

**THE ARABS IN EAST WEST TRADE –
A STUDY IN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL INTERACTIONS – 9th TO 15th CENTURY**

**Thesis
submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in History**

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**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
2008**

DECLARATION

I, Kadeeja P., hereby declare that the thesis **“Arabs in East West Trade - A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions - 9th to 15th Century”** is a bonafide record of research work undertaken by me, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis **“Arabs in East West Trade - A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions - 9th to 15th Century”** submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Calicut, is a record of bonafide research carried out by **Kadeeja P.** under my supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for award of any degree before.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have immense pleasure in expressing my earnest gratitude to many teachers, scholars, colleagues and friends for their help and support for completing this study.

First of all, I am greatly indebted to my guide and supervisor, Dr. Kunhali V., former Professor and Head of the Department of History, University of Calicut at present the visiting Prof., Chair for Islamic Studies and Research, University of Calicut for his insightful and scholarly guidance and encouragement through out my work. He patiently supervised this work amidst a multitude of other avocations and made useful and valuable suggestions, additions and alterations.

I am indebted to Dr. K.K.N. Kurup, former Vice Chancellor of University of Calicut and Dr. S.M. Koya, former Head of the Department of History, University of Calicut for their valuable suggestions and continuous encouragement. I express my gratitude to Prof. M.G.S. Narayanan, former Chairman of I.C.H.R., who has laid me under deep obligation by giving me access to his personal collections of rare materials.

I express my hearty gratitude to my teachers Prof. A.P. Abdurahman, Prof. Mohammed Hassan, Dr. Mohammed Ali, Sri. P.A. Mohammed, Dr. T.A. Mohammed and Sri. K.P. Alassan

Kutty who were the constant inspiration to me during the course of my study.

I owe my gratitude to Sri. K. Mohammed, former Deputy Director of Collegiate Education, Calicut, Sri. M. Vijayakumar, former Head of the Department of History, Sanskrit College, Pattambi for their constant support for my research.

I would like to record my indebtedness and thanks to Dr.T.M.Vijayan, Head of the Department of History, University of Calicut and to the eminent teachers of the Department, Sri.K.P.Velayudhan, Dr.K.N. Ganesh, Dr.K. Gopalankutty and Sri.M.Madhavan for their valuable suggestions and constructive comments. I am thankful to the office and library staff of the Department of History for their timely help.

I express my profound gratitude to Dr. Muhammed Poozhikuth, Sri. P.K. Aboobakar, Dr. V. Sulaiman and Mrs. M.A. Nishath, my colleagues at Govt. College, Malappuram for their constant support and valuable suggestions.

I am thankful to the staff of C.H. Mohammed Koya Library, Kunhali Marakkar Centre for West Asian Studies Library, University of Calicut, and Farook College Library for extending necessary facilities to my research. I owe my gratitude to the staff of Tamil Nadu State Archives and Library, Connemara Library, Chennai, Madras University Library and Library of Aligarh Muslim University.

I am grateful to the UGC for granting me the teacher fellowship under X Plan for the completion of this work. I am

also thankful to the Director and the staff of the College Development Council, University of Calicut for their co-operation.

My thanks go out to all my friends and research colleagues who have assisted me in different ways in the completion of this work. I must single out Mrs. Beena Paul, Lecturer in History, St. Benedict College, Thodupuzha, for special thanks for her constant encouragement and generous help. I am thankful to Mrs. Jisha Girish and M/s. Bina Photostat.

C.U. Campus,
Dated:

KADEEJA P.

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ABBREVIATIONS

IA	:	Indian Antiquary
IC	:	Islamic Culture
ICHR	:	Indian Council of Historical Research
IESHR	:	Indian Economic and Social History Review
IHC	:	Indian History Congress
JESO	:	Journal of Economic and Social History of Orient
JRAS	:	Journal of Royal Asiatic Society
KCHR	:	Kerala Council of Historical Research
M & E	:	Journal of Man and Environment
MIQ	:	Medieval India Quarterly
SIHC	:	South Indian History Congress

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF ARAB TRADE

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POLITICAL, SOCIAL,
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Arabs' has referred to different peoples at different times. In the modern sense, the term refers to the people who speak Arabic as their native language. Ethnically, the term denotes the nomadic peoples of Arabian peninsula who use Arabic as their mother tongue. In pre-Islamic times the term was used to designate the inhabitants of Arabian peninsula. On the advent of Islam, when believers of the new faith were unified in to one 'Ummah' or community irrespective of their nationality or ethnic affiliation the term Arab got a wider meaning and began to be used to denote any one who professed Islam and used Arabic as his 'language'¹. In this study the term 'Arab trade' is used in the wider sense to denote the commercial activities of a people with diverse ethnic origin, whether it be Persian, Syrian, Egyptian, Turkish, Arabian or any other one, but united by a common bond of the medieval Arab culture.

