Chapter Nine

Retrospect

From the present study, it has emerged that it would be erroneous to perceive the Indian Ocean as a barrier, which was broken by the Europeans in the late fifteenth century. On the contrary, it has witnessed a tremendous amount of mercantile activity since the antiquity. Indians looked upon the sea as a convenient mode of international communication. It facilitated trade relations among distant regions. The emergence of the Roman Empire considerably expanded the maritime network of India around the first century. Historians are unanimous regarding the economic prosperity of Indian trade upto the Gupta period. However, the general line that traditionalists followed pertained to the decline of Indian trade with the fall of Roman Empire. Paucity of coins and agrarian orientation of the Indians were cited in support of this argument.¹ They studied Indian sea trade only in relation to the Mediterranean economy. This assumption stands challenged with the corpus of contemporary sources that point towards a different scenario. When countries around the Mediterranean Sea were going through economic depression, the Indian merchants were busy in exploring the eastern markets of Asia. They ventured into southeast Asia and established their colonies. The Chinese also traded upto southeast Asia and thus Indian products found place even in the Chinese markets. In the seventh century, Islam took birth in Arabia and soon penetrated into Persia. Damascus and Baghdad became the seats of the caliphates respectively. Islamic armies subdued many principalities in Asia, Africa and Europe. The new situation helped Indian trade. Indian products began to enjoy increasing demands in western Asia.

The emergence of Islam contributed to the revival of Asian markets. Muslim armies captured huge amount of hoarded precious metals from the Byzantine

¹ Ram Sharan Sharma, ‘How Feudal was Indian Feudalism?’, in Herman Kulke, ed., The State in India 1000-1700, pp. 73, 86; D.N. Jha, Early India, p. 193.
empire and Egyptian pyramids. The situation improved further when China witnessed a huge agrarian expansion under the Tangs. Demand for exotics and foreign products grew in China. The eleventh century witnessed the rise of powerful commercial empires in different sectors of the Indian Ocean. The Fatimids in the Red Sea, the Cholas in south India, the Sailenderas in southeast Asia and the Sungs in China constituted maritime trade into an integral element of their state policies. The new founded prosperity played an important role in the cultural habits of people in different regions. Muslim armies were successful in ensuring the circulation of precious metals in the markets with their continuous raids in prosperous regions. The second wave of Muslim invasions of India around eleventh and twelfth century was motivated with the same desire to capture hoarded reservoirs of precious metals and bring them into circulation. Prosperity and conquests created an expanding class of nobility and ruling elites in areas under Islamic influence, especially in western Asia. These nobles wore expensive and finely woven clothes. Their diets included many exotic spices and herbs brought from India. They used perfumes and expensive timbers in their houses. All these phenomena encouraged Indian exports, given the shortage of these luxuries in western Asian barren lands.

The Mediterranean economy began to show signs of economic recovery around the tenth century. The Crusades brought western Europe in contact with western Asia, which supported advanced level of culture and civilization. The Europeans imbibed the taste for spices and herbs in the Islamic markets. Rising population, improved methods of cultivation and consolidation of the institution of the Church improved the general standard of living. City states like Venice and Genoa worked as a catalyst between the Asian and European markets. They also evolved new methods of banking, book-keeping and business partnerships.

Southeast Asia was also experiencing the rise of strong maritime empires like Srivijaya and Malacca, which viewed state patronage to the sea trade as an inevitable method of economic growth. The Chinese economy witnessed a tremendous growth under the Tangs, but their successors had to shift the political
focus towards the southern areas. The prosperity and proximity to the sea attracted them towards the exotics of India and southeast Asia. The Sung, Yuans and early Mings included sea trade as an important element of their state policies. They displayed considerable fondness for Indian spices, cotton clothes and pearls. Indian empires therefore were never ignorant of the riches and benefits of the sea.

In such a scenario, India played an important role in the Indian Ocean maritime empire. The Cholas, Pandayas, Chalukyas, Muzzaffarids, Samuris and the sultans of Bengal actively encouraged commercial activities in their seaports. When the Portuguese arrived in India they noticed flourishing sea trade being carried from Indian coasts to all the quarters of the world.

