Chapter Two

Historical Setting

The Indian Ocean is the smallest of three oceans, which are used for maritime commerce in the world.\(^1\) It is located in the southern hemisphere of the globe. It touches three continents namely Asia, Africa and Australia. Total area of the Indian Ocean is about 28,356,000 square miles.\(^2\) It is divided by the Indian subcontinent into the Bay of Bengal on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west. The Arabian Sea has the Persian Gulf and Red Sea towards the north. The average depth of the Indian Ocean is about 4,210 meters, slightly greater than that of the Atlantic. Its deepest known point is situated at about 7,725 meters from the southern coast of Indonesia, an island of Java. In general, the greatest depths are in the northeastern sectors of the ocean, where about 50,000 square meters of the ocean floor lies at a depth of more than 5,488 meters.\(^3\)

The Indian Ocean derives considerable importance from its strategic location. It touches some of the world’s most populated areas, having different climatic zones. The phenomenon resulted in assorted cultural habits in each of these zones. A single journey from Arabia to China is sure to make one come across a wide range of geographical units with different social and cultural practices. Arabia is dry and its inhabitants adopted nomadic and pastoral life. On the other hand, the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia are beset with fertile plains. The rain is abundant and agriculture remained the prime occupation of the people. China, a large mass of land, accommodated around ninety percent of its population in eastern regions (also called Proper China).

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\(^1\) The Pacific and Atlantic are the other two oceans.

\(^2\) *Diplomat World Atlas*, p. 344.

India, a unit of Asia, is in reality somewhat demarcated from the rest by its high mountains. These mountains permit passages only at certain sections in the northwest. Five passes of Punjab namely Khyber, Kurram, Gomal, Bolan and Tochi connected India with central Asia. The eastern branches of the Himalayas have formidable passages leading to Tibet and China. The dense forests along with high terrain dominate Indian border with Burma. Therefore, contacts between India and Irrawaddy river basin (Burma) were established only through sea routes. It is true even in the present times.

Next to the Himalayas come the fertile plains of the Ganges, Indus on the northwest and Brahmaputra on the east. The plains receive abundant rainfall and alluvial soil brought by fast torrents of these rivers. As a result, agriculture remained important among the inhabitants. The alluvial soil also enabled farmers to cultivate a wide range of crops. Both rice and wheat were cultivated in abundance. Surplus production in agriculture enabled some sections of society to indulge in other pursuits. The Brahmans became the custodians of knowledge. The Kshatriyas were the defenders of the social structure, whereas the Vaishyas adopted trade. Agriculture was confined to the Shudras, who were responsible for the production of agrarian surplus for other varnas.

Towards the western side of the Aravali mountains (in western India), there existed a vast arid zone called the Thar Desert. Normally, an arid zone seems unfavourable to human settlement, but the Thar is not very sandy (except a strip to the west of Jaisalmer). There are numerous ponds that made cattle rearing and vegetation possible in this area. It never restricted human survival unlike the desert of Sahara. It also nurtured some of the famous trading communities like banjaras, who adopted a nomadic life in search of fodder for their cattle. They also transported goods from one place to the other and constituted an important element of land trade.

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Southern peninsula of India can be divided into three geographical units. Stretching from the Vindhya range to Cape Comorin, its nucleus (like a triangle) is made of very old rocks. It contains a vast wealth of minerals. It has a steep brink towards the west, whereas the eastern side has a gentle fall. Western Ghats existed next to the steep edge towards the west. They rise steeply in forms of steps from the sea shore. The Ghats have an altitude of 1000 to 2000 meters. They culminated in the Nilgiris with Dodabetta at the height of 8,760 feet. At this juncture, they meet the Eastern Ghats. Communication between the Western Ghats and the rest of the peninsula would have been difficult, had there been no passage break of Palaghat. It is a low lying area, which extends twenty miles from north to south. The western side of the Western Ghats is often precipitous. Due to abundant rainfall (300 inches around Mahabaleshwar), the Western Ghats have evergreen forests containing bamboo, rose-weeds, betel nuts and cardamoms. Hilly terrain encouraged the inhabitants to look for extension towards the sea. Coastal navigation was more suitable than hilly and dense forest routes. In the sixteenth century, Travernier observed that one could follow the road from Surat to Goa, but it was in shabby condition. He further suggested that one should take a boat, which sailed through various ports of Konkan.5

The Eastern Ghats are scattered and harbour low altitudes. They start from Orrisa and extend into the Andhra region at the distance of fifty miles. Then these Ghats recede from the coasts and follow southwest course. From Madras, however, they once again took southern course and meet the Western Ghats at Nilgiris. These Ghats receive less amount of rain fall and trees here are shorter in comparison to their western counterparts.6

6 K. A. Nilakanta Sastrī, A History of South India: From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijaynagar, p. 35.
South India remained divided into certain well-marked territorial divisions like the Kuntles, Andhras, Cholas, Pandayas and Cheras. Generally each region developed its own culture. The cultural divisions, however, never deterred any strong state to unify the peninsula under one regime like the Cholas and Vijaynagara. The population of south India was constituted of various races. Apart from the indigenous population, there existed large sections of the Arabs, Chinese, Christians and Jews. They all contributed to the economy of the peninsula in one way or other. During the period of Hindu recession from the Indian Ocean, these communities participated in sea trade.

Brahmans remained the dominant caste in India. They were the custodians of education and *dharma*. Namboodri Brahmans allowed only the elder son to get married so that others could devote themselves to study and teaching. However, Brahmans also joined army and mercantile pursuits. Chettisetti was a reputed Brahman merchant in the Hoysala kingdom. He monopolized the supply of horses to the royal army. The Chola and Vijayangara army had considerable number of Brahman generals. The composition of other classes involves complexities. Apart from Malabar, where abundant rain-fed agriculture helped to sustain a warrior class of the Nayars, no specific warrior (Kshatriya) caste emerged in whole of the macro region. Sat Shudras also called kaniyatchiyar occupied an important place in social hierarchy. This class was the major beneficiary of agricultural land. They were also bestowed agrarian

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7 K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, op. cit., p. 284.

