Chapter Six

Mercantile Communities

Traders remained soul to any commercial activity in the Indian Ocean trading world. In simple words, a trader was a person who risked his capital. He obtained commodities, available in plenty, from a market at lower prices. These commodities were then transported to distant markets where greater demands existed for them. Commodities fetched higher prices and the margins were kept as profits. In medieval times, trading was not as easy as it looked. It involved a large number of complexities. Merchants had to cross distant boundaries, overcome risks of plunder and unjust bargains to execute beneficial transactions. Tributes and gifts added to their expenditures. Merchants operating in the Indian Ocean also overcame various political, socio-cultural and linguistic barriers to form global trading networks. They formed associations and guilds to extract good deals from the nobility and elites. These mercantile groups also exerted pressure to strike the best possible transaction for their members. When Vasco da Gama and his armada was perceived as a threat by the local Muslim merchants, they threatened the Samuri (the ruler) that they would leave Calicut en mass, if their demands were not met. Indian guilds like the Manigramam and Ainnurruvar were extremely powerful. Even the rulers hesitated to interfere in their internal affairs.

In the early times, trade was present in the crudest form, namely barter. Money and other complexities had little place in it. Evolution of state and society resulted in the expansion of economies. Markets began to expand. Merchants found unprecedented mobility. The states established strong nexus with traders. The kingdoms bordering the Indian Ocean like the Cholas restructured their imperial policies with an eye on the benefits of both sea and land trade.¹

Study of mercantile communities and their associations, operating in the Indian Ocean, presents several challenges. These groups displayed both

flexibility and rigidity. The associations and guilds of merchants included members of different ethnic groups. We also have numerous references in the contemporary sources pointing towards the separate quarters of people of different faiths or coming from different regions. These groups sometimes specialized in particular commodities. Lubbais mostly dealt in pearls and textiles, whereas Mapillas controlled spices. The merchants resided in separate quarters with their own shahbanders (leaders). They decided the disputes of the merchants as per their own customs and cultures. Thus, mercantile groups, operating in the Indian Ocean maritime world, displayed a peculiar mixture of flexibility and rigidity. This was perhaps a necessity for successful trading ventures.

In the present chapter, an effort is being made to study the composition of the merchants with reference to their regional mooring and religious affiliations. This broad framework helps to analyze the various characteristics of sea merchants in India.

**Muslims**

As discussed in earlier chapters, it has been observed that the emergence of Islam and its subsequent expansion provided considerable impetus to mercantile activities. It heralded a period of economic recovery. Prophet Muhammad was a trader. Merchants were thus not relegated to the lower rung of social hierarchy. They enjoyed equal sharing of economic prosperity, several privileges, a considerable amount of mobility and ample respect. Muslim merchants and adventurers displayed equal zeal for expansion. In fact, the Muslim merchants often managed to penetrate distant markets much before the arrival of the Muslim armies. By twelfth century, Muslim armies overran large parts of Asia, Africa and Europe, creating Pan Islamica. It was characterized by more security, better mobility, increased consumption and mercantile activities. The Arabs had already conquered Persia and inherited navigational skills from them. These navigational skills
helped the Arab merchants to dominate the sea trade of the Indian Ocean upto the arrival of the Europeans. They were found operating right upto Africa, India, southeast Asia and even China by the tenth century.

India always enjoyed close trading relations with Persia and Arabia. Indian ports were in touch with the western world. S.R. Rao opines that the port of Cambay might have been used even in the Harrapan times.\(^2\) Ships from Arabia regularly sailed upto Malabar and Ceylon to obtain spices. The Periplus records that the ports of Muziris (Crangnore) abounded with ships sent there with cargoes from Arabia and by the Greeks. Similarly, Pliny refers to the large number of Arab settlers in Malabar.\(^3\) Konkan was an important shipbuilding centre. Arabs visited Konkan to obtain teak. Dhows were built in Konkan. Indian rulers also remained quite accommodative towards the sea traffic. They invited and encouraged the settlement of foreigners in their areas. These early settlements of the Arabs and Persians brought the first seeds of Islam into India. About 10,000 Muslims were residing in Saymur around the tenth century.\(^4\) Muslims inhabited Sind prior to the invasion of Muhammad bin Qasim in 712 AD. In Gujarat, there was a large population of Muslim merchants. A merchant, Nuruddin Firuz, from western Asia acquired land in Somanath to construct a mosque.\(^5\) Located in the vicinity of the temple, the charter for the grant was signed by several local dignitaries. The Muslims were also entrusted with the maintenance of the mosque. Bitter memories of 1025 AD perhaps did not create that much a stir as it does in present times. Muslims were already enjoying several privileges in south India before the march of Islamic armies in the early thirteenth century. They

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were given religious freedom and permission to build their mosques. A merchant named Misqal in Calicut was rich enough and fellow merchant congregated in his house to take his advice. The sultans of Maldives assigned ‘a third of the taxes of the islands as alms to traveling foreigners in recognition of his reception of Islam.’

Duarte Barbosa believed that the Portuguese discovery of Indian routes helped in curbing the expansion of Islam. Otherwise, Malabar would have definitely been ruled by a Moorish King. Muslims were indeed very influential in Calicut when Vasco da Gama reached Calicut. They formed groups to exert pressure on the rulers to force the foreigners to leave the port. To the European eye, it was a Muslim conspiracy to obtain power and control over the entire trade. They clothed the event with religious and ethnic colours. Local traditions however point towards a different scenario. Perumal was a respected ruler of Malabar around eighth century. He met some Muslim saints after their visit to Adam's Peak. Teachings of Islam so impressed him that he decided to visit Arabia in their company. Perumal was not destined to return and died on the sea (thus came the word al-Samuri, the Zamorin).

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6 Ibn Battuta, (Mahdi Husain), p. 189.
7 Ibn Battuta records an interesting incident that resulted in the conversion of Maldives into a Muslim land. Referring to local traditions, he records that there came a demon from the sea every month. It was a custom to offer him a local woman to be devoured. But one pious Muslim from Morocco decided to help the local family and decided to offer himself in lieu of a girl of the family. He disguised himself as a girl and continued to recite Quran throughout night. The demon did not dare to touch him. The same thing happened in the next month. The rulers of Maldives were so impressed by the incident that they decided to embrace Islam. People also followed their rulers and the whole of island was converted to Islam. Ibn Battuta, The Rihla, Tr. and Ed., Albert Gray, Ibn Battuta in the Maldives and Ceylon, pp. 14-16 (hereafter cited as Ibn Battuta, (Albert Gray)). These local tales were perhaps the best way to adjust the new trading communities in the local settings. And these were found almost in all the regions of Indian Ocean trading empire.
9 It is not convincingly proved whether the story was a real event or invented to display close affiliations of Hindu Samuris with the Muslims. Perumal was said to be
However, he sent the last word that the Muslims should always be cordially welcomed in Calicut. Malabar presented an interesting example of peaceful co-existence to reap the fruits of maritime trade. Interestingly, unlike Malacca, the nobility here was not forced to adopt the new religion (Islam). Hinduism remained the religion of the rulers and the masses.