It is not possible to agree with the view that Indian sea trade went through regression between the eleventh to sixteenth centuries. It has been repeatedly asserted that Indians remained indifferent towards the sea in medieval period. Hindu scriptures are quoted to prove that Indians remained aloof from maritime activities. Lallanji Gopal suggests, "in the beginning religious feelings were not against sea voyage...But, in the early medieval period we notice that there was definite growth of taboo against sea voyage." He quotes Baudhayana Dharmasutra, Manusamhita, Naradsamihta and Brhannaradiya Purana to prove Indians' abhorrence towards the sea. And with the help of these scriptures he concludes that, "There are clear indications of the decline in Indian shipping in one respect at least. For people away from the coastal areas it had ceased to be of much concern." Andre Wink quotes Manava Dharamasastra, which declares a

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2 Basham notices Indian maritime contacts with the west and east. He remarks that the Indians concentrated more on the eastern markets after the collapse of the Roman empire. However, he strangely took away the credit from the Indians because the trade was carried 'in foreign bottoms (ships).’ He rejects the Indian ships carrying 1000 persons on board as mere exaggeration. A.L. Basham, The Wonder that was India, Vol. I, p. 226.


4 Ibid., p. 97.
Brahman crossing seas to be *apankteya*, i.e. not fit for community dinner.⁵ He comes to the conclusion that ‘Muslims participating in the Indian trade were either Arabs or Persians.’⁶ Hindu scriptures might not be in favour of sea trade, yet there were many other ethnic groups inhabiting India, which had equal claim to Indianhood. The Mapillas, Lubbais and Bysiras were Indian Muslims. Their participation must be seen as the representation of the Indians like that of the Chettis (Hindus) in Tamilnadu. Repeated use of the word *Pose* and *Tashi* must have contributed to the confusion. It must be understood that these word *Pose* (corrupt form of *Farsi* meaning Persian) and *Tashi* (corrupt form of *Arbi* meaning Arabic) were applied not always for the nationalities. Many a time, these words signified the languages of the merchants. It would be appropriate to quote few lines from the work of V.K. Jain to highlight a kind of confusion regarding the Indian participation in sea trade. It is not known how and when Indian participation meant only Hindus’ activity? He argues:

> “Ibn battuta informs us that Indian ships from Thana, Quilon, etc. called at the port of Aden which contained permanent colony of Indian merchants. From Marco Polo we learnt that Indian ships visited Fu Chau in China and Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. These authorities, however, do not specify the religion of the Indian traders going to China or the Middle East. It is possible that while some of them were Hindus from western India, the majority of them were Muslims who, after having settled in the port towns of India, claimed a lion’s share in Indian foreign trade.”⁷

Now the above paragraph has an undertone that excludes the Muslims activities from Indian participation. The author is unwilling to recognize that the

⁷ V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India (AD 1000-1300)*, p. 82.
Muslims could also be Indian converts and not foreigners. He, somehow, reaches the conclusion that the people who settled on the Indian ports must be foreigners. Nevertheless, in the very next line, he himself quotes a reference from Ibn Buzurg that there was a famous Hindu who converted to Islam and earned a good name as a pilot. Indian converts to Islam were an important constituent of Indian participation in the sea trade.

Perhaps in the Indian Ocean trading world (1000-1500 AD), religion did not arouse as much emotions as it does in present Indian scenario. We find frequent references, where there is clear indication that the Muslims were welcomed in a particular principality though the ruler, at the same time, might be at war against the Muslim kingdoms. The Rashtrakutas were extremely accommodative towards the Muslim merchants. The Samuri of Calicut was always eager to welcome and grant permanent residence to the Muslim merchants in his kingdom. The gentry of Somanatha overlooked the demolition of the famous temple by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1025 AD and even granted land to a Muslim merchant named Nuruddin Firoz to construct a mosque in the vicinity of the temple. These contradictions have long confused the historian as to why these merchants were welcomed even when their presence could be perceived as a threat to the very existence of native kingdoms. The answer lies in the study of maritime trade of India. This trade was guided by the simple logic of profit.

One finds that in the ancient time, Buddhism was instrumental in the expansion of maritime empire of India. Collapse of the Roman empire resulted in the decrease of flow of merchandise towards the west. But, by that time the Buddhist missionaries, guided by their strong missionary zeal, had started exploring southeast Asia and China. Hindu merchants followed them and colonized southeast Asia. The result was the diversion of trade towards the east. Marco Polo, seeing the vast magnitude of export from India

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8 V.K. Jain, op. cit., p. 82.
to China and other southeast Asian countries, candidly remarked that Indian merchandise toward the west did not constitute even one tenth part of the merchandise that flowed towards the east.