8 Ibid., p. 293.


management.\textsuperscript{11} Other lower castes in south India were divided into \textit{valangai} (right hand castes) comprising mainly agriculturists and \textit{idangai} (left hand castes) comprising artisans.\textsuperscript{12} Around eleventh century, the left hand castes started asserting themselves and demanded a better share in the society and economy. The \textit{masenai} (the great army) of the Cholas consisted of both \textit{valangai} and \textit{idangai}, when it invaded Ceylon.\textsuperscript{13} After the conquest of Ceylon, the inscriptions refer to the activities of Tamils (first as \textit{idangai} and then as merchant guilds) in the conquered land.\textsuperscript{14}

Regional variations in ecological patterns resulted in different socio-political structures in mainland south India and Malabar. In Malabar, the rains were sufficient and there was no need to develop irrigational methods. This resulted in the evolution of individual and independent land holdings not connected to one another through supra-local cooperation. The result was the birth of small states, which continued to rule their territories up to the arrival of the Portuguese. Secondly, the Nayars remained independent to their individual land holdings and never left their Shudra status.\textsuperscript{15} On the other hand, the rest of the peninsula displayed considerable urgency to connect with local and supra-local

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Stein finds that these divisions of left and right caste were not uniform throughout ‘the macro region’ (south India). In contrast to Tamil and Kannada areas of influence (where there was simple left and right caste divisions), it was based on sectarian considerations in Telugu areas. For example, the Vaishnavas belonged to right caste whereas the Saivites corresponded to left caste in Telugu areas. Ibid., p. 27.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Burton Stein, \textit{Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India}, p. 188.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
assemblies to remain the beneficiary of the irrigation system. The Brahmans and strong peasant assemblies took the decision as how the agrarian surplus was to be utilised for various donations. Autonomy to village assemblies and mercantile organization remained the key factor in the polity of the region.

The rulers and nobility enjoyed a luxurious life. They displayed liking for the luxuries and created the prime consumer group in India. The merchants, who held sufficient amount of capital, could only match them to a certain extent. Merchants were also important for their control over the supply of luxuries as well as war animals. Thus in Calicut, there was a merchant named Misqal, who was rich enough to own ships which sailed to other ports of India, China and Yemen.16 The merchants formed associations like the Anjuvannan, Ainnurravar and Manigramam. With the passage of time, these associations considerably expanded their mercantile activities in India and foreign destinations. They established erivirapattans (protected merchant towns) to provide security to the artisans and merchants. The Ainnurravar claimed it to be the protector of Virabananjudharma (the law of noble merchants).17

Temples played an important socio-economic role in south India. They helped in the Aryanization of Dravida country. Local deities were assimilated as the consort to the main deities.18 Kanakalatha Mukund opines that the ruling classes were pouring capital in the rural economy through their patronage to various temples.19 Numerous land grants (brahmdeyas) were attached to the

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16 Ibn Battuta, (Mahdi Husain), p. 189.
19 Kanakalatha Mukund, The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel, p. 32.
temples in the form of donations. They enjoyed control over irrigation channels and hence extracted the agrarian surplus. The temples also gave an impetus to the process of urbanization. They employed a large number of artisans and tenants. Artisans worked in the construction and beautification of temples, whereas the tenants tilled the temple lands. Huge construction of temples and regular daily rituals and annual festivals necessitated the services of a large number of ritual specialists and workers. The phenomenon was distinct around the eleventh century, when the Cholas brought home enormous amount of booty from the various inland and foreign invasions. Burton Stein highlights the increasing role of the temples in building cooperation between Brahmans and artisans:

"Another significant element in the widespread temple-building of the thirteenth century and later was the enhanced importance of artisans and merchants involved in the construction of temples and the provisioning of labour forces undertaking the work. The skills, goods and services necessary for the creation of temples of this period did as much to create new towns as the completed temples themselves. An almost ubiquitous feature of urbanization of the time was the development of towns at the base of hills on which much of the new temple-building took place. These towns must have begun as supply depots for the building material and other supplies as well as the residential quarters of the workers. Considering all of this, it is not surprising to discover a new basis of cooperation between the dominant agricultural folk, under whose auspices these monuments were constructed, and artisans and merchants."

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Agriculture remained the most important economic pursuit in the Indian subcontinent. The same was true about south India. Generally, the land was fertile and rains were sufficient to carry out cultivation. However, there were long spells of dry season that necessitated the construction of ponds for harvesting the rainwater. There were some major rivers, which helped irrigation over the vast mass of land. The major rivers of Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery indicated the general steep of the Deccan towards the southwest. Only Narmada and Tapti flowed towards the western side. Still the agriculture remained dependent largely on ponds and wells (except Kerala where rains were abundant enough to carry out agriculture).

It is imperative to understand the inherent connection between the eco-system, economy and social structures of ‘this macro region’ consisting, “Kalinga country or Orissa, Andhra or Telugu country, Chola and Pandya parts of Tamil country, and isolated south western littoral of Kerala or Malabar.” Three dominant types of eco-system were prevalent in south India. There were well-irrigated zones of Cholamandalam (Kaveri basin consisting region from the sea to modern district of Salem)\(^21\) and some parts of Tondaimandalam (consisting Pallavapuram, Mamallapuram, Seriperumbudur, Uttaramerur, Tiruvannamalai, Kanchi, Nellur and Tirupati).\(^22\) In these regions the availability of water helped the cultivation of cereals and rice to sustain the religious class. The Brahmanical institutions were dominant in these areas and the social diversifications were well marked. The Brahman village (brahmadeya) grants also helped to strengthen


\(^{22}\) As depicted on the map of Tondaimandalam between p. 533 and the last cover page in Burton Stein, Peasant State and the Society in Medieval South India.
the control of priestly class on the irrigation systems through the village assemblies.23

The second form of ecological zone was the area of scanty rain. Ramnad, Madurai and Pudukkottai and some parts of Rayalaseema form the core region of this arid zone. In these areas, agriculture was not sufficient. Thus pastoral activities compensated the shortage of arable land. Maravar and Kallars were the dominant groups inhabiting these regions. Absence of surplus production also kept the Brahmans away.24

Semi-arid zones formed the third ecological division of ‘the macro region.’ There were some form of irrigational facilities in the form of wells, but agriculture was largely dependent on the rains. Burton Stein credits the inhabitants of this region with their unique capacity for survival. Their agrarian economy was ‘based upon a balance of livestock and millet production.’25 They were less prone to exploitation owing to limited extent of agriculture. They were also very mobile and adopted trade to supplement their incomes. Again, the merchants and peasant groups displayed more affiliation in these semi-arid zones, namely Kongumandalam (modern Salem and Coimbatore), some portion of Tondaimandalam and Pandimandalam and Gangavadi in Karnataka. Brahmanical institutions were not very strong and the artisans enjoyed more respect in these semi-arid zones.