Andre Wink considered Mapillas and Lubbais as constituting Muslim diasporas in India. The word diaspora denotes the settlement of groups far from their original home. This perfectly describes the search of the Jews for their original home. Can this term be applied to the Muslims of India? Islam was not attached with any specific region. It was a cosmopolitan religion that believed in mobility and expansion. Conversion was also permitted. When the first generation of merchants brought this new creed into India, it found ready acceptance among the lower classes existing at the fringes of social hierarchy. Fishing communities benefited from the new religion. Muslim merchants married native women. The children of such unions and converts constituted a new element in Indian Islam. No doubt, these communities sometimes traced their origin to Arabia, yet Arabia did not act as a promised land to them. Their beliefs and rituals displayed a considerable amount of fusion with local customs and practices. Contemporary travellers were fully aware of this composition. Ibn Battuta remarks that the Pardesis were from Persia and Arabia, whereas as the Mappillas were clearly recognised as the natives of Malabar. The Baysiras, Mappilas and Lubbias displayed marked fusion of local traditions in their beliefs and usages.

From the twelfth century onwards, the Mapillas emerged as influential sea traders of Malabar. Along with the Pardesis, they controlled a large

impressed by the teachings of Islam and visited Mecca, yet his successors remained Hindu and never attempted to visit Mecca or adopt Islam. Andre Wink, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 77.

10 Islamic Pase (a country of southeast Asia) agreed to trade with Malacca only if the ruler of Malacca converted to Islam. Tome Pires, Vol. I, p. 239.

chunk of maritime trade towards western Asia. Duarte Barbosa states that Pardesis were the natives of Arabia, Gujarat, Persia, Khurasan and Deccan. In reality, they were foreigners who traded in Malabar. On the contrary, Mapillas were the natives of Malabar. They constituted one-fifth of the total population of Malabar.\textsuperscript{12} The word Mapilla is formed with two native words \textit{ma} (big) and \textit{pilla} (child). They were the offsprings of the union of Muslim merchants with local women. The revival of Hinduism during ninth century AD, with strict adherence to the concept of pollution, forbade the contacts of upper class Hindus with Muslims. Thus, the merchants acquired their wives from fishing communities. Such marriages were legalized under the provision of \textit{muttah}.\textsuperscript{13} The phenomenon worked in favour of the Mapillas. They inherited both sailing and trading skills. They specialized in maritime traffic towards the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. They played an important role for the ruling classes owing to their control over the supply of \textit{bahri} horses from western Asia. The Cholas and Vijayanagar empire were acquiring horses from the Malabar. It was perhaps the result of Mapilla monopoly over the supply of war horses. Their contacts in western Asia (Arabia and Persia) enabled them to emerge as intermediary of horse trade in India. The Mapillas enjoyed several privileges and became economically well off. They were provided autonomy and religious protection. They appointed their leaders.

\textsuperscript{12} Duarte Barbosa, Vol. II, pp. 74-75.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Muttah} is a marriage contracted for a limited period, for a certain amount of money. The \textit{muttah} marriages are said to be lawful among the \textit{Shias}, but unlawful among the Sunnis. The \textit{Shias} established the legality of \textit{muttah} upon the following verse of Quran: \textit{Surah}, IV, 28.

\begin{quote}
"Forbidden to you also are married women except those who are in your hands as slaves. This is the law of god for you. And, it is allowed you, besides this, to seek out wives by mean of your wealth with modest conduct and without fornication. And give those with whom ye have cohabite their dowry. This is the law. But, it shall be no crime in you to make agreement over and above the law. Verily God is knowing, Wise!"
\end{quote}
The rulers were very accommodative towards them. When the friends of Ibn Battuta demanded the son of a local ruler as a hostage in their ship as long as they stayed in the port of Mangalore, the qazi Badr-ud-din convinced him that the ruler of Mangalore could do no harm to them because 'the sultan fears us.'\textsuperscript{14} 'The fear' might be the threat of mass migration by Muslim merchants from his ports, resulting in the decline of revenues. The natives however still avoided contacts with them. The Hindus of Malabar did not let them inside their homes.\textsuperscript{15} This practice again confirms their plebeian origin.

Mapillas were helped by various social factors. During the ongoing movement of Hindu revivalism Shankaracharya, a Namboordari Brahman, radicalized Hinduism. Namboordaris and Nayars became the custodians of both religion and politics in Kerala. These two communities were oriented more towards agriculture. Trading activities, especially maritime commerce were not suitable to the new found gentry. Sea journey resulted in contact with the \textit{mlecchas} and avoidance of one's religious practices. Aversion to the sea journey was so strong that any member of the high caste was sure to lose his caste if he happened to cross the seas. He was declared \textit{apantakya}, i.e. no longer able to enjoy community lunch.\textsuperscript{16} When captain Gabral held some Nayars on board in his ship to guarantee his success and safety, the Samuri at once requested the replacement of these Nayars with others 'because they were \textit{gentilhommes} and could neither eat nor drink on board.'\textsuperscript{17} Mapillas, professing Islam, derived benefits from such a situation. They became indispensable to the local ruling elites who wanted to exact their share in prosperous maritime trade of the Indian Ocean.

Global developments helped the Mapillas. Towards the end of the twelfth century, the Karimis overtook the trading activities of the Jews in the Red

\textsuperscript{14} Ibn Battuta, (Mahdi Husain), p. 185.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 183.
\textsuperscript{16} Andre Wink, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
Sea. Saladin established a fanatic Sunni dynasty (the Ayyubs in 1173 AD) in Egypt displacing the Shia Fatimids. The Ayyubs also evicted the Jews from their areas because of their trading links with the Christians during the Crusades. Trade to Aden came into the hands of the Karimis around the thirteenth century. The Karimis specialized in Indian pepper and clothes, mostly sought after in western Asia and Europe. Fischel has studied one important aspect of the Karimis. According to him, the Karimis commercial organization was based on religious affiliation and they were all Muslims.\(^\text{18}\) Arabic and Persian provided uniform languages to all the Muslim merchants throughout the Indian Ocean. Therefore, the religious and linguistic affiliation of the Mapillas with the Karimis would have enabled them to have better control over the supply of commodities from India.