When Hiuen Tsang visited India, he found many religious sites of Buddhism in decline and a simultaneous revival of Hinduism. The Buddhists took part in Hindu processions. By the ninth century, Buddhism appeared more like a branch of Hinduism and began to lose its earlier distinctive character. Under the Pallavas, Hinduism displayed marked orientation towards the land. The foreigners (mlechchas) were despised and looked down upon. Caste system became rigid and a new class of outcaste (antayajas) emerged. Thus, a void was created in the Indian participation in the sea trade. Around the same period, Islam had not yet consolidated in India. The void was filled temporarily by the Christians and Jews of India. The Christians and Jews, however, failed to monopolize the commodity structure of the Indian maritime trade. Besides, their number never swelled to such figures as could enable them to dominate the scenario. The rulers were, therefore, in search of communities or social groups that could contribute in the expansion of maritime empire of India. The realization brought them closer to the Muslims who were suitable owing to their freedom in economic matters and international presence. By the eleventh century, Islam had penetrated Europe, Africa and Asia. Muslims traded right from the Mediterranean to China. Indian rulers, therefore, could not ignore their presence. They wanted to derive benefits of sea-trade through the Muslim presence and participation. Muslim merchants settled and married in India. Thus, we encounter a new class of Indian Muslims (Bysira in Gujarat, Mapillas in Malabar and Lubbais in Kerala and Bengali Muslims) actively trading and monopolizing Indian sea trade by the thirteenth century. The Portuguese also hinted at such a scenario when they claimed that but for them the whole of India would have been converted to Islam.

It is important to note that many strong mercantile guilds emerged in India around eleventh century. The Nanadesi, Manigramam, Ainnurruvar and Anjuvannam were some of the reputed mercantile association of south India. They established
erivirapattans (fortified merchant towns), where they implemented their orders. An eleventh century Ayyavole inscription records the conversion of a village named Velur into erivirapattans. The merchants from eighteen countries decided to provide food to the guards and other foreigners in their town. They appointed officials and punished the offenders. The guilds even had their own private soldiers to secure the merchandise and settlements of its members. These guilds expanded their mercantile activities in foreign lands. The Nanadesi established a temple called Nanadesi-Vinagar-Alavan in thirteenth century Pagan (Burma). The Ayyavoles were present in the Sumatra in 1088 AD. Still these mercantile guilds were not guided by any strong clan or religious affiliations. They even had Muslims, Jews and Christians as their members. The guilds thus acted as loose confederacies, promising better deals in different areas under their commercial jurisdiction.

It is often alleged that the Indian rulers were indifferent towards the sea trade. In their attempts to prove their point, important events like the invasions of Cholas on Srivijaya were seen as simple plundering raids and various trading missions to China from the Indian rulers were altogether ignored. V.K. Jain conveniently asserts that Indian rulers were unable to control the sea trade because they were unable to face the Arab war-ships. K.N Chaudhuri repeats somewhat similar

10 Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, p. 112.
11 Ibid.
15 V.K. Jain, op. cit., pp. 88-90. It is somewhat unfortunate that Jain considered invasion of Sind and Vallabhi in the eighth century a substantial evidence to suggest a hypothesis that the Arabs controlled the sea trade with their naval warships. Some evidences are quoted that refer to the inability of the Indian pirates to attack the well-guarded ships. But he forgets that Bysiras, Tchina betchegan and even Abyssinians guarding the merchants’ ships had their roots in western and south India respectively. If Razzaq finds Tchina betchegan capable of repulsing
sentiments when he remarks, "The ruling elites in India and elsewhere, who were accustomed to derive their main income from an agrarian base, saw the sea as an object of diversion and a highway through which travelled the good things of life." On the contrary, the Indian rulers displayed active interest in the sea trade. As the present study shows, they were fully aware of the benefits of the sea, though there could be some debate regarding their attempt to monopolize the sea routes. Throughout our period, the sea-trade remained inevitable and indispensable to Indian states. Apart from the Cholas, the Pandayan warrior Kulasekharra invaded Ceylon in thirteenth century. On the request of Ibn Battuta, the ruler of Madurai ordered the construction of ships to launch a naval attack on Maldives. Again the port of Malipattan was strongly fortified to ward off pirates. Ahmad Shah of Gujarat and the Samuri of Calicut joined an Afro-Asian union to defeat the Portuguese in the battle of Diu (1507 AD). Still, it must be admitted that Indian rulers did not pay adequate attention to the naval warfare. In the larger picture, the rulers ignored military factors of the sea and had to pay heavily for this in the face of the European onslaught. However, if the sea was meant to be neutral for the prosperity and betterment of the entire mankind, then nowhere this practice was better observed than in India. Indian rulers