South India also excelled in trade and manufacturing. Agriculture could not cater to the needs of all. Therefore, forced with limited means, many ventured out to other places. The high terrains of Western Ghats were not cultivable and hence the natives sought extension towards the sea and other prosperous areas


Main River Systems Used by Long Distance Traders.
inland. From ninth century onwards, the wealthy mercantile associations emerged and they interlinked the scattered advanced agrarian societies in south India. With the passage of time, these itinerant mercantile groups merged with the localized mercantile groups operating inland trade. Many of the earlier itinerant traders, specialised in coastal and foreign trade, might have integrated in Islam, realizing its dominance and pervasive influence in the Indian Ocean trade.26

Availability of spices, herbs and manufactured products made trading activities even more tempting. Many ports of international importance like Calicut, Quilon, Nagapattinam, Kaveripattinam and Kayal dotted the coastal areas of the south Indian peninsula. Some communities adopted piracy to eke out their share in this trade. Sometimes, small rulers also patronized the pirates to plunder the ships with the promise that the captured horses would go to the ruler.27 Manufacturing and textile industry also developed in south India. Spinning and weaving industry mostly remained concentrated towards the eastern side. Warrangal specialized in manufacturing of cotton and silk textiles and carpets. Calicut had some of the finest jewellers, who were so perfect in their profession that diamonds and other precious stones were imported from foreign countries to be worked upon in the city.28

The Red Sea and Persian Gulf shoot out towards the north from the Arabian Sea. Situated between the two, in one of the largest peninsulas on the world map, Arabia is beset with some of the most dry and hot regions on the earth. It is located between the gate of two continents, namely Asia and Africa. Arabian peninsula and the Fertile Crescent of the Euphrates and Tigris formed


the Arabian land in Asia. Between the two horns of the Fertile Crescent is situated the Syrian desert, also an extension of Arabia.\textsuperscript{29} The peninsula is rectangular in shape and covers a surface of a million and a quarter square miles.\textsuperscript{30} Its boundaries are the Persian Gulf and the sea of Oman in the east, the Indian Ocean in the south and the Red Sea in the west. It merges with the Syrian desert in the north.

The Arabian peninsula is a plateau, higher in the west and sloping gently towards the east into the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamian depression.\textsuperscript{31} Hot and humid lowlands existed towards the western side. These lowlands are backed by a mountain range, which runs parallel to the Red Sea. These highlands of the peninsula attain the height of 9,000 feet in Hejaz and 14,000 feet in Sena.\textsuperscript{32} These mountains catch the western monsoons and hinterlands remained almost rainless. The situation is aggravated with the existence of lowlands towards the coastal areas. As a result, no water reaches inland.\textsuperscript{33} The peninsula does not possess any single river that can be called perennial. The unique geography of the Arabian peninsula made contacts between coastal areas and inlands difficult. The people of coastal regions therefore extended towards the sea in search of livelihood. Gradually, coastal cities like Aden became reputed ports. It received commodities from the distant lands of India, China and Africa. Aden's control over the Indian Ocean trade aroused the jealousy of the Roman world. Emperor

\textsuperscript{29} The western Fertile Crescent is Egypt. The Nile converted it into a beautiful oasis in the Sahara desert.

\textsuperscript{30} Nejle Izzazudiin, op. cit., p. 2.


\textsuperscript{32} It is the capital of Yemen. Yemen is one of the healthiest regions of the peninsula to live. Ibid., p 18.

\textsuperscript{33} Philip. K. Hitti, \textit{The Near East in History}, p. 12.
Justinian sent an embassy to Abyssinia (531 AD) requesting the ruler, “that they should buy silk from the Indians and sell it to the Romans; thus they would make a lot of money, while they would be bringing this gain to the Romans, that they (Romans) would no longer be faced to send their own money to their enemies (Persians).”

It was not that arid hinterlands of Arabia did not witness any social evolution. It housed one of the fiercest tribes of the world called the Bedouins. They were the symbols of human’s best adaptation to the worst of climatic settings. They were nomads. Hostilities of the deserts acted as their friend in the face of foreign aggressions. They were land pirates, brokers or both at the same time. Enriched with free spirit, they sought extension of their livelihood in the form of raids on their neighbouring territories. Familiarity with the desert made them efficient carriers of merchandize from one corner to another. In a nutshell, shortage of fertile land made the Arabs excellent traders. Agriculture was considered a lowly profession in comparison to trade. Therefore, they emerged as the forerunner of maritime trade in the Indian Ocean.

It was not that Arabia produced nothing in its fields. Certain patches of oasis made cultivation and cattle rearing possible. Yemen received sufficient periodic rains to make vegetation possible within the radius of 200 miles from the coastal regions. Dates remained the backbone of Arabian products. It

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34 Procopius quoted in G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient India and Early Medieval Times*, p. 43.


36 Referring to the traditions of the Bedouin life, the poet Qutami writes, "Our business is to make raids on the enemy, on our neighbour and on our brother, in case we find none to raid but a brother." Quatami quoted in Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, p. 25.


constituted an important food along with milk. Apart from dates, wheat was also grown in Yemen and certain oases. Barley and rice were cultivated in Oman. Frankincense trees and gum raisins were found on the highlands parallel to the southern coasts. Other products of Arabia are pomegranates, apples, almond, lemon, sugar-cane and water melons.

Arabia was divided into numerous clans before the emergence of Islam in the seventh century. Islam united them under the flag of one religion. The religious unity replaced clannish loyalty. The unification released tremendous amount of energy in the form of geographical, political, economic and social expansion. The democratic principles of the Bedouins were distinct in early Islam and it helped Islamic ideologies in their adaptation to contemporary settings. Between the ninth and twelfth centuries several works of philosophy, medicine, history, religion, astronomy and geography were produced in Arabic. Expansion brought prosperity and demands for the luxuries increased. The result was the expansion of inland and sea trade.

Infiltration in Persia opened a new chapter in the evolution of Islam. Persia (modern Iran) constituted major portion of a plateau (called Iranian) located between the Indus on the east and Tigris on the west. Its eastern portion is occupied by Afghanistan and Baluchistan. The plateau is generally surrounded by the mountains ranging from Hindu Kush to Elbruz range towards the south of the Caspian Sea. The highlands of Zafros Massif located on the southwest drained the westerlies. As a result rain is scanty in the inland areas. Except

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39 It was the only hard food available to the Bedouins next to camel flesh. To possess “the two black ones” (al-aswadda) i.e. water and dates, remained the cherished dream of every Bedouin. Philip K. Hitti, **History of the Arabs**, p. 19.