The period of history covered in this study is long spanning over seven centuries, chronologically from the ninth to the fifteenth, century AD. Categorically this was the heyday of Arab

¹ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean, A History of People and the Sea*, Oxford University Press, (1993), P.95

trade².

By virtue of their high standards of commercial morality, greatness of their Caliphs and enormous economic prosperity they brought in, the Arab merchants found a warm welcome in the imperial courts and ports of Mediterranean, Africa, Middle East, India and China.

The medieval Arab merchants were able to make Ptolemy's Alexandria the richest port in the world. Long before Columbus set sail from Europe, Arab merchants were making regular voyages that were in greater distance than what Columbus sailed. Arab merchants were the means by which inventions and thoughts were transmitted from the Far East to Europe causing western world to develop in to great and sophisticated society. No people in the Middle Ages had contributed to human progress so much as did the Arabs and the Arabic speaking people³. They kept alive higher intellectual life and the study of Sciences during the period when the West was passing through the 'Dark Ages'.

Political expansion of Arab empire reshaped the political boundaries of the Middle East and the Mediterranean. When Spain and Sind were conquered lands from Tagus to the Indus came under the political control of Arabs, giving rise to the biggest

² Appa Dorai, *Economic Conditions of South India*, Vol.II, Madras, (1936), P.500

³ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London (1974), P.4

empire and largest collection of economies under one political system that the world had ever seen. It is said that during the palmy days of Abbasids, Baghdad was the central empire of the period, not China though it was calling itself the middle kingdom⁴.

From the seventh century to the time of Vasco da Gama maritime routes to India and China through the Spice Islands were under the control of Arabs. This monopoly allowed them to control much of the trade in silk and spices and made them the total masters of Indian Ocean trade.

Trade income or in modern sense, mercantile capital, is the surplus generated through commercial activities with others. It is the most sustainable source of income of an economy. Trade became possible when men learned to exploit nature and to produce beyond his immediate needs. Trade is considered as one of the indications for the existence or formation of state. Trade had an important role in territorial expansion during the early historic period. Through trade, along with the exchange of tangible goods, invisible cargoes of ideas, knowledge, culture, language, faith, technology etc. were also exchanged. Hence a study of 'trade' becomes exhaustive, when it focuses not only on the visible facet of exchange of wealth and wares but also on the other

⁴ Bertold Spuler, *Trade in the Western Islamic countries in the Early centuries, in Islam and Trade of Asia* (ed.) D.S. Richards, London, (1970), P.19

aspects like the socio-economic, political interactions of the buyers and the sellers. In this study an attempt is made to analyze the social, economic and political interactions that took place during 9th to 15th century AD. on account of the Arab trade with East-West countries.

Sources of the Study

The primary sources utilized for this work consist mainly of the accounts of the medieval Arab travellers and geographers. Travelogues of explorers, adventurers, mariners and earlier Greeco-Roman accounts, European and Chinese accounts are also utilized. As medieval Arab travellers were co-travellers of Arab merchants their accounts contain a detailed narration of the itinerary of a merchant, giving meticulous details of various ports and towns en-route and the distance between them and major items of merchandise exchanged between far off lands. They also provide information on the economic, political, social and cultural conditions of different peoples of different regions.

The political superiority and economic prosperity of the medieval Arab empire and the Arab domination of the maritime routes encouraged the Arab travellers to undertake long journeys to far off lands and to produce voluminous travel accounts. The information provided in these accounts on the basis of their

personal experiences and direct contacts with informants has helped historians to reconstruct the history of the medieval period. One notable feature of these accounts is the exhaustive and interesting way of presentation of the information incorporating reports and narratives of sailors and merchants. As these accounts deal with several problems connected with trade, commerce and taxes of different countries, they are the most reliable source for the study of trade and mercantile activities of different peoples of the medieval period. Hence Arab travellers' and geographers' accounts are used as the major source of information for this study.

