation of export and import of articles from Western India has been carefully projected. It goes without stating that a final analysis of this chapter serves as the very yardstick by which economic activities can be properly judged. Various objects reported from archaeological sites related to the foreign trade were also studied here in order to focus on trading activities carried out in this region.

Chapter VI - Conclusion

The concluding chapter of this work deals with the general discussion of different trade patterns and activities carried out in this area and indicates the significance of the study.