40 However, the cultivation of these commodities was not sufficient enough to export to other regions.

41 Philip K. Hitti, **History of the Arabs**, p. 4.

42 Ibid., p. 15.
some fertile plains on the sides of the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf, the area is too dry to sustain cultivation. The desert of Persia (popularly called Lut) is the dead heart of Persia. It made communication between the different zones of Persia extremely difficult. Population in Persia concentrated towards the west near the Fertile Crescent of the Tigris and Euphrates. The barrier of Taurus on the south kept Persia separated from the Arabian Peninsula. It also helped Persia to develop its own identity and culture. Vegetation in Persia was scanty and limited to spring season. Pears, apples, apricots, plums, peaches, cherries, figs, almond and pistachios were the reputed products of the land. Near Shiraz, dwarf oak trees and poplars were also grown.

Iraq is situated towards the western side of the Iranian Plateau. Once a cradle of the Babylonian Empire and the region of the Tigris and Euphrates, it enjoys alluvial plains. Iraq can be divided into two climatic and topographical zones. The northern part is mountainous. It is cold in winter and cool in summer. It received a good amount of rain and forests cover many parts of the Kurdish mountains. Varieties of fruits are cultivated here on the slopes. The vegetation also provides grazing grounds for the cattle. Livestocks, wool and hides are the products from Iraq. The plains towards the south covered two third of Iraq. The plains are flat and slightly above sea level. It is predominately depended upon the irrigation system of the two rivers the Tigris and Euphrates. Wheat, barley, rice and cotton (in a limited quantity) are grown here.

Its connectivity with the Persian Gulf encouraged Iraq's foreign trade. Situated between the two arid zones, it had enough provisions to sell to its neighbourhood of Arabia and Persia. Its prosperity also invited the invasions from

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44 Ibid., p. 12.

the neighbours. The Persians controlled Iraq for most of the time. Muslim armies overran Iraq in the seventh century. The Arabs considered trade more respectable than agriculture. As a result, the cities of Iraq like Baghdad and Basra were converted into flourishing sea emporiums of the Indian Ocean trade.\footnote{Philip K. Hitti, \textit{History of the Arabs}, p. 276.}

After the conquest of Damascus (635 AD), the Arabs utilized their whole energy towards Persia. The victory of Nahavud (642 AD) and subsequent murder of ill-fated Yazdagir (651 AD) by his men marked the supremacy of the Arabian military in Persia. The Ummayyads were not favourably disposed towards Persia. However, the Abbasids raised their armies in Khurasan. The second Abbasid caliph, al-Mansur (754-775 AD) displayed considerable interest in Persian concept of sovereignty. His court etiquettes were Persianized and Baghdad emerged as a famous centre of learning. Residence of the caliph also attracted scholars and nobles. Court functions became enormous means to display the grandeur of the caliph. As a result, trade received tremendous amount of impetus. Tabari while quoting al-Mansur on the strategic importance of Baghdad remarks, "This is Tigris...there is no obstacle between us and China; everything on the sea can come to us on it."\footnote{K.N. Chaudhuri, \textit{Trade and Civilisation in the India Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750}, p. 47.} The Mongol emperor Halaku Khan destroyed Baghdad and killed the Abbasid caliph in 1258 AD.\footnote{In 1258 AD, Halaku Khan, the grandson of Chengiz Khan sacked Baghdad and killed Abbasid caliph Al-Musta’sim. The caliphate went into decline in Baghdad and later revived in Constantinople under Usman (Turk dynasty) in 1299 AD. Thomas Patrick Hughes, \textit{Dictionary of Islam}, p. 267.} However, the newly established Fatimids in Egypt diverted the sea trade towards the Red Sea. Problems of the Silk Route under the Mongols and subsequent revival of the Red Sea brought unprecedented prosperity to the Indian Ocean trade.
Islam is urban in its orientation. The traders and artisans enjoyed equality, liberty and freedom. Islamic armies unearthed vast amount of hoarded precious bullion from the pyramids of Egypt and the temples of Byzantine, Persia and India. Circulation of capital resulted in unprecedented growth in the form of construction and military activities. Construction of mosques, hospitals and palaces might have helped in the circulation of wealth to lower classes. In Baghdad a jeweller (name not given) remained wealthy even when al-Muqtasir (dated 932 AD) confiscated 16,000,000 dinars from him.\(^49\) Another merchant of Basra was said to be earning 1000,000 dirhams annually. Many merchants of Siraf had homes worth 30,000 dinars.\(^50\)

Forced by the limited economic means, the people in western Asian reared horses, which tremendously contributed to the foreign trade of the region. The Bedouins, who needed speed during their plunders, reared high quality horses. These horses were a necessity in any medieval warfare. Indian subcontinent always remained in dire need of war-horses and considerable demand existed for them. Thus, the shortage of surplus agricultural produce was compensated with the availability of war-horses. The Arabs could balance the flow of imports with that of export in horses. Almost every ship from the Persian Gulf took horses to India.\(^51\) The camels, though not in great demand in sea trade, helped the natives to combat the hostile desert. A Bedouin ‘drinks its milk; feasts on its skin; he makes tent of its (camel) hair. Its dung is used as fuel, and its urine is used as a hair tonic and medicine. To him, the camel is more than the ship of the desert.’\(^52\) The camels can remain without water for a longer period and are excellent means of transportation across the deserts. In medieval times,


\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) Marco Polo, Vol. II p. 395; Abdur Razzaq, p. 5.

they enabled the traders to transport their merchandize across the hostile deserts of Arabia and Syria.

Before moving to the other regions of the Indian Ocean, it would be appropriate to discuss some aspects of the Mediterranean economy. Though not directly connected to the Indian Ocean in the medieval era, its impact was not negligible in the period under study. The Mediterranean Sea is an intercontinental sea situated between Europe to the north, Africa to the south and Asia to the east. It covers an area (excluding the Black Sea) of 970,000 square miles. To the west, it is also connected with the Atlantic Ocean by the strait of Gibraltar. Now a days, the Suez Canal connects it with the Red Sea, but in middle ages, the communication between the two seas was established overland. With the decline of the Roman Empire and European economy, the Mediterranean trade went into regression. However, around tenth century, Europe began to show signs of economic recovery. Agriculture expanded and the Church declared the holy wars (the Crusades) against Islam. In their pursuit to transport pilgrims and commodities for the crusaders, the sea traffic started increasing. Whatever might be the political results, culturally, the crusades brought the two civilizations close to each other. According to Kirk:

"The importance of the Crusades in the cultural history of Western Europe can hardly be over estimated for their effect in throwing open the windows of men's mind to the influence of the Middle East, whose level of civilization was still far higher than that of the west." 