Many Non-Arab travellers' accounts for the period from the tenth to sixteenth centuries have also been used as major source of primary information. In order to compare historical facts and identify modern names of ports and markets, many connected early European works are found to be very useful.

The secondary sources of information that have been utilized consist of many published and unpublished materials from different archives and libraries.

A brief survey of the primary sources is furnished below. The primary sources of this study can be classified in to three groups as:

- a) Arab travellers' accounts
- b) Arab Geographers' accounts and
- c) Non-Arab travellers' accounts

a) Arab travellers' accounts:

The first known Arab traveller, Sulayman al Tajir was a merchant. He started his voyages as a maritime trader in the first half of the ninth century. He travelled several times from Siraf to China rounding the coast line of Indian Peninsula. Tracking the route of Sulayman, M. Reinaud remarks, "he started for India from the Persian Gulf, sailing with monsoon. The first country caught his attention was the Gulf of Cambay, which the Arab ships accustomed to pass for the coast of Malabar and on the direction of the Island of Ceylon"⁵. His travel account, Akhbar as Sin wal Hind (Tales of China and India) is the earliest known Arab description of China and the coast lands of India⁶. As a merchant Sulayman gives more information about the major sea routes, trade centres, merchandise and conditions of trade and traders. Scholars are of the opinion that the original work of Sulayman was lost and after twenty seven years when it was rediscovered by Abu Zayd he supplemented the Akbar with information which he

⁵ R.H. Major (ed), *India in the fifteenth century*, Delhi, (1974), P.XXV

⁶ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London, (1940), P.383

gathered from merchants and seamen of Siraf⁷. Akbar has been translated in to English and French⁸.

Al Masudi was a great traveller, geographer, historian and encyclopaedist of the early tenth century. He travelled widely for more than twenty five years and wrote the history of Islamic World in 30 volumes. When he got settled at Busra he wrote Muruj al Dhahab (Golden Meadows) describing the sects, customs, regions and condition of nations⁹, and Mirat al Zaman (Mirror of the times) describing the history and geography of the countries he visited¹⁰.

Kitab al Masalik wal Mamalik written by Ibn Hauqal in the tenth century is a narrative of his travels and explains the major routes, ports and trade centres.

Ajaib al Hind (Marvels of India), a travel account written by Buzurg bn Shahryar, a merchant and captain of a ship, who sailed from Iraq to China includes a comprehensive picture of India.

Kitab-an-Nuzuhah al Mushtaq fikhtiraq al Afaq (The Book of Pleasure for those who desire to travel around the world) written by Al-Idrisi under the patronage of the Norman King, Roger II is a great source of information about Malabar and pepper trade. He

⁷ G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, New York, (1975), P.68

⁸ French (Tr.) T. Sauget, *Akbar Sin wal Hind*, Paris, (1948), English (Tr.) Renaud, *Ancient Account of India and China*, London, (1733)

⁹ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima* (Tr.) F. Rosenthal, London, (1967), P.29

¹⁰ Musudul Hasan, *History of Islam*, Vol.I, Delhi, (1998), P.641

called Malabar as Malai and gives valuable information about the ports and trade centres of the period. But S.M.H. Nainar says that Idrisi only repeated the works of Khurdhadbeh in many respects¹¹. It can be seen that information regarding the political and social conditions included in his description is a repetition of the previous reports.

Rehla, the famous travelogue of the great traveller Ibn Battuta published under the title Tuhfat Un-Nazzar fi Gharib il Amsar Wa Ajaib ul Asfar is a major source of information on trade and commerce of the middle ages. It contains important information on the political, economic, social and cultural life of the different parts of the medieval world. A good part of this travel diary is used for recording his travels and experiences in South India. His description of Malabar is more accurate and exhaustive than any of his predecessors.

Masalik ul Absar fi Mamalik ul Amsar of al Umari, a traveller of the fourteenth century from Damascus contains vast information on the social, political, religious and economic conditions of Arab lands and India. Subh ul Asha written in the fourteenth century by Shihabuddin Abul Abbas Ahmad (Al-Qalqashandi) is a mine of information on medieval West Asia and India.