The Lubbais, a corrupt form of the word Arabic, were influential sea merchants of Tamilnadu.\(^\text{19}\) The Chola expansion and subsequent interest in maritime trade attracted merchants from distant areas. The Lubbais traced their origin to an earlier branch of merchants from Arabia. They boasted of their pure Arab blood and professed the Shafite school of Islam. They continued with their old traditions even after the influx of the Turkish power in south India under Malik Kafur. Interestingly, the Lubbais of coastal areas (Marrikayars) abhorred the Lubbais of interior because of their mixed blood. This abhorrence also benefited them in one respect. Lubbais of coastal areas often preferred to marry their children to the Shafites of Ceylon and southeast Asia. In this way, trading relations could be easily established in far off countries. Thus, they formed their trading world in association with the larger network in the eastern sector of the Indian Ocean. Marrikayars were extremely rich and they owned big ships. They made Kayal their

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headquarters; a step which strengthened their dominance over the supply of pearls. Indian pearls were eagerly sought after in the trading world of the Indian Ocean. They also managed to extract a good deal from the local rulers. In Kayalpattinam, a Muslim was allowed to levy a tax upon the collection of pearls. He even executed judgments and dispensed justice. It was again a custom in Kayalpattinam that ‘the catch (pearls)’ of Friday would go to the ship owners (normally Marrrackayars). Though the Marrrackayars boasted of their purity of blood and remained exclusive, yet their mosques displayed a kind of hybrid culture. Their mosques, with lotus and other local symbols, point to the impact of Hindu culture in their constructions. Again, in the face of onslaught by the Portuguese, these Lubbais were readily helped and protected by the local Nayars who recognised their importance to the local economy.

Around the eleventh century AD, thousands of Muslim merchants were settled in the western ports of India. Sind and Gujarat were in close contact with the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. The Arabs visited Konkan to obtain teak for their dhows. Sind was an inevitable part of the Persian Gulf trade. Maqbul Ahmad argues that Sind acted as the main centre for the diffusion of Arabic culture in India. No region had such a large number of Arab settlers as Sind. Thus, control over Debal was a necessity for Muslim merchants settled around Fars (Persia) and Makran. After his invasion of 712 AD, Muhammad bin Qasim concentrated on the fortification of Debal. Muslim migrants followed Muslim armies into India. Soon the Muslims were in control of Sind. They brought merchandize from distant countries like China, southeast Asia and Malabar. They re-exported it to western Asia. These

21 Lubbais were also known as the jewellers in south India. Ibid., p. 79.
22 Ibid., p. 80.
23 Maqbul Ahmad, op. cit., pp. 6-7.
Muslim merchants were also instrumental in the supply of war-horses to the Delhi sultan. Ghiasuddin Balban had to send his son to Sind to ensure the regular supply of these war horses (*bahri*) to Delhi.\(^{24}\)

Gujarat was a flourishing centre of cotton textiles. Better connectivity with the hinterlands and benevolent attitude of the rulers towards sea trade attracted Muslim merchants to Gujarat. These Muslim merchants were given independence, protection and religious freedom. As a result, the merchants flocked to the ports of Gujarat bringing in great amount of prosperity and revenues. Gurjara Pratihara rulers followed the suit of the Rashtrakutas. They also began to patronize the foreign traders. Broach and Cambay became the favourite ports for the Persians and Arabs. These merchants married with the locals and offsprings of these unions were known as Bysiras.\(^{25}\) The Balharas authorized the leaders of Bysiras to regulate their affairs. None, but the Muslims governed the fellow Muslim merchants in the Balharas' kingdom (*min qiblai balhara*).\(^{26}\) The Muslims replaced the Hindu rulers of Gujarat after the invasion of Alauddin Khalji in the early fourteenth century. The Muslims penetrated into the interiors of the country. Muslim activities were recorded in Junagarh and Annhilwara from this period onwards. They financed the construction of beautiful mosques and houses. They even financed royal armies and hired private guards. Duarte Barbosa observes that the Muslims of Malabar paid no attention to the matters of weapons.\(^{27}\)

Nayars were the warrior class of Malabar, but in Gujarat, the situation was somewhat complex. Muslims were strong enough to raise the banner of revolt. In the first half of thirteenth century, a Muslim merchant of Cambay,

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25 V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India (AD 1000-1300)*, p. 120.


named Saida, challenged the local governor, Vastupala, and revolted against the latter.28

Gujarat presented a different picture regarding the Muslim expansion. The Arabs and Persians visited Gujarat since antiquity. Muslim armies invaded the ports of Thane as early as 636 AD. Chalukyas and Gurjara Partiharas spoiled the military expedition sent by the governor of Bahrain. Numerous inscriptions found in Gujarat testified Muslim penetration in the interiors. Haji Ibraham of Cambay was called, "chief of the merchants and prince of shipmasters" in an epitaph (1291 AD). A Junagarh inscription (1286-87) commemorates the construction of a mosque by Abul Qasim, who was also addressed as the prince of chieftains and shipmasters and pilgrims to the city of Mecca and Medina.29 Another inscription from Anhilwara (1232 AD) refers to a merchant Fakhruddin Ibrahim, who belonged to a merchant family of Shahrzur in Iraq. He came to India as an agent of his family and settled in Anhilwara.30

A considerable amount of general harmony existed between the locals and foreign merchants. They were promised complete autonomy and fair play. A co-religionist decided their cases. The important inscription of Veraval dated 1264 AD records the grant of land out of mahajanpali to a famous sailor and merchant named Nuruddin Firuz in Somanath. The grant was witnessed by brihat purush, the elites of the town. A jamatha was also appointed to look after the day-to-day works of the mosque. This jamatha consisted of sailors, oilman, religious teachers, whitewasher and mason etc.

28 V.K. Jain, op. cit., p. 75.
29 Ibid., p. 76.
30 Ibid.
Any surplus income was to be sent to Mecca and Medina. This inscription indicates a clear desire of the locals to attract the foreigners and ensure complete religious freedom to the Muslims willing to trade in Somanath. The port must have gone into decline after the plunder by Mahmud of Ghazni. Nevertheless, economic concerns and ground realities overcame any religious considerations. It testifies the impact of maritime trade in creating a hybrid Indian society especially around coastal areas.

Gujarat gained a lot from Muslim participation. Cambay became a world-renowned port. Merchants of the whole world crowded the streets of Cambay for trade. It stretched two arms, one to Aden and the other to Malacca. Merchants from Gujarat were also found trading in Malacca, Aden, Hormuz and other Indian Ocean ports. Interestingly, the Hindu classes dominated the inland trade of Gujarat, whereas Muslims controlled the sea trade. Muslims' presence also attracted the supply of bahri horses to Gujarat. The availability of war horses must have helped its sea trade reach unprecedented heights.

Bengal came in contact with Islam during the early thirteenth century when a handful of Khalji soldiers conquered the city of Gaur. Some Muslim immigration might have followed the political victory. In Bengal, a clear demarcation was visible among the inhabitation of different communities. Duarte Barbosa observes that the Muslims lived mostly in the seaports where there was a regular traffic of ships arriving with rich merchandize from distant countries. The Hindus, on the other hand, populated the interiors. Muslim merchants of Bengal were extremely rich. Some of them even owned big

ships like *junks*. Tome Pires records their nationalities from Chaul, Dabhol, Goa, Persia, Turkistan and Arabia. It is however not sure whether he points to the nationalities of these merchants with reference to their respective regions (of inhabitation) or spoken languages. Whatever might be his criteria, one thing was very clear that these merchants played a crucial role in establishing the commercial relations of Bengal with southeast Asia. Division of the Indian Ocean trade into two halves benefited Bengal. Every year one or two ships containing a merchandize of eighty to ninety crusades each sailed to Malacca from Bengal. Four or five *junks* also sailed to Pegu and Malacca every year. They grew in number with the passage of time. Malacca and Pase were Islamic kingdoms and this might have provided another advantage to the Muslim merchants of Bengal. These merchants were engaged in exporting slaves, textiles, sugar and other commodities from Bengal to different sectors of the India Ocean.