54 In 1095 AD, the Pope Urban II made a speech against the atrocities of the Muslims. It culminated in the declaration of the Crusades against Islam. Philip. K. Hitti, The Near East in History, p. 38.

55 George E. Kirk, A Short History of the Middle East, pp. 45-46.
In the Orient, the Europeans acquired new tastes. Spices, sweetmeats, perfumes and other products of Arabia and India were brought into Europe. The new-found tastes helped Italy (especially Venice, Genoa and Pisa) to monopolize the trade with the Levant world. Referring to the vast range of products imported from western and central Asia, Philip K. Hitti states:

"Returning Crusaders introduced into their homes the rugs, carpets and tapestries of which western and central Asia had for long made specialty. Fabrics such as muslin, baldachin, damask, Sarcenet or Saracen stuff, velvet, silk and satin came to be more appreciated. Rosary became familiar...with fine clothes and metallic waves went lacquers and dyestuff, such as indigo. Oriental works of art on glass, pottery, gold, silver and enamel served as models for European products."\(^{56}\)

The flourishing trade started replacing the old hostilities. In 1229 AD Federick II of Holy Roman Empire even sent a mission to the successors of Saladin to establish more trading relations.\(^{57}\) Similar treaties were concluded by the city-states of Italy with the Ayyubs in 1208 AD.\(^{58}\) It laid the foundation of prosperous maritime trade between Italy and Islamic empires.

It is not only the contacts with the Orient that suddenly resulted in the expansion of Mediterranean economy. Europe itself was also exhibiting the signs of economic recovery. Agriculture, population, trade and religious institutions were undergoing fundamental changes. Medieval western Europe was divided into self sufficient manor system. The agrarian products were not enough to support a large population. Mortality rates were high and large chunk of land was left uncultivated. But new innovations like heavy plough, horse shoe (introduced in 900 AD) and whipple tree (introduced around 1077 AD) brought an 'agricultural


\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 48.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.
revolution. New techniques and subsequent agrarian expansion reduced the mortality rates and mobilized communities in search of new agricultural tracts. N.J.G. Pound observes the movement of the peasantry to nearby and distant destinations to colonize the land. The chronicle of Helmond describes how the Flemish peasants undertook massive venture to colonise watery terrain of Holistein. Simultaneously, major industries- wollen textiles, construction and mining- registered unprecedented progress. The growth of urban centers was noticed in rising population, activities of guilds and municipal governments. This trend of economic progress was terminated during the fourteenth century on account of wide spread peasant revolts, unrest among artisans and finally the mortality caused by the Black Death.

Trade prospered in eleventh century Europe. It is not that Europe was not trading anything after the decline of the Roman Empire. Slave trade was widely prevalent in the Mediterranean Sea. It is alleged that the merchants sometimes even castrated young children and sold them in the Muslim markets. Along with slaves, Europe exported bullion and some amount of hides to the eastern markets in return of spices, textiles and other oriental goods. Around twelfth century, agriculture and handicraft industry had attained a stage in which the Europe could balance the imports of spices, textiles, silk and other Oriental goods with its metal goods and clothes.

59 Whiple tree is a rod hinged in its middle to the centre of the load and attached each tip to the end of one of the traces. It reduces the risk of breaking of harness and overturning the wagon before making any manoeuvre. Lynn White, 'The Expansion of Technology 500-1500', in C.M. Cipolla, ed., The Fontana Economic History of Europe, p. 153.


Rising economy and population strengthened the institution of the Church. The religious classes changed their attitude towards economic pursuits. Earlier criticism of the mercantile interests was replaced with general attitude of accommodation. The Church emerged as a single largest unit commanding considerable amount of capital. Vast amount of construction was undertaken to build new churches, monasteries and other charitable buildings. Islamic contacts brought improved technologies in the building and textile industries. Changes in architectural styles, fashion and demand of construction material helped the economy. The church also participated in other public ‘welfare works.’ It offered hospitality to the pilgrims. It took care of the aged, orphans, monks and widows. It also provided relief in the times of distress and

63 The Church was facing serious threat from Islamic influence. The Arab culture remained huge attraction in western Europe. Alvaro, the bishop of Cordova wrote in the middle of ninth century:

“My fellow Christians delight in the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the works of Mohammadan theologians and philosophers, not in order to refute them, but to acquire a correct and elegant Arabic style. Where today can a layman be found who reads the Latin commentaries on Holy Scriptures? Who is there that studies the Gospels, the Prophets, the Apostles? Alas. The young Christians who are most conspicuous for their talents have no knowledge of any literature or language save the Arabic; they read and study with avidity Arabic books; they amass whole libraries of them at a vast cost, and they everywhere sing the praise of Arabian lore. On the other hand, at the mention of Christian books, they disdainfully protest that such works are unworthy of their notice. The pity of it. Christians have forgotten their own tongue and scarce one in thousand can be found able to compose in fair Latin a letter to a friend. But when it comes to writing Arabic, how many there are who can express themselves in that language with the greatest elegance, and even compose verses which surpasses in formal correctness those of the Arabs themselves.” Nejle Izzeddin, op. cit., p. 47.

64 Islam spread up to Sicily in tenth and eleventh century. It brought with it new Islamic innovation. Henry Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe, pp. 42-43.
supplied rations in the famine stricken areas. Along with the elite and mercantile classes, the institution of the church created an enormous demand for consumable and other goods.

The study of economic expansion of the western Europe would be incomplete without taking into account the key role played by Italy from the early tenth century onwards. Italy presented a unique picture in medieval Europe. It was a prosperous province of the Roman Empire and Gothic and Lombard invasions failed to destroy the economic activities of the region. Villa system in Italy created self-sufficient economic units binding serfs to the land. However the land owning groups of Italy never left the cities entirely, creating urban demands for the rural products. The landed classes received surplus from the rural areas in the form of either cash or kind. Familiarity with trading practices in urban centers encouraged these landed classes to invest in trade. As a result, division between landed classes and merchants got blurred. Venice, a city of lagoon, was the first one to take the advantage of changing scenarios. Its merchants traded with the Muslims and exported slaves to the harems of Egypt and Syria. Timber and iron was also exported to the Islamic world. Venice supported Emperor Alexis to drive away the Normans from south Italy. It eliminated its formidable competitors and secured trading concession in the Byzantine Empire.