¹¹ S.M.H. Nainar, *Arab geographers knowledge of Southern India*, Madras, (1942), P.18

Matlaussaadain, the travel account of Abdur Razzak who visited India and China as an Ambassador of Shah Rukh provides valuable information of the fifteenth century India and China. His account contains more information about Calicut and pepper trade.

b) Arab Geographers' Accounts:

The medieval period produced many Arab geographers whose geographical works were characterized by accuracy and scientific interpretation. The great Arab geographers like Ibn Khurdhadhbih, Ibn Faqih, Al Masudi, Istakhri, Yaqubi and Ibn Rustah provide us not only geographical and topographical description but also valuable information on trade, social and economic conditions of many medieval countries.

The principal works of Arab geographers have been collected and edited under the title *Bibliothicae Geographorum Arabicorum* by M.J. de Goeje in eight volumes as under

- I. Istakhiri, *Kitab al Masalik wal Mamalik*.
- II. Ibn Hawqal, *Kitab Surat al Ard*.
- III. Index and Glossary to Vol. I-III.
- IV. Index and Glossary to Vol. I-III.
- V. Ibn al Faqih, *Muktasar Kitab al Buldan*.
- VI. Ibn Khurdhadhbih, *Kitab al Masalik wal Mamalik*.

VII. Ibn Rustah, *Kitab al A'laq al Nafisah*, Yaqubi, *Kitab al Buldan*.

VIII. Masudi, *Kitab Tanbih wal Ishraf*, Index and glossary to Vols. VII and VIII¹².

The well known Arab geographer, Ibn Khurdhadhbih wrote his *Book of Routes* in the middle of the ninth century. This great work, *Kitab al Masalik wal Mamalik*¹³ contains an elaborate description of the stages of voyage from Persia to China. Al-Yaqubi, an officer in the *Diwan-i-insha* (Department of Correspondence) under the Abbasids, visited Armenia, Khurasan and travelled widely in the Islamic countries in the later half of ninth century. He produced his *kitab-al Buldan* (Book of countries) with emphasis on the topographical, geographical and economic details of the countries he visited and routes he traversed.

Abdullah Ahmad Ibn Muhammad popularly known as Ibn al Faqih was a great geographer of the early tenth century. He produced a great work on geography, '*Kitab al Buldan*' in five volumes giving detailed description of Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Rum, Jazira, Nabia, Abyssinia, the Maghrib, Spain (Andalusia),

¹² M.J. de Goeje (ed.), *Bibliothicae Geographorum Arabicorum*, Leiden, (1879), VIII, Volumes.

¹³ Ibn Khurdhadhbih, *Kitab al Masalik wal Mamalik*, (ed.) De Goeje, Leiden, (1889)

Sudan and India¹⁴. This work also provides information about the social and economic conditions of these countries.

Ibn Rusta another great geographer of the early tenth century who lived in Persia produced an encyclopaedic work on geography, *al-Alaq al Nafisah* (Precious Bags of Traveling Provisions)¹⁵. This work gives much information on the topographical and geographical features of the medieval Arab empire. Al Maqdisi, the Palestinian geographer who travelled widely and collected materials for his work, *Ahsanat-Taqsim fi Marifat al Aqalim*, completed it in 985/986 AD¹⁶. This work gives a detailed account of products, trade and industry and of cults and coinage of many countries. In the last chapter of this work, Al Maqdisi gives much information on the social and economic conditions of India. Another celebrated geographer, Istakhri of Baghdad visited many countries including India in 951 AD. He wrote two books on geography. They are *Kitab al Aqalim* and *Masalik wal Mamalik*¹⁷. These books contain valuable information about many aspects of the Arab trading activities. His *Masalik wal*

¹⁴ Ibn Faqih al Hamdasi, *Muktasar Kitab al Buldan*, (ed.) De Goeje, Leiden, (1885)

¹⁵ Ibn Rustah, *Kitab al Alaq al Nafisah*, (ed.) De Goeje, Leiden, (1882)

¹⁶ Al-Maqdisi, *Ahsanat-Taqsim fi Marifat al Aqalim*, (ed.) De Goeje, Leiden, (1906)

¹⁷ Istakhri, *Kitab ul Masalik wal Mamalik*, (ed.) Mohammed Jabir, Cairo, (1961)

Mamalik was the first book on human geography in the world¹⁸. It contained maps of each country including Sind.