Bengal was under the control of the Muslim rulers and hence the political will required for promoting maritime commerce was not lacking. Indian rulers normally followed the policy of laissez faire in the internal affairs of sea traders as long as their participation ensured regular revenues. The merchants of Bengal not only participated in sea trade but also patronized shipbuilding. Bengal was constructing *junks* around the fifteenth century when China had stopped active participation in the Indian Ocean trade. Merchants owned large *junks* for trading. In addition to *junks*, *dhow* on the pattern of Arabia were also constructed in Bengal. Though there is no direct evidence, yet it is possible that the fishing communities, like in Malabar and the Coromandel, would also have found Islam a better option promising more

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freedom and mobility. Poor strata of Muslims might have provided efficient labour to the shipbuilding industry.\(^3\)

Muslim merchants dealt in all kinds of commodities. Their merchandize ranged from costly pearls and other luxuries to staples like black rice and dates. In fact, traders in the Indian Ocean always favoured division of their merchandize in both luxuries and staples. The Mapillas of Malabar were reputed intermediaries and they were instrumental in arranging supply of spices and pepper. Gujarati Muslims controlled the supply of cotton textiles, indigo and other manufactured products like vessels and ornaments to western Asia, Africa and southeast Asia. In the Coromandel, the Muslim Lubbais monopolized Kayal pearl fisheries. The duties were collected by the Muslim and all the catch of Friday was to go to the owners of the ships called Champanes (\textit{sampans} in local dialect).\(^3\) The Muslims of Bengal dealt in staples ranging from sugar and rice to costly textiles. \textit{Sanbaf}, \textit{mamos} and \textit{duguz}, all varieties of Indian silk, were in considerable demand throughout the Indian Ocean trading world. Even Ibn Battuta took Bengal cloth as a present for the ruler of Sumatra.\(^4\) Slaves from Bengal were readily sought after. Marco Polo noticed the slave trade of Bengal. He observed that slaves and eunuchs were sold to sea merchants who took them all over the world.\(^4\)

\(^3\) There is almost no reference to the menial staff of the crew on a ship in any of the contemporary sources. It would have been very helpful to understand the character of these unsung heroes of the sea. They were as important as any other on the ship. Besides, considerable amount of shipbuilding traditions also existed in Bengal. Ibn Battuta found that both \textit{junks} and \textit{dhow}s were constructed in Bengal. Ibn Battuta, (\textit{Cathay and the Way Thither}), Vol. IV, p. 90. The industry would have employed labour from the weaker sections of both the Muslims and Hindus. However, Barbosa tells us that the Muslims dominated the coastal areas. Duarte Barbosa, Vol. I, p. 135. It is probable that they benefited from the shipping industry of Bengal. However it is just a hypothesis that needed detailed study.

\(^4\) Friday is a holy day for the Muslims. For details see Duarte Barbosa, Vol. II, pp.120-124; Andre Wink, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 79.


\(^4\) Marco Polo, Vol. II, p. 115.
Duarte Barbosa describes the hunt for eunuchs by Muslim merchants in Bengal in the following words:

“The Moorish merchants of this city of Tamer travel up country to buy heathen boys from their parents or from other persons who steal them and castrate them, so that they are left quite flat. Many die from this; those who live they train well and sell them. They value them much as the guardian of their women and estates and for their low objects.”

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“Eunuchs they held in high esteem as a man of upright character.”

The Muslim merchants also sought the protection of guilds. An important guild of south India, the Manigramam was noteworthy in this regard. Originally, it was a guild of Christians, who had settled in Qulion after the death of Saint Thomas. The guild was extended various privileges. It formed alliances with Anjuvannan and other mercantile organization. Meera Abraham opines that Arab Muslims were also the members of this guild.

Jews

The Jews constituted another important group in the Indian Ocean trade. Destruction of the Jerusalem (70 AD.) and subsequent religious persecution forced their migration from Babylonia. India, south India in particular, displayed close contacts with the Persian Gulf and Red Sea around the first century. A group of Jews therefore arrived at Crangnore after the destruction of the Second Temple. Local traditions also alluded to the persecution of the Jews by Titus and Vespian and their migration to south


43 Meera Abraham, Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India, p. 25.
India. Hebrew manuscripts claimed the number of Jews to be around 10,000 in Malabar. Zayad Din in his book *Tuhfat at Mujahidin* records (1563 AD) that the Jews and Christians migrated to Malabar before the arrival of Islam. Traditions also allude to the migration of Christians into south India because of religious persecution, yet there is no clear reference to any joint migration of the Jews and Christians in India.

The concept of diaspora can be aptly applied to the Jewish settlement in south India. The Jews always affiliated themselves with religion and ‘promised land’ (Israel). They failed to develop any composite Judaic Hindu culture. Besides their emergence and decline remained closely associated with the activities of the Jews in Babylonia and then al Fustat. The word diaspora has been coined by the Greek speaking Jews as an equivalent to the Jewish *gaeloth*. It was applicable to all the Babylonian Jews who were living outside Palestine. The Jewish *gaon* of Babylonia contributed a lot to the emergence of the Jews throughout Asia around seventh and eight century. Islam also contributed to the rise of *gaons*. For they were able to

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45 Ibid.
48 The very foundation of Israel is based on these religious views. The Jews believed that God gave instructions (Torah) to Israel (Jews), which mandated both worldly views and a way of life (Halakah). *Microsoft Encarta* (1993-2001 computer edition).
50 The rabbinization of all the Jewry, including the growing Mediterranean and European diasporas, was a gradual process that had to overcome sharp challenges from the Karaites and other anti-rabbinic movements. The Arab conquest of the Middle East in the 7th century by Muslim armies, facilitated the spread of a uniform rabbinic Judaism. Near the seat of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, the heads of the Babylonian rabbinical academies *gaon* attempted to standardize Jewish laws,
mediate their traditions to all the Jewish communities residing in the different quarters of the Indian Ocean. The status of *zimmis* enabled them to continue with their traditions and beliefs. In Baghdad, the Jews held a central position in trading and banking activities. They were instrumental in developing banking and finance. Prohibition against usury in Islam and Christianity helped to consolidate their status. Soon the Jews were not only acting as traders (*tujjar*) but also organizing finances. They even financed the Muslim traders and rulers.51

Interestingly, the fate of Indian Jews was directly linked to their counterparts in Baghdad. Indian Jews were oriented more towards the Persian Gulf till the destruction of Baghdad by Halaku Khan in 1258 AD. Troubles in Persia and subsequent revival of the Caliphate under the Fatimids in Fustat forced the migration of Jews from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea.52 Shifting of the balance of power also lured Indian Jews to trade in Egypt. Trading activities around the Red Sea was also important in the light of revival of Europe. The Jews were present in Europe also. Egypt developed as the transit point. Emergence of strong Jewish commercial houses in Egypt strengthened the role of Indian Jews in the eleventh century. Various documents pertaining to the Jewish trade in south India are available in Geniza around the same period.