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67 Ibid., p. 106.

68 Ibid., p. 350.

69 The threats of ex-communication by the Church to the merchants who supplied anything (to the enemies) that can be used against the army of the Christians failed to have any impact on the morality of the Venetian merchants. Henry Pirenne, op. cit., p. 18.
(1062 AD). The Crusades brought further prosperity to Italian cities. Henri Pirenne remarks:

"The profits realized by army contracts profited Venetians, Pisans, Genoese....finding themselves suddenly rich, hastened to put new ships on their stocks. The establishment of the Crusading states in Syria ensured regular use of these means of transport, without which the Franks would have been unable to maintain themselves in the East. Towns thus became important."  

He further adds:

"One lasting and essential result of the Crusades was to give the Italian towns...the mastery of Mediterranean. They developed economic and strict capitalist activities that gradually filtered to the north of Alps."  

Rising prosperity could be underlined in the subsequent expansion of trade, which attracted new classes. Nobles, merchants and peasants all invested in trade. The Burgs expanded and new towns (faubourg) emerged next to old burgs. These were the merchant towns. Gui de Dampiere remarked in 1217 AD that Flanders 'cannot support herself without the provisions from outside.'

To accommodate trade, new commercial laws (ajus mercatorum) were established for the protection of the merchants. In thirteenth century Europe, the old custom of confiscating whatever the sea threw to their ports (in the form of

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70 Henry Pirenne, op. cit., p. 203.
71 Ibid., p. 32.
72 Ibid., p. 33.
73 Ibid., p. 43.
74 Ibid., p. 176.
wreckage) was abandoned to infuse confidence in the traders. Merchants devised new forms of commenda to raise capital with the reduction of risks. Hodgett believes that Italian cities developed the practices of financing trade much ahead of Europe and it enabled them to dominate the Mediterranean over a long period of time. In the records of Girurnni Scriba (a Genoese notary), he records two types of commendas. In the first type, the investing partner (the Stan) invested all the capital and traveling partner (the Tractator) took the responsibility of taking the cargo to foreign markets. The profits were divided as three fourth to the Stan and one-fourth to the Tractator. In case the Stan invested two third of the capital, the profits were shared equally by the two partners. In some cases, part of the merchandize was governed by commenda and the rest was owned individually. Thus commenda enabled a number of persons from different strata to invest in trade. The nobles, widows, clerics, artisans and shop-keepers invested in trade. It resulted in the availability of a huge amount of capital for carrying out trade by the cities of Italy. With the passage of time, ships and merchandize were insured and the ship owners even advanced loans to the traders to carry out mercantile activities. Double entry book-keeping (started in Genoa 1340 AD) also simplified tracking the records of different commercial transactions. Farolfi ledger of Florence (1299-1300 AD) placed receipts next to expenditures.

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75 Shepard B. Clough, *European Economic History: The Economic Development of Western Civilisation*, pp. 81, 87.


77 Ibid., p. 63.

78 Ibid., p. 69.

79 Ibid., p. 70.
However twelfth century Italy was facing serious shortage of bullion to balance the imports from Asia. France and Low Countries to its north were at that time developing cloth industry. Initially in the hands of monasteries, the industry gradually found skilled workers. Italy with its control over oriental products was in search of products to be exported further east. Thus the two areas complimented each other. Merchants went further west from Italy to obtain clothes. The Flemings sold their clothes at the annual fairs like that of Champagne, Cologne and Paris. These products were then transported to Italy. Italy exported them to different zones of the Mediterranean. Thus prosperity of Italian cities further helped in the economic consolidation of western Europe. Economic prosperity increased the standard of living and consumption patterns for the Oriental products.

Rising demands of spices and herbs had direct impact on the polity and economy of southeast Asian countries. Spencer considers ‘the Southeast Asia’ a recent term employed to describe the area that ‘belongs to everyone, yet belongs to none.’ Large number of cultural groups had moved into the region and had claimed some part of it, but no one has ever brought the whole region under one system of control. However, we shall study the region under the term of southeast Asia only. It is a region that lies between India and China. Geographically, it is a mainland of Asia. It stretches around 4020 kilometers from west to east. However the high mountain barrier emerging in the north

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83 Ibid., p. 313.
from Tibetan Plateau had made the region isolated. Numerous islands, swamps, jungles and mountains break the unity of the mainland.

Robinson divided southeast Asia into two broad categories namely insular and peninsular. Peninsular southeast Asia consisted of Burma, Thailand, Indo-China, Malaysia and Singapore. In the second category came insular principalities of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. However for our convenience and better understanding, we can divide southeast Asia into two broad zones that is coastal and inland. We shall concentrate on the geographical setting of the coastal states and its bearing on the maritime trade.

Java is 1045 kilometers long from west to east. Its total area is 126,50 square miles. It is the main rice producing area of the southeast Asia. Sumatra is an island and consisted of 164,000 square miles of land. It could be divided into three distinct zones. There were narrow western plains to be followed by the hilly region. Further towards the east, there were again some fertile plains. However, this lowland had dense forests and the natives preferred to live on the slopes of the highlands. Palembag in Sumatra was the capital of Srivijayan empire. Foreign communities like the Arabs, Indians and Chinese also populated the coastal regions of the country. Malaya peninsula extended two hundred miles from the Gulf of Siam to Singapore. In Malaya, mountain range was strictly linear and peninsular divide was near to the west than east. Vegetation in Malaya could be divided into three categories. The highland forests on the

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85 K.K. Beri, *History and Culture of Southeast Asia*, p. 5.
86 H. Robinson, op. cit., p. 222.
87 Ibid., p. 327.
89 Ibid., p. 27.
altitude of more than 2000 feet brought forth low trees, lichens, liverworts and orchids. Below the height of two thousand feet grew tall trees and palms. And along the coastal belt casuarinas grew on rocky soil and mangrove trees were found in mud flats.\textsuperscript{90}