17 *Mahavamsa* quoted in Burton Stein, op. cit., p. 299. It proves the considerable influence Ceylonese trade had in south Indian politics.
20 Even the United Nations had to assert this mantra (to ensure the neutrality of the seas) to restore international peace. In Atlantic Charter (that laid the foundation of
believed in a policy of laissez faire. They left the markets to their own circumstances and played the role of good guardians. When the natives plundered some storm struck ships that strayed into the port of Somanath, the ruler expressed his concern that, "it would earn him a bad name and force foreign traders to avoid his ports because of the threat of robbery."21 Can this concern be attributed to the neglect of sea trade by the Indian rulers? There are numerous references, quoted in the previous chapters, which signify the attempt of the rulers to provide conducive environment for the maritime trade. They believed in the neutrality of seaports. They permitted the commerce to grow on the basis of its own logic without any bureaucratic interference. They were also aware that in case of any coercion, the merchants would leave their ports. It would be interesting to quote the portion of a letter, written by Sinhalese ruler Bhuvenakabahu of Yapahuwa (in the thirteenth century) to the ruler of Egypt:-

"Ceylon is Egypt and Egypt is Ceylon. I desire that an Egyptian ambassador accompany mine on his return and that another be sent to reside in the town of Aden. I possess a prodigious quantity of pearls and precious stones of every kind. I have vessels, elephants, muslins and other stuffs, woods of bagam (sapan wood), cinnamon and all the other objects of commerce which are brought to you by the banian merchants. My kingdom produces tree the wood of which is fit for making spears. If the Sultan asks me for twenty vessels yearly, I shall be in a position to supply them. Further, the merchants of his dominion can with all freedom come and trade in my kingdom."22

the United Nation’s Charter), it was asserted that countries would have ‘access on equal terms, to trade and raw material of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity.’ Later on in 1963 AD superpowers like the USSR committed not to use nuclear weapons in commercial seas like the Mediterranean. N. Bhuinya, *International Organisations*, pp. 56, 125.

21 V. K Jain, op. cit., p. 80.

This letter underlines the importance of sea trade for the rulers around the Indian Ocean in the period under study. They wanted to attract foreign trade with incentives and not coercion. Importance of the Muslims in the emerging trading pattern of the Indian Ocean was fully comprehended and they were given a warm welcome even if the rulers were in conflict against the Muslim rivals. Almost all the Muslim historians attest to the friendly attitude of the Rashtrakutas towards the Muslims even when the Indian frontiers were facing threats from Muslim armies. The Cholas continued to patronise the Buddhist monastery of Nagappatinam even after their invasion on Srivijaya. The Palas of Bengal followed Shakti cult, but still gave royal protection to many Buddhist monasteries in their kingdom. Even after the raids of the Delhi sultanas, the Samuri of Calicut was found protecting the Muslim merchants in his ports. He encouraged the Muslims to bring more of their fellow countrymen in his territory. Ramdev of Gujarat, at once, interfered and punished the locals when they harassed the Muslims and burnt a mosque in his territory.

It would again be unjust to assert that the Indian rulers were unaware of sea warfare. There are numbers of references in contemporary sources pointing towards sea wars waged by them. The Cholas famous invasion on Srivijaya was aimed at freeing the passage to China from any undue interference and thus attests to the supremacy of Indians in sea wars at that time. Ibn Battuta notices the ghurrab, a kind of war ship, in which the soldiers were protected from arrows and spears. Sonargaon and Satgaon (Bengal) also used war ships. Arya Chakravati, a notorious ruler of Ceylon, had his own ships to trade in different areas. He also engaged in piratical activities to force the ships to come to his ports. Ahmed Shah of Gujarat even joined an Afro-Asian league against the Portuguese, realizing the new threat posed by the Europeans to the existing trading pattern in the Indian Ocean. No doubt, the Indians were no match to European warships that were fitted with canons. But, it was a difference of technology, not the will. Indians soon learnt the new

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23 Muhammad Ufi in *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, Vol. II, p. 164.
techniques and employed canons in their war ships. They also discarded the practice of stitching their ships and used nails instead. It was perhaps the well developed navigational skills because of which the Indian pirates continued to be a tough nut to crack for the English upto the twentieth century.