The earliest substantive evidence of Jewish migration to south India is to be found around 978 AD to 1036 AD. Inscriptions of Sthanu Ravi and Bhaskar Ravi Varman grant contained references to the Arabs as witness and

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52 This migration might also have been facilitated because of Shia Fatimids, who were more accommodative towards the Jews than the fanatic Sunnis.
they were "Jewish or Arab Muslim, Christians and Persians or a mixed group." The Jews of India became prominent around the tenth century. Their emergence was attributed to the revival of the Jewish *gaon* of Babylonia under the early caliphate. Secondly, the period was marked by the revival of the Hinduism. Brahmanization and supremacy of the Nayars oriented south Indian society towards agriculture. Sea trade was abhorred and sea merchants were avoided. Revival of Hinduism also resulted in the decline of Buddhism. Buddhists were reputed for their maritime adventures. They crossed seas to reach Ceylon, southeast Asia, China and Japan. However, their decline created a space for other communities in south Indian trading world. Till that time, Islam had not consolidated its roots in Malabar. Absence of well-developed institutions made the role of the Jews more important. Indian rulers responded to the changing scenario and bestowed privileges on the Jew merchants. They were remitted any tax on their slaves. If they had complaints they could redress their grievances by stopping the payment of custom duties upon the merchandize. They were given freedom in their jurisdiction and about seventy-two privileges were bestowed upon their organizations.

The Jews formed associations and Anjuvannam was one of such guilds. T.A Gopinathan states that five castes namely washermen, footropes, ladder and *lachchan* (carpenters) constituted the guild. However K.N. Daniel convincingly proves that Anjuvannam were the Jews. Inscription of

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53 Inscriptions of Sthanu Ravi are a series of inscribed copper plates on which Manigramam was first mentioned. Bhaskar Ravi Varman grant (1016 AD) is a copper plate grant issued to a Jew named Issuppu Irappan and is now in the possession of the Jews of Quilon. Both the above mentioned plates had Hebrew signatures that attest to the participation of the Jews. Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, pp. 20, 22, 25, 26, 36.


55 Fifth caste is not identified. Ibid.
Bhasakar Ravi Varman declares that Isupu Irappan owns Anjuvannam.\textsuperscript{56} Besides, the Anjuvannam worked in close association with other guilds. The Manigramam was important in this respect. It also included Christians of Malabar. Increased participation of foreigners- Jews and Christians- also strengthens the argument that space created in maritime trading world of India was filled by new communities around the tenth century. Emergence of the Mapillas and Lubbais in the Malabar and the Coromandel respectively forced the Jews and Christian participation once again into negligible proportion around thirteenth century.

As discussed earlier, the Jewish diaspora of India was closely related to Babylonian \textit{gaon}, which was shifted to Egypt under the Fatimids. An important letter of manumission, dated 17 October 1132 AD, given to a slave girl Ashu in the city of Manglore by her former master Abraham Yiju, a Tunisian merchant, opened with the introduction:

"In the city of Manglore..., the royal city, which is situated on the coast of the Great Sea and which is under the jurisdiction of our lord Daniel, the great prince, the head of Diaspora of all Israel, the son of our lord Hisday, the great prince..., and also under the jurisdiction of our Gaon Masliah Ha Kohen, the head of Yeshiva Gaon Ya'aqou (the Palestine academy), the son of Soloman, the head of Yeshiva."\textsuperscript{57}

Thus in this period, the exilarch of Baghdad and Palestine \textit{gaon} had their seat in Cairo.\textsuperscript{58} In the Geniza documents, there are numerous references to the activities of the Nagid. Nagid Madmum was declared to be 'the prince of the land of Yemen.' He was entrusted by all (the Jews) as 'the lord of the sea and desert.' He concluded agreements in the interest of his

\textsuperscript{56} K.N. Daniel, op. cit., p. 257

\textsuperscript{57} S. D. Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza}, Vol. III, pp. 20-21. Also see appendix A of the present work.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
clients with the petty rulers (or pirates) who controlled the routes of Arabia and Indian sea as well the land routes between Aden and Egypt. The Nagid was also entrusted the duty to protect the interests of the Jews. He acted as a judge in conformity with the Jewish laws and customs. He was also held responsible for the regulations and restrictions imposed on the non-Muslims in Islamic states. The Fatimids of Egypt also confirmed the Nagid after his election by the Jews. Protection and increased mercantile trade under the Fatimids brought a considerable prosperity to the Jews. But soon, they were robbed of their supremacy. Around the thirteenth century, a powerful organization known as the Karimi merchants began to dominate trade in the Red Sea. Commercial policy of Saladin (the Ayyubs) also closed the Red Sea for the foreigners, as it was declared an ‘Islamic waterway’.

It is matter of debate whether the Jews participated in the Karimi organization or not? Fischel finds only the name of Izazad din Abd ul Aziz Mansura, whose father was a Jew but he being a convert to Islam, operated under the protection of the Karimi organization. Karimis’ control over the Red Sea trade and emergence of Mapillas in Malabar reduced the importance of the Jews. At the same time, the Jews migrated further west to Europe and the Mediterranean. Thus with the decline of Babylonian gaon, the Jews of the Indian Ocean once again went into oblivion.

The Jewish cargoes in the Indian Ocean trade consisted of a wide range of products. It ranged from foodstuffs to costly finished products of


60 S. D. Goitein, A Mediterranean Society: the Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza, Vol. III, p. 27.


62 Ibid., p. 166.
muslin and silk. Gold was also traded in substantial quantity. Goitein has prepared the list of products traded from Aden to India and vice versa:

FROM RED SEA TO EASTERN PORTS:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Textiles and clothing</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Vessels and ornaments of silver</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Household goods, such as carpets</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Chemicals, medicaments, soap and paper books</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Metal and other ingredients for metal industry</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Coral</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Foodstuff (cheese, sugar, raisin, olive oil Linseed oil for lamps)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FROM INDIA TO ADEN:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Spices, aromatics, dyeings, vanishing plants and medicinal herbs</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Iron and steel</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Brass and bronze vessels</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Indian silk and clothes, made mainly of cotton</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Pearls, beads, cowries, shells and ambergris</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Shoes and other leather work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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64 Ibid., p. 196.
7 Chinese porcelain, Yemenite stone pots, African ivory and plants 3
8 Tropical fruits, such as coconuts 5
9 Timber 1

In the Geniza letters, there is reference of a slave girl named Ashu in India. However, it is not known whether she originally belonged to India or was bought from western Asia or China. Another letter refers to the gift of a girl around six to be kept as a personal attendant. These letters signify some amount of slave trade being carried out by the Jews in India, but the evidence is not sufficient to assess the volume of this business.