C) Accounts of Non-Arab travellers

The works of non-Arab travellers like Al-Biruni, Marco Polo, Benjamin Tudela, Ma Huan, Athnadius Nikitin, Ludovico Varthema and Duarte Barbosa have been helpful in supplementing and confirming the information gathered from the Arab travellers' and geographers' accounts.

Al-Biruni who came to India from Ghazna with Mahmud of Ghazna had spent 40 years in India. On the basis of his 40 years experience, he gives first hand information and eye witness reports of the social, economic and religious conditions of medieval India. His great work *Kitab al Hind*¹⁹ is sufficient to understand the social and political conditions of medieval India.

Benjamin Tudela, a Jewish traveller from Spain travelled widely from 1159 AD. to 1170 AD. His work contains valuable information on people, ports and cities of many countries, commodities and conditions of markets.

Marco Polo, the Venetian traveller of the thirteenth century was undoubtedly the prince of great travellers of the western

¹⁸ Masudul Hassan, *History of Islam*, P.640

¹⁹ E. Sachau (ed. & tr.), *Kitab al Hind*, London, (1887)

world, He started his journey at the age of fifteen. He was the earliest merchant ambassador to Eastern world. He visited China and passed through India twice. He gives clear firsthand information on the social and economic conditions of the countries from his personal knowledge and experience. His account²⁰ contains information about the conditions of merchants, imports and exports of India and China.

Friar John of Monte Carvino was a contemporary of Marco Polo. He started his journey to Far East in 1291 AD. He halted in India for thirteen months during his journey to China. His reports particularly about India and China are very useful.

Ma Huan, the Chinese traveller gives important information about fifteenth century India. He was the first traveller who described Cochin as a major port of South India. His descriptions give more information on the social, political and economic conditions of Calicut and Cochin. Details of weights and measures used during the fifteenth century are also available in his work. His work, *Ying-yai Shenolan*²¹ (Description of the coast of the Ocean) written in 1451, describes the social and economic conditions of many countries he visited. More important among them are Java,

²⁰ Henry Yule (ed.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, 2 Vols., London, (1903)

²¹ Ma Huan, *Ying-yai-Shenolan*, (ed. & Tr.), I.V.J. Mills, Cambridge, (1970)

Palembang, Malacca, Aru, Sumatra, Lambiri, Ceylon, Quilon, Cochin, Calicut and Maldiv Islands.

Abdurazak's accounts help us to have an insight into the warm cordial welcome accorded to foreign merchants in Calicut. He tells us that he was assigned a house, servants and provisions befitting his stature.

Athnadius Nikitin, the fifteenth century Russian traveller provides information on Central Asia. Major part of his work is devoted for the description of India, Egypt, Khurasan, Arabia and Turkistan. This work gives more information on the famous Persian Port Ormuz and trade routes from Persia to India, Ceylon and Burma.

Ludovico Varthema and Duarte Barbosa the two great travellers of the early sixteenth century give us valuable accounts of Arab trade. Varthema who travelled widely in Egypt, Syria, Arabia, Persia, India and Ethiopia from 1503 AD to 1508 AD gives us a first hand description of the life and people of these countries.

Barbosa, Portuguese traveller, who travelled to India during the period from 1500 to 1516 AD, gives us a detailed account of the lands, agricultural products, commodities of exchange, ports and major trade centres of medieval South India like Calicut, Quilon, Cochin and Cannanore.

Secondary Sources

The Secondary sources that have been utilized for this study consist of many published and unpublished materials obtained from various libraries and Archives. A short description of the major sources which come under the purview of previous studies connected with the present topic is given below.

Arab Geographers' knowledge of Southern India written by S.M.H. Nainar is a valuable reference book in this study. This work has been used to identify names of medieval ports and sources of Arab merchandise, and products of South India.

Arab O Hind Key Ta 'lluqat (Indo-Arab Relations) by Maulana Syed Sulayman Nadvi, is an extensive and critical study of Indo-Arab relations in Urdu. This work was helpful in tracing out the background and nature of Arabs' relation with India during the medieval period. Another work of the same author Arabon Key Jahazarani (Arab Navigation)²² was useful for the study of the history of Arab navigation during Abbasid period, the role of Arabs in foreign trade and the important ports of the period. Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi's series of articles in "Islamic culture' (1930's) about Arab navigation have also been utilized for the study of Arab navigation.