The Indian maritime trade underwent several changes in the period under study. Earlier, the spices and exotica were the main constituents of the Indian exports. Indian imports were limited due to the availability of all commodities in the country itself. Concentration of capital in the hands of the few, primarily nobility, limited the import only to things better described as foreign ‘exotic toys.’ With the arrival of the eleventh century, this trend underwent a change. Rising population and expansion of economies increased the demand of staples along with luxuries. Rice of the inferior type along with wheat and coconuts found ready markets in western Asia. Spices and herbs witnessed unlimited demands from all the quarters of Asia, Africa and Europe. Indian clothes and technical superiority in manufacturing good quality jewellery and vessels also placed it in an advantageous position. Indian cotton clothes were eagerly sought after in southeast Asia. In return for its clothes, India could obtain spices, later to be re-exported to Islamic lands in western Asia, eastern Africa and western Europe. No doubt, pepper was available to the Chinese markets from southeast Asia, but still the pepper from Malabar was greatly cherished throughout the world.\footnote{Pepper was available in southeast Asia near home to China. Still Marco Polo candidly admits that the flow of spices (pepper) from India to Europe constituted not one tenth part of what went to China.} Indian spices like \textit{putchuk} also found good Chinese market. Pearls and other gems like emerald from Ceylon were praised for their good quality, yet these were brought to Calicut to be reworked on fine pieces of jewellery and later sent to different Asian markets. Iron was brought from Africa to Cambay and vessels prepared from it were brought back to Arabia and Africa. Duarte Barbosa remarks that every kind of skilled workers were available in Cambay.\footnote{Duarte Barbosa, Vol. I, p. 142.} It is not that India imported nothing in return. One important constraint
upon its trading structure was the unavailability of good war horses. India lacked the skills to breed good war horses and the same were brought from Persia, Iraq, Yemen and Arabia. Rulers of south India paid around 2,200,000 dinars every year to the horse merchants. The money was collected from the temples and courtesans.\textsuperscript{26} War elephants were also brought from Ceylon. Apart from these war animals, the Indian import bill was mainly confined to the luxuries and exotics. Thus, the balance of sea trade was tilted considerably in favour of India. Every year India received a large amount of precious metals as a bill for its exports. It forced three historians belonging to three different times (namely Pliny, Wassaf and Bernier) make somewhat similar statements that India was robbing the world by hoarding precious metals received in return for its grass and roots (spices and aromatics).

It is often asserted that the maritime trade of Indian was not specialized and existed in pre-capital era where the merchants adopted crude commercial practices. Often religious scriptures imposing huge interests on maritime ventures were cited to strengthen the argument.\textsuperscript{27} However, these very injunctions show that the

\textsuperscript{26} Wassaf in \textit{The History of India as Told by its Own Historians}, Vol. I, pp. 33-34.

\textsuperscript{27} It is interesting that scholars like Lallanjji Gopal (see Lallanjji Gopal, op. cit., p. 96.), V.K. Jain (V.K. Jain, op. cit., p. 82.) and Andre Wink (Andre Wink, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 68-69.) attributed the decline of Indian participation in the Indian Ocean trading world due to various prohibitions in religious scriptures. On the contrary, one can identify Hindu participation in sea trade. Hindu traders in Burma and Sumatra constructed Hindu temples. Braham Chatti-setti enjoyed considerable reputation as a horses merchant. He supplied war horses to the Hoysala kingdom. We also find increased interaction between different castes in south Indian mercantile organization (Meera Abraham, \textit{A Medieval Merchant Guild of South India}, \textit{Studies in History}, Vol. IV, No. 1, pp. 22, 23.). It is probable that when the Hindu scriptures forbade sea voyages to dwija, they were trying to resist the onslaught of 'kali age', which was undergoing prominent changes in new socio-political scenario. Economy was growing and it necessitated the rise of many new castes and communities, which D.N. Jha finds increasing around after seventh century (D.N. Jha, op. cit., p. 197.). It is again a debatable point as to how far religious injunctions were successful in curtailing the economic activities of Indians. Temples were receiving grants from merchants. There were temples in Mahabalipuram that acted as lighthouses to the sea traffic. Andre Wink, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 313.
merchants had invented several novel practices to carry out commercial activities. They formed limited and full partnerships for the exchange of goods. Credit was not a big problem if the venture seemed profitable to the investors. Sea merchants stood guarantors for one another. They also acted as agents for one another at distant places. Problems of carrying liquid cash were solved with the help of hundis and hawala. Even in the seventeenth century India, the Dutch were forced to send their money from Golkunda to Masulipatnam through local merchants with their own armed escort and with a commission of 1-1.5 percent. Often religion and customs or practices were employed to provide legitimacy to the commercial partnerships and business ventures.