From the above mentioned products, it becomes clear that the Jewish trade did not conform to the general characteristics of commodity structure in the Indian Ocean trade. It mainly catered to the Jewish clients of Fustat and Europe. Indian pepper and spices were in considerable demand but reputed Indian clothes were not included in the list of Indian exports in the Geniza documents. Again, there is a reference to Indian iron and steel, but the famous Indian swords are not mentioned anywhere. Cheese and sugar were imported from Aden though these were available in plenty in India. War-horses, always in huge demand in India, are not referred to in any Jewish document. Perhaps this was another important reason for their rapid decline in the Indian maritime trade. The Jews in India failed to monopolize the commodity structure and therefore could not play the crucial role of intermediaries, as was played by the Mapillas and Lubbais in later times.

Christians

The Christians played an important role in the maritime trade of India around tenth century. Mar Sapo, a Christian priest, was addressed as the

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person who founded ‘the city of Quilon’. Christians were given several privileges and considerable autonomy. Marignolli remarks that the proprietors of pepper gardens were the Christians of Saint Thomas, besides the masters of public steel yard (weighing office). They provided him hundred gold coins every month and a thousand when he embarked on further journey. They were also given a higher status in caste hierarchy of Malabar. Tome Pires counted these Christians to be around fifteen thousand minus recent converts. These included men of repute, noblemen and merchants. The Nayars did not abhor contact with these Christians. On the other hand, mlecchas (Muslims) and other low caste were not extended these privileges. Duarte Barbosa also observes that these Christians were scattered among Heathens. He counted them to be around twelve thousand. Christianity also penetrated in the interiors by the sixteenth century. Duarte Barbosa encountered a church located in the interiors of Kerala.

The Christians of India followed the Nestorian church. The Roman

66 Meera Abraham, Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India, p. 27.
70 Nestorian is a Christian sect that originated in Asia Minor at Syria. Narsai, a reputed administrator and theologian, was expelled from the school of Edessa (471 AD). He followed Nestorius who was declared heretic for his beliefs. He stressed the independence of the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ. The nature, according to him, signified two persons, loosely united in moral union. The newly developed Church is called Nestorian, sometimes Persian or Assyrian Church. Nestorian in Persia got rid of any foreign connection in 424 AD to eliminate local doubts. The Muslim forces of Arabia after conquering Persia (637 AD) granted them zimmi status. The Nestorians displayed good relations with the Caliphate. By the tenth century, there were fifteen metropolitan centres of the Church in caliphate and five abroad in India and China. The Mongol and Turk invasions threatened the existence of the Nestorian Church, but in 1551 AD, Nestorians were reunited with Rome and were called Chaldeans. Following the example of the Persian Church, the followers of Saint Thomas in India also united with Rome in late sixteenth century. Microsoft Encarta (1993-2001 computer edition); www.wikipedia.org.
and Sassanids' persecutions forced their immigration to foreign destinations. The earlier Christian immigrants were skilled traders. Even the missionaries displayed a keen understanding of trade and commodity structure of the Indian Ocean. Acts of Judas Thomas also testify the close nexus of traders and missionaries. Monk Abraham of the sixth century wrote, "I was a merchant of the number of those who traded on the sea, it happened to us that on our way back from the country of India, our ship broke up." Cosmas, another Christian monk of sixth century, also possessed a good understanding of maritime trade and commodity structure of Ceylon and south India. Referring to Ceylon, he remarks:

"The island being, as it is in central position, is much frequented by ships from all parts of India and from Persia and Ethiopia, and it likewise sends out many of its own...And from the remotest countries I mean Tzinsta and other trading places, it receives silk, cloves, sandalwood and other products, and these again are passed on to the marts on this side, such as Male, where pepper grows, and to Calliana which exports copper and sesama-logs and cloth for making dresses, for it also is a great place of business. And to Sindhu also where musk and castor is produced...and to Persia and the Homerite country and to Adule. And the island receives imports from all these marts, which we have mentioned and passes them on to the remoter ports, while at the same time exporting its own produce in both directions." 

Legends attribute the arrival of the Christians in Malabar to Saint Thomas. The saint was said to have visited India during the times of

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72 Cosmas as quoted in Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, p. 19.
Gondophares. It is claimed that the saint even converted the ruler to the Christainity. Saint Thomas impressed the ruler with his divine powers. He was allowed to build a church but, later on, persecuted owing to fear of his rising popularity. With the passage of time, the church of Saint Thomas fell into neglect and merchant Thomas was sent to maintain the church. His followers accompanied Thomas from Jerusalem, Nineveh and Baghdad. The story might be a religious cloak to cover the forced migration due to religious persecutions under the Sassanids and trading interests in Malabar. Malabar was important for its supply of spices and pepper. The Christians of Quilon had become the masters of pepper gardens when Marignolli visited Malabar. Another wave of Christian migration was said to have arrived in Malabar around the eighth and ninth century. First Bishop Thomas of Cana and later Mar Sabrisho and Mar Piroz brought groups of Christians to south India. The account of the Jacobite priest from Malabar refers to the migration of Christians in the following words:

“Then in the year 823 AD the Syrian father Mar Sapron and Mar Piroz, with the illustrious Sabrisho came to India and reached Kullam. They went to king Shakibiti and asked from him for a piece of a land in which they could build a church for themselves and erect a town. He gave them the amount of the land they desired and they built a church and erected a town in the direction of Kullam, to which Sapron bishop and Metropolitans used to come by the orders of the Catholics who sent them Jacob priest.”

It is clear that the Christians migrated to India in different phases. Both religious persecutions and trading interests attracted them towards Quilon. However, it was not only foreign groups that provided reservoir for the Christians, but the locals also embraced Christianity. Money and equality


74 Ibid., pp. 20-21.
might be another two driving forces to the low castes. Duarte Barbosa candidly remarks, 'these men (locals) baptized for money.'

The Christians in south India were favoured by the same factors as the Jews. The two displayed a considerable similarity. Both were present in south India before the arrival of Islam. At this juncture, Islam was not properly established and Buddhism was on the decline. Hinduism was regressing back into agriculture. The Hindu abhorrence to the sea encouraged the Christians and Jews to fill the trading space thus created. Maritime trade always remained an important constituent of the state policy in south India. Thus, the rulers responded to the changing scenario and displayed much initiative and warmth in encouraging the Jews' and Christians' participation in their areas. The Christians were even accommodated in the nobility.

The Manigramam was an important and powerful guild of south India. There is much controversy over its character. Daniel quotes many sources to prove that members of the Manigramam were Christians. According to him, the Manigramam was entrusted with the duty to protect the Church and adjoining land. Tanu Iravi copper plate records, "No poll shall be levied upon the slaves brought by these people. In case of vehicles (or merchandize) these people are entitled to collect eight cash for admitting in or letting out, and to collect four cash when it comes and goes in veti (meaning not known) or in boats." The members of Manigramam were further authorized to levy duty on articles. These people were given seventy two such privileges. They could redress their complaints 'by stopping the custom duty on the weightage.' They were given jurisdiction to govern their criminal

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matters. Mar Sapo and the church of Quilon was also provided protection in buying and selling around the tenth century.