Agriculture was the esteemed profession in southeast Asia. Rice remained the chief crop. However, there was a general shortage of cultivable land and the sea provided alternative means of livelihood. Southeast Asia received abundance of rain and season was not divided in winter and summer, but wet and dry. However, the heavy rain resulted in heavy erosion. Cady studied the factors contributing to the shortage of arable land and found that its nature caused the main concern. Non-volcanic water-impregnated soil was subjected to downward drainage. It gradually became either latrized or leached because certain soluble minerals were drained away. When the soil temperature remained steadily above 75° F, the organic matters and silica dissolved and sank to lower level. It left porous soil of heavy clay and iron content called laterite. “When exposed to the sun, laterite becomes hard enough to use for building purposes and roads; when unexposed it is spongy and unstable and also notoriously lacking in essential plant nutrients.”\textsuperscript{91} When the temperature was below 75° F, downward draining water with heavy organic matter in solution frequently dissolved the clay and iron, leaching surface soil of iron oxide needed by plants.\textsuperscript{92} Thus, agriculture developed in deep rooted forests and plantations capable of tapping water tables far below the surface level. Only Java with sufficient amount of volcanic soil managed to produce surplus in rice and

\textsuperscript{90} Richard Winstedt, op. cit., p. 9.

\textsuperscript{91} John F. Cady, \textit{Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., p. 9.
spices.\textsuperscript{93} Gold, tin, tree gums, pepper, nutmegs and fine wood attracted traders to southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{94}

Culturally southeast Asia can be divided into two zones, namely coastal and highland. It can also be considered a division between sea-oriented people and land oriented people. The coastal areas of Burma, Thailand, Malaya peninsula and Sumatra participated directly in the Indian Ocean trade. Sea compensated the shortage of arable land in these regions. These areas witnessed considerable influx of foreign communities like the Arabs, Indians, Chinese and Europeans. Strong maritime empires like Srivijaya and Malacca emerged in these areas between eleventh and sixteenth century. These areas also housed a large number of fishermen and sea pirates. The Celetes were the dreaded pirates of the Malaccan Strait and they played an important role in the foundation of Srivijaya and Malacca empires. They were instrumental in consolidating the naval power of these states.\textsuperscript{95}

The second zone comprised of the inland empires of Java. Here the state possessed huge arable land. Production was surplus and supported large number of inhabitants. Still, it would be wrong to assert that the state cf Java remained fully insular.\textsuperscript{96} Javanese rice was in demand in neighbouring territories of Malaya and Sumatra. In spite of long standing hostilities, Java agreed to improve its relation with Malacca, realizing the demand created by the Malaccan markets for its products. Still Java failed to reach the glories of maritime commerce as attained by Srivijaya and Malacca.

Participation of so many communities resulted in a hybrid southeast Asian culture. Religiously, it displayed the fusion of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

\textsuperscript{93} H. Robinson, op. cit., p. 316.

\textsuperscript{94} J.E. Spencer and William L. Thomas, op. cit., p. 348.

\textsuperscript{95} Tome Pires, Vol. II, p. 234.

\textsuperscript{96} Beri studies Java in relation to it land policies only. K.K. Beri, op. cit., p. 227.
With the advent of Islam, Hinduism received a setback and was confined to a few states like Bali. Nevertheless, some of its customs continued to dominate even after the spread of other religions. For example, the sultan of Malacca continued to enjoy some privileges like the use of white umbrella and gold colour (reserved exclusively for royal families).\(^{97}\) The Muslims populated the coastal areas, whereas the Buddhists were dominant in the mainland.\(^{98}\) Religious customs were sometimes closely related to economic activities. In Javanese culture, it was believed that every object had a soul and even a rice grain was no exception. Rice cultivation, therefore, became a kind of religious obligation and not just mere economic activity.\(^{99}\)

Numerous channels, swamps, steams and mountains made land contacts extremely difficult. Water navigation therefore remained more important than anything else. Sea remained equally important for all the states, whether insular or peninsular. It developed the navigational skills of the people. In fact, it acted as a unifying force. It brought the economic interests of different states on one common platform that was foreign trade. The centre of power might have shifted from Palembag to Malacca in the fourteenth century. But the prosperous maritime trade benefited the whole region, which continued to participate in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean in one way or another.

China was a large country. Its area was around 3,696,100 square miles.\(^{100}\) It was around forty times the size of United Kingdom, and is larger than United States including Alaska and Hawaii.\(^{101}\) Chinese territory extended from Siberia to

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\(^{97}\) K.K. Beri, op. cit., p. 341.

\(^{98}\) H. Robinson, op. cit, p. 228.

\(^{99}\) K.K. Beri, op. cit., p. 228.


\(^{101}\) Ping-chai Kuo, China, p. 5.
the equator and from the shores of the Pacific to the heart of Eurasian continents. Its southwest was a tremendous complex of very high mountains and high plateau formed in the fields of the Himalayas. It came in the rain shadow area of the Himalayas and was very arid. The desert covers the area between Siberia and cultivable northern area. Its fertile plains included Manchuria (north China), middle and lower Yangtze, the plains of central regions and Canton (south China), the Red river basin in Vietnam. Statistically speaking, the eastern China is more blessed than other areas. As a result, ninety percent of the population lived in twenty provinces in the eastern third of the country (also called China Proper). The other ten percent is scattered equally in different regions. Again, the western regions indulged more in pastoral activities in contrast to the agricultural eastern side.

Climatic conditions added to the diversity of China. The eastern and southern regions were subjected to the altering influence of the monsoons, whereas the interiors remained almost dry. Northern areas received some amount of precipitation and temperature here remained generally cool. China could be divided into three broad zones with its climatic settings and subsequent impact on vegetation in these areas.

Northern China consisted of three major regions namely the Yellow River plains, the Wei and Fen valleys, Loess Highlands (deposits of fine sand carried by the winds from central Asia) and the Liao River Valley in south Manchuria. Due to less rainfall but cooler temperature, wheat, Kaoliang (a variety of Sorghums), soya beans and millet were produced here. Central China could be divided into lower Yangtze plains, Szechwan basin, Central Lakes and Chekiang Fukien. In the regions of abundant rainfall and warm climate, rice was cultivated

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103 Ping-chai Kuo, op. cit., p. 19.