The present study shows that merchants had already developed some sophisticated commercial and banking institutions. It is possible that in absence of any well-documented international law regarding maritime trade, the merchants turned to religious scriptures and local customs to cement their partnerships. Islamic jurists played a supporting role. Merchants were allowed to form partnerships between fellow religionists and others. Disputes regarding different coins and profits were taken into account and solved meticulously. It is possible that the expansion of Islam over a large area would have helped in consolidating these principles as general rules for merchants operating in the Indian Ocean. Still, some local variations must have existed. In the Hindu scriptures, high interest rates were charged from the sea merchant. He was not to be accepted as a witness, yet in case of any mishap over the sea all his debts were to be cancelled. Merchants employed armed guards to protect their merchandize. The bankers insured the cargoes of the merchants against dacoity. Barter was practised over a large area. It was quite beneficial and merchants could spread out the risks. Liquid cash and other precious

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28 The Dutch had earlier thought of carrying the money themselves to avoid commission, but it was disfavoured realizing the dangers involved. For more details see Kanakalatha Mukund, 'The Role of Merchants in India's Pre-Industrial Economy', in Studies in Trade and Urbanization in Western India, Series no. 9, ed., V.K. Chavda, p. 152.
cargo were easy to plunder. Spices and porcelain incurred profits equal to any precious metal. Therefore clothes, pepper and even rice could be used in a commercial transaction and it solved the mystery of the absence of precious metals or coins in medieval India.

Navigation in the Indian Ocean required a considerable amount of skill, which was possessed by the Indians in a fair measure. Sailors were made to undergo sufficient amount of practical training. They were required to learn complex calculations regarding the altitudes of the stars with isbas. Compass was used but its use was not common. The sailors were also taught siyasat (politics) to counter any trouble among the passengers and members of crew. The Indians mainly employed two types of ships in two different sectors of the Indian Ocean. According to Basham, “Indian techniques of ship construction and navigation had by this time fallen behind those of the Arabs and the Chinese.” Lallanji Gopal also remarks that Indian ships were slow in comparison to the Arab and Chinese ships. However, It must be remembered that ideas travelled more freely in the medieval world. Anything promising was imitated without much hesitation. Studying the suitability of the dhows and junks, Indian also employed them. Calicut was manufacturing junks whereas in the fifteenth century Bengal both junks and dhows were constructed. Konkan also emerged as an important shipbuilding centre for dhows. Indians also constructed some local variants of ships for coastal trading. The contemporary travellers refer to stitched dhows as Indian ships. In the western sector of the Indian Ocean (constituting the Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf and Red Sea) dhows were dominant. These were single-mast stitched ships well suited to ride the rough Arabian Sea. On the eastern sector of the Indian Ocean (mainly Bay of

29 Jain remarks that Indian ships were unable to compete with the Arabs’ dhows and the Chinese junks. V.K. Jain, op. cit., pp. 88-90.


31 Lallanji Gopal, op. cit., p. 97.

Bengal, Malacca Straits and Chinese Sea) \textit{junks} on the pattern of China were built and employed. These were multi-masted and multi-sailed. These were huge structures equipped with all the luxuries, but were unsuitable to ride in the shallow waters of the Arabian Sea. Sailors also faced the threat of the pirates who hovered in the Indian Ocean right from Sacotra to Malacca Straits. Many a times, unavailability of skilled sailors also created serious problems for the ships. Ibn Battuta attributes the destruction of his ship in the Bay of Bengal to an inexperienced captain.\textsuperscript{33}