After the eleventh century, the Manigramam expanded its activities and recorded its presence in southeast Asian countries. But, the Christian participation began to decline. The Muslims strengthened their organizations and soon monopolized the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean. The Manigramam responded to the changes and started expanding in the interiors. It started granting donation to the local temples with a view to associate with the masses. The Manigramam continued to enjoy various privileges but the Christians did not benefit from it. Association with Hindu temples and institutions brought them once again into the ambit of Hinduism. The Christians lost their status and identity. They requested the Portuguese governor to restore their ancient rights 'that the Christians who had the management of the Church also should have in their keeping the seal and the standard weight of the city, which privileges the governor of Canlao (Quilon?) had taken from them for the fault and negligence of one of their member.'

Concentration of trading activities of the Manigramam in the interiors brought it close to Hindu religion. Daniel opines, "Whereas the church of Travancore is at that time totally demolished the great part of its parishioners having above forty years ago turned perfect heathen, all which has happened through the negligence of sending priests among them by reason of their great distance from any church, there being nevertheless several good

77 These rights were later on demanded by Christians of the Malabar from Alberqueque because these had been bestowed upon them by earlier local rulers. K.N. Daniel, op. cit., p. 257.

78 Meera Abraham, Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India, p. 22.

Christians among them." He believes that the Manigramam Nayars of Quilon were in reality the Christian converts to Hinduism.

Chinese

The Chinese participation in the Indian Ocean trade has not received due attention. Scholars tend to concentrate more on the mercantile activities of the Arabs and Persians. The Chinese are mainly referred in relation to their marvelous junks only. One reason might be the absence of substantial records. Nevertheless, many contemporary evidences hint towards the large volume of trade with China. Marco Polo records that the spices going from India to the west constituted not even one tenth of its volume going towards China. The Cholas sent many tribute missions to the Chinese court. Their purpose was to extract favourable terms for trading in China. They also wanted to attract Chinese merchants to the Chola kingdom. Chinese porcelain was imported to India in large quantity.

Since the birth and expansion of Buddhism to different quarters of the world, the Chinese scholars displayed a keen interest in India. Many Chinese pilgrims visited the holy land of India to pay homage at the sacred places related to Lord Buddha. Indians also visited China to propagate the tenets of Buddhism. Politically, the Kushanas traced their origin to China. Chinese silk was a prized commodity and came to India via the Silk Route and sea. Colonization of southeast Asia by India also brought the two countries into close contact. In the early fifth century, Fahien boarded the ship from Tamparlipti on his way back to China. He, however, faced considerable hardships. Sea routes were not preferred at that time. The first embassy from Ceylon to China around 405 AD preferred to take the land routes than sea.

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81 Ibid.
With the passage of time, the sea routes became more secure than the land routes. Kumar Deva of Ceylon sent many tribute missions to China in the sixth century i.e. 515 AD, 523 AD, 527 AD and 531 AD., and all of these went through sea. By 1127 AD, thirty five percent of tribute missions to China came through land only and after that all came through sea.

The eleventh century introduced several new changes in the Chinese society. Mongol threat and disruption of the Silk Route increased oceanic traffic. The Sungs transferred their capital to the south and encouraged maritime trade to generate income. They also patronized the direct participation of Chinese in the Indian Ocean trade. Promotions and reward were given to the nobles and officers who promoted maritime trade. For example, import of one million ounce of frankincense could help an officer to get promotion of one grade. The Chinese junks grew in size and started sailing right upto south India. Revolt of the Chinese general (879 AD) and subsequent assassination of the Muslims forced foreigners to leave Canton for short period. However, they returned back to the great city of Canton after some time. The Sungs also encouraged the Chinese to participate directly in sea trade.

The Cholas attracted the Chinese merchants to their ports. As a result, Nagapattinam, Kaveripattinam, Quilon and Calicut became favourite

86 The Sungs appointed superintendents of ports and encouraged the Chinese navigation in the Indian Ocean. The junks started to sail up to India. The Chinese monopolized the shipping of the eastern sectors of the Indian Ocean from the Arabs after the eleventh century. When Ibn battuta visited Calicut, he saw thirteen Chinese ships at the harbour. He further adds that, “China Sea is navigated only by the Chinese ships.” Ibn Battuta, (Mahdi Husain), p. 189.
destinations of the Chinese merchants. They established marital relations with the natives. Offsprings of such unions were known as *Tchina betchegan* (Chinese child). They were adventurous and skilled sailors. Even the pirates did not attack the ship guarded by *Tchina betchegan*. There is no substantial contemporary source to attest the Chinese active participation in any Indian guild. Still, they helped their countrymen during the times of calamities. Ibn Battuta and fellow Chinese travellers were provided with food and clothing when their ship met with a disaster in a sea storm.

Chinese trade was more oriented towards luxuries. The Chinese merchants pursued the rarities and exotics of India. The reason might be the availability of all commodities of basic needs in China. The Confucian ideology and ‘the Mandate of Heaven’ was another characteristic of the Chinese imperial policy that guided its trade missions. Availability of the rarities established the credibility of the ruler as a world conqueror because these gifts were presented as the token of their submissions by the foreign rulers to the court of China. Chau Ju Kua provides a detailed list of the spices, rarities and medicinal herbs imported into China from India. Pepper, frankincense, dragon saliva, myrrh, *pucthuk*, aloes-wood and cotton were important exports from India to China. China exported its costly silk and porcelain in return. As mentioned earlier the Chinese did not participate in any local guild. Buddhism had declined in twelfth century erasing the chances of the Chinese interaction with the interior. Language might also have been a barrier. The Chinese concentrated their activities around coastal areas. One fails to notice any distinct impact of Chinese fusion with south Indian culture between 1000-1500 AD.

Cheng Ho expeditions, which were undertaken during the early fifteenth century, marked the height of the Chinese glory as a sea power. These

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87 Abdur Razzaq, p. 19.
88 Ibn Battuta, (Mahdi Husain), p. 194.
expeditions touched many ports of the Indian Ocean. He captured the ruler of Ceylon and sent him to the imperial court as a prisoner. He also visited Indian ports and obtained tributes. The gift of a giraffe from Africa to the emperor of China was beyond any comparison. It helped the Ming usurper to consolidate his rule. Around the fifteenth century, the Chinese court again started channelizing its energy to northern areas. The imperial courts ignored the maritime trade. Prohibition was imposed on any government officer participating in the maritime trade. This weakened the Chinese participation in sea trade. Their naval strength declined and they failed to do anything except ordering a withdrawal from the coastal areas in the face of the Japanese invasions during the fifteenth and the sixteenth century.