²² Translated by Syed Shahabuddin Abdi Rahman and edited by Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, (1966)

R.H. Major's work, *India in the 15th century* is a compilation of travellers accounts connected with fifteenth century India. In this work he has given translation of four works of great travellers namely Abdu-Ur-Razzak, Nicolo Conti, Athnadius Nikitin and Hieronimo di Santo Stefano of the same century. This works contains information on the political, social, economic and religious conditions of 15th century India.

S. Maqbul Ahmad's work on *Indo-Arab Relations*, is a worthy contribution to this study. This work is a historical survey of India's relations with the Arab world from ancient to modern times. In this work he analyses the political, commercial and cultural relations that existed between Arabia and India throughout the ages emphasizing more the cultural relations.

Arab Accounts of India by Muhammad Zaki is a valuable reference book used for this work. It contains a detailed introduction about the Arab accounts of India from 8th century to 14th century. It also gives a complete translation of *Masalik-ul-Absar Fi Mamalik ul Amsar* of al-Umari and *Subh ul Asha* of al-Qalqashandi. These translations provide significant information to the present study especially on the Arab relations with India.

Arab Seafaring by G.F. Hourani is another important source of information for this study. This book gives a detailed history of

Arab seafaring from pre-Islamic era to the period of Caliphate. He specially mentions the trade routes of medieval Indian Ocean and presents a comparative analysis of medieval Arab and Mediterranean maritime activities. He provides a detailed description of navigational history of Arabs with special reference to their ship building and maritime technology.

Al-Hind, The making of Indo-Islamic world written by Andre Wink is an exhaustive work on Arab trade with India, Indian Ocean Islands and Africa. The first volume contains a detailed description of the growth and development of the medieval Indian Ocean economy. This book gives a clear picture of the role of Arab trade in shaping and sustaining the economic system of medieval Indian Ocean world.

Sales and Contracts in Early Islamic Commercial Law of Abdullah Alwi Haji Hassan is a mine of information on Arab commercial law, techniques and practices. This work contains an analysis of commercial conventions of Arabs in pre-Islamic times and a detailed discussion of Islamic commercial law on the basis of Quran and Hadith.

Trade and Traders in Western India by V.K. Jain is a detailed study on the history of trade of Western India. The fourth chapter of this book provides a detailed account of Arab settlements in

Western India. The author discusses the attitude of kings towards Arabs, Arabs' role in India trade, trade routes and ports and major imports and exports of the period.

Rahul Sankaratyayana's work *Bharat Aur Arab Ka Sambandh* is an important work connected with Arab trade. This work discusses the social, economic and cultural relations of India with Arabia.

H.C. Verma's *Medieval routes to India: Baghdad to Delhi* is an exhaustive work on the medieval trade routes between the Middle East and India but no specific reference about trade relation with Eastern countries is made. This book was useful to identify the location of many medieval trade centres.

The Traditional Trade of Asia by C.G.F. Simkin is a comprehensive historical survey of Asian trade from remote antiquity to the enlightened nineteenth century. The author explains the richness of the Asian countries citing their international trade relations. This work discusses in detail the economic history of many Asian countries. This work was useful in analyzing the impacts of medieval Arab trade.

The *Suma Oriental* of Tome Pires, written in the early sixteenth century gives an account of the Eastern trade²³, at the

²³ Tome Pires, *The Suma Oriental and the Book of Francisco Rhodesique I & II*, Published by Hakluyt Society, London, (1944)

time of Portuguese exploration of the East. This work discusses the causes of the decline of Arab trade in the Ocean region.

The Legacy of Islam by the editors Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume which gives a detailed account of the Arab contribution in various fields of knowledge was used as a reference book for this study as it has articles giving direct evidence to the impacts of Arab trade.

'Maritime India' which contains three separate studies of Indian Ocean world by eminent scholars, Holden Furber, Sinnappah Arasaratnam and Kenneth Mc Pherson provides an exhaustive history of the Indian ocean world, the main arena of medieval Arab trade. The first part of the book, Holden Furber's Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800, tells the story of European expansion in Asia through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the eve of the French Revolution. This part provides the history of decline of Asian trade. Second part Sinnappah Arasaratnam's