The prosperity of the Indian maritime trade brought a considerable change in the character of the Indian and other Asian ports. The contemporary travellers refer to the emergence of the trading emporiums in different zones of the sea. Travellers like Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta and Stefano identify some Indian ports that were acting as the trading emporiums of the Indian Ocean trade. These ports were not referred to in the context of their harbour only, but even the hinterlands and the region itself was named after them. Marco Polo refers to Cambay not simply as a port but as 'a kingdom.'\textsuperscript{34} After more than two centuries, even Tome Pires used the similar nomenclature for the port of Cambay.\textsuperscript{35} Similar was the case with such other ports as Calicut, Quilon, Aden, Malacca and Canton. There were many factors that contributed to the growth of trading emporiums in the Indian Ocean trading world. Geographical location, availability of vast range of merchandize, political will and sufficient amount of security and autonomy of the trading communities were some of them. Sailing was bound with the monsoon patterns prevailing in the Indian Ocean. Ships did not have ample time to visit and trade at all the ports en route to their destinations. Therefore, they preferred to visit ports, which promised to offer them a

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{33} Simon Digby, 'The Maritime Trade of India', Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, eds., op. cit., p. 225.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{34} Marco Polo, Vol. II, pp. 397, 398.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{35} Tome Pires, Vol. I, p. 33.}
vast range of merchandize and commercial freedom for carrying out their trading activities.

Towards the end of our study, it shall be appropriate to state that several flaws have existed in the study of Indian maritime history (1000-1500 AD). More important of these were neglect (or abhorrence) of the sea by the rulers, ignorance of shipbuilding and sailing techniques and inadequate volume of goods. The present work seeks to prove that the Indian rulers were fully aware of the benefits of the sea trade. However, their orientation differed from that of the Europeans. They believed less in plunders and more in liberal policies. Their ports were open to whosoever wanted to trade peacefully. They appointed shahbanders (custom officers) from the mercantile classes and granted religious autonomy. Indians were capable enough to develop their own shipbuilding industry. It would be unjust to blame them for dependence on the foreign shipbuilding traditions. Indian Ocean trade displayed a kind of economic unity in which ideas floated freely. Indians were building both the junks and dhows around the fifteenth century. They were even quick to learn from the European shipbuilding traditions. The British East India Company built ship-building yards in Surat which was shifted to Bombay in 1735 AD. Indians served the British Bombay Marine about which Col Leicester Stanphone once claimed in 1827 AD, "Never was there an instance of any ship of the Bombay Marine having lowered her flag to an enemy of equal force." Again another French officer F. Baltazar Solvyns (1811 AD) remarks:

In ancient times the Indians excelled in the art of constructing vessels, and the present Hindus can in this respect still offer models to Europe- so much so that the English, attentive to everything which relates to naval architecture, have borrowed from the Hindus many


improvements which they have adapted with success to their own shipping...The Indian vessels unite elegance and utility, and are models of patience and fine workmanship".  

Indian foreign trade included a wide range of products. It was importing goods right from coarse rice to expensive jewellery. Indians were enterprising enough to carve out an important place among producers and suppliers of almost all the commodities available in the Indian Ocean trading world. Spices were brought from southeast Asia to re-export to further west. Expensive pieces of gems were worked upon in India to sell them in international markets. Indians were also extracting benefits by playing the important role of intermediaries between the two sectors of the Indian Ocean. India's maritime trade had profound cultural and social impacts on the Indian society. It facilitated the entry of various communities like the Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Muslims in India. With the expansion of sea trade, greater amount of interaction ensued between different castes. One can notice right hand (valangai) and left hand (idangai) castes working together to expand their commercial basis in Ceylon under the Cholas. Fishing communities interacted with the foreign traders and new social groups (Mappilas, Lubbais and Bysiras) came into existence. Though they traced their origins to foreign lands, yet they considerably enhanced the reach of Indian trading operations in the sea with their first hand knowledge, which was collected through many successive generations. Therefore, when the Europeans came to India they were not creating a new maritime empire, but only trying to hijack the already established and prosperous maritime trade of India. The Europeans attempted only to monopolize and divert the flow of sea trade towards their ports. The result was the emergence of new ports like Surat, Goa and Calcutta. With the new technology of canons on the war-ships, the Portuguese initiated the trend of forced monopolization in the Indian maritime network. Thus, their presence resulted in the break from age long traditions and practices of the Indian Ocean maritime world.

38 F. Baltazar Solvyns quoted in Radha Kumud Mookerji, op. cit., p. 183.
39 Burton Stein, Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India, p. 198.