**Hindus**

The Hindus were also active in the trading world of the Indian Ocean. The ships from India sailed in all directions since antiquity. *Rigveda* refers to the merchants who were guided by their greed, sending several ships to foreign destinations. In *Mahabaharta*, a *rajasayu* and *digvijaya yajnas* of Arjuna and Nakula refer to foreign countries. Hindu navigators from Kalinga colonized Java around 75 AD. They established colonies in foreign lands and started trade with their motherland. Referring to the Hindu colonization of Java, Elphinston writes, "the histories of Java give a distinct account of a numerous body of Hindus from Clinga (Kalinga) who landed on the island, civilized the inhabitants ... the truth of this narrative is proved beyond doubt by their numerous and magnificent Hindu remains... still existing in Java and by the fact that although the common language in Malay, the sacred

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90 Ibid., p. 40.

91 Ibid., p. 103.
language, that of historical and political composition of most inscription is a
dialect of Sanskrit."\(^92\)

The Bengalis also participated in trade. Fahien boarded the ship from
Tamarlipti to China. The Cholas also expanded their maritime influence. They
couraged Indian colonies in southeast Asia and China. Even in Japan, the
legends attributed the arrival of cotton seed in the country by an Indian from
Ten-jikku or Kuen-lun who was washed ashore by black currents.\(^93\)

Hindu participation in the maritime trade suffered a set back owing to
the dominance of the Arabs and Persians. The reason might be unfamiliarity
with the Arabic and Persian languages. These languages could be termed as
the trading languages of sea merchants throughout the Indian Ocean. Islam
had penetrated throughout the Indian Ocean countries. Familiarity with the
Islamic doctrines and legal texts would also have made transactions easier
among the Muslims. Hindus, on the other hand, were not favoured with any
such language. Sanskrit and other Indian languages would not have been in
vogue in foreign destinations. Thus, Hindus would have found it difficult to
communicate in local language while away from their native country.\(^94\)
Prohibition on sea voyage further worsened the situation. Manu prescribes
that a Brahman who undertakes sea voyage was not fit to carry out religious
ceremonies and not worth being invited on religious feasts. According to
Narada, a sea going merchant (samundravanik) is not a reliable witness and
not to be accepted in judicial proceedings.\(^95\) Lallanji Gopal remarks that these

\(^92\) Radha Kumud Mookerji, op. cit., pp. 103-104.

\(^93\) Ibid., pp. 122-123.

\(^94\) In fact even among the Indians, there was a serious shortage of a common
language. Sanskrit was limited to the few privileged ones whereas the local dialects
changed within fifty to hundred miles. Even in India, the problem was resolved with
the introduction of the Persian (for the elites) and the Urdu (for the masses). It is a
hypothesis and needs further study.

\(^95\) Lallanji Gopal, 'Indian Shipping in Early Medieval Period', in K.S. Behra, ed.,
Maritime Heritage of India, p. 96.
injunctions were no doubt applicable to the Brahmans alone in the beginning, yet with the passage of time these came to be applicable to all the dwijas.96 Thus one finds the ruler of Malabar begging the release of Nayars on board because these Nayars, being upper caste Hindus, would eat nothing on sea.97 Decline of the Lokayats and Buddhism also encouraged Hindu withdrawal from sea voyages. After the invasions of the Muslims, the Buddhists might have migrated to China and other southeast Asian countries.

Hindus were no longer a prominent group in the maritime world of the Indian Ocean. However, they participated in Indian maritime trade to a limited extent. Abu Zaid remarks that Hindu merchants visited Siraf and maintained cordial relations with Muslim merchants.98 Buzurg refers to a Bania visiting the Persian Gulf. Jagadu, a Hindu merchant and banker, was a well known figure in the Indian Ocean maritime trade. He had his agents (wakils) in all the Indian Ocean countries. Duarte Barbosa found both Hindus and Muslims from the Coromandels doing brisk trade in Malacca.99 An inscription in Arcot during the same period records the gift of land for a temple to ensure successful sea voyage.100 The Chettis were reputed merchants from the Coromandel. They were tawny, almost white, but famous as merchants on the sea. They dealt in precious stones, pearls and precious metals.101 They were found all over southeast Asia. Duarte Barbosa observes that Chettis

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96 Literal meaning of dwija is twice born. The first is a natural birth from the mother's womb whereas the second was a symbolic birth, after performing rituals, to enter one's caste (varna). The upper three varnas namely Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were allowed dwija status, whereas it was prohibited to Sudras. Ibid.

97 Andre Wink, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 73.

98 V.K. Jain, op. cit., p. 81.


100 Kankalatha Mukund, The Trading World of Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel, p. 47.

controlled the supply of commodities so that they could artificially inflate and deflate the prices.\textsuperscript{102} Ibn Battuta records the presence of several Indian merchants in the great port of Aden.\textsuperscript{103} A Brahman named Chetti-setti was actively engaged in overseas trade.\textsuperscript{104} An inscription of Arasikere (1187 AD) refers to him as a reputed sea merchant importing things from all the quarters of the world. It records that he "brought in ships, a multitude of horses which were ornaments to the horses of Hari, elephants which were equal to the elephants of Indra and pearls comparable to the pearls of raindrops (of Svati) from the sky and sold them to kings with pleasure."\textsuperscript{105} Abraham finds Chetti-setti enjoying the monopoly of sale of horses to the Hoysala court around twelfth century.\textsuperscript{106}

Some other castes, that did not have a place in the hierarchy of the caste system, also participated in the maritime trade. Being outside the concept of untouchability, they managed to earn profits from the prosperous trading world of the Indian Ocean. Duarte Barbosa found Biaberas (corrupt form \textit{Beopari}) actively asserting in sea trade.\textsuperscript{107} Muttan, another caste, was known to be very skilled sailors. They dealt in almost every type of commodity at seaports. They also participated in inland trade.\textsuperscript{108} Mogeres were a fishing community. However, they adopted sea trade as an alternative

\textsuperscript{102} Duarte Barbosa, Vol. II, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Epigraphica Carnatica}, Vol. V, Pt. 1, No. 22.
\textsuperscript{107} Duarte Barbosa, Vol. II, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
way to earn their livelihood. Manques were another fishing community. Normally fishing remained their main occupation, yet some of them sailed in the Muslim and Heathen (Hindu) ships as they were expert seamen. Thus, these plebeian castes also benefited from an increase in the volume of maritime trade. They had years of knowledge of the sea. They were situated away from the idea of religious pollution and hence suited for trading activities. They were not economically sound and therefore worked in the ships. However, they might also have raised a little capital to undertake petty trading activities. Duarte Barbosa informs us that Biabares were very rich. Profits must also have filtered down to these socially inferior classes like the Mogeres, Muttan and Manques.

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109 Duarte Barbosa, Vol. II, p. 64.
110 Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 64-65.
111 The Biabares is a corrupt form of beopari. They gathered in Malabar from other areas also. The king could not execute them with legal process as they decided their cases themselves. The upper caste Nayars could touch them as they were not untouchables. For more details see Ibid., pp. 55-57.