104 Jacques Gernet, op. cit., p. 3.
extensively. A region of Central Lake was also called 'the Rice Bowl' of China. Some amount of wheat was also cultivated in Yangtze Plain. Tea along with rice was cultivated in Chekiang Fuken. Southern region of Kwangtung was humid and sub tropical. Two crops could be easily cultivated in the plains, but hilly areas dominating the countryside reduced the area under cultivation.¹⁰⁵

China accommodated a large indigenous population. Regular interaction with neighbouring territories had resulted in a heterogeneous composition of population. The phenomenon is more distinct if one studies the linguistic division of modern China. From Siberia to north china, people have migrated from central Asia and their language has an impact of Turkish, Mongolian and Tong groups (Ural-Altaic), whereas Sino-Tibetan languages dominate other areas. Mon-Khymer and Malayo-Polynesian linguistic groups inhabit southeast Asian regions.¹⁰⁶

The Chinese were often alleged to be non-religious people. The concept of salvation and sins did not have space in any Chinese philosophy except the Buddhism (and it originated in India). Metaphysical teachings failed to rouse any distinct attention in China. The Chinese traditionally concentrated more on the social aspects of religion. Man was bound to a social structure. Any capable person could join nobility after appearing in state competitive examinations. Social divisions were not prominent. The Confucian ideology perhaps contributed convincingly to such thoughts. Talking about death, Confucius (551-479 BC) once remarked, “Not knowing enough about life, how can we talk about death?” He saw public service as the natural culmination of education. Taoism also influenced the Chinese society. Founded by Lao-Tzu, it believed that human nature would find its equilibrium and hence stressed less governance in contrast to the Confucian ideology. Buddhism also filtered from India to China. However,

¹⁰⁵ Ping-chia Kua, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
¹⁰⁶ Jacques Gernet, op. cit., p. 5.
the revival of Confucian ideology in the ninth century hampered the growth of Buddhism. A decree of 836 AD forbade the Chinese to have any contacts with foreign religions (including Buddhism), which were alleged of bringing the moral decline of the society. Emergence of the Confucian ideals however worked in favour of China. The Confucians stressed that the emperor should have a 'Mandate of Heaven' to rule not only China, but whole of the world. The search of this so called 'Mandate' forced rulers after the tenth century to send embassies to foreign destinations to secure the exotics. Foreign embassies were also encouraged to visit the Chinese court and offer the gifts. These gifts were viewed as a tribute by the distant rulers in submission to the Chinese emperor. It was no co-incidence that both maritime states of the Sungs and Mings also made Confucianism to be the state religion.

In spite of the vast tract of land, China was not suitable enough for agrarian economy. The rising population around the ninth and tenth century increased pressure on the agrarian lands. The Tangs brought more cultivable tracts under cultivation. However, the state revenues were not increasing. In eleventh century China (1064-67 AD), out of the total cultivable area of twenty four million hectares only thirty percent was taxed. In China, the land was mostly owned by the elites who constituted the major portion of aristocracy. They resisted any reform to tax their lands. When Chia Ssu-tao (1213-1251 AD) suggested number of measures to tax big landlords in order to lighten the burden on the poor peasants, he was staunchly opposed by the aristocracy. Agrarian crisis was apparent in Canton in the eleventh century, where the population was divided between Chu-hu and Kio-hu. The Chu-hu had cultivable lands and were

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108 Ibid., p. 314.
109 Ibid., p. 315.
A Giraffe Brought from Africa in the Twelfth Year of Yongle (AD 1414)

Source: wikimedia.org
taxed whereas the Kio-hu were without land and thus could not be taxed. In such a scenario trade lured population towards the urban centers. There were instances when the poor peasants, lured by rewards of trade, sold their farms and engaged in trade.\textsuperscript{110} The situation encouraged the sea-trade of China.

China displayed strong administrative control since antiquity. Dwindling revenues from agriculture and rising prospectus of trade lured the state to participate in trade. The situation was further aggravated when the Juchens occupied northern China and Kao Tsung shifted his court to Hang Chou (Qinsay of Marco Polo). The population of the new capital increased manifold. According to E.A. Kracke, Hang Chou had a population of 900,000 within its walls and 600,000 in suburbs.\textsuperscript{111} Southern China faced large scale immigration from the northern areas in face of foreign invasions. From forty-five percent in the eighth century, the population of Yangtze valley and southern areas went upto eighty five to ninety percent by the end of thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{112} Facing economic crunch, the Sungs diverted their full energy towards sea trade. The state itself became merchant and trader, by creating workshops and commercial enterprises run by civil servants and by systematically developing the state monopolies in order to provide for the maintenance of its armies and to meet the rapid increase in military expenditure. As a result, revenue from maritime duties, which constituted only a half a million strings of thousand coins at the beginning of the dynasty (of the Sungs) reached sixty five million strings in 1189 AD.\textsuperscript{113} In response to increased demands, the cultivation of textile producing plants like hemp, mulberry and cotton gained ground. Metallurgy witnessed enormous


\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, p. 481.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., pp. 479-480.

\textsuperscript{113} Jacques Gernet, op. cit., pp. 323-324.
expansion.\textsuperscript{114} New mines of iron and copper were explored. The regions of Kai-feng, Honan, Hopei, Hangchow and Fukien excelled in ceramics. Chinese rivers and the canals connecting Hangchow to Chen-chiang and Yagchow to Kei-feng provided a waterway of about fifty thousand kilometers. These waterways experienced increased traffic.\textsuperscript{115} The rising prosperity of China had bearing on other Indian Ocean countries. Rising number of rich families created new demands in clothing, diets and housing projects. Cotton and other expensive clothes were imported from India. Spices and herbs were used on wider scale and southeast Asian and southern India profited from the situation.

Thus no regions with its own geographical peculiarities could ignore the sea trade. Rising standards of living transformed the patterns of demand in both necessities and luxuries. The earlier economic regression was showing the signs of withdrawal. Every zone influencing the Indian Ocean trading empire was witnessing population increase. More lands were reclaimed when Islam introduced new innovations in irrigation, weaving and construction projects right form Asia to Europe. India was ready to take the advantage of the situation. Indian products like clothes and spices began to dominate distant markets. The impact could be seen with increased donations to the temples and rising participation of the artisans, manufacturers and merchants in state policies. No doubt, they were not strong enough to subvert the caste distinctions. But they were mobilising themselves to demand more share in the resources of the state. We shall discuss these changes in the subsequent chapters.

\textsuperscript{114} It was 114,000 tonnes in 1078 AD China, whereas in England it reached mere 68,000 tonnes in 1788. Jacques Gernet, op. cit., p. 320.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., pp. 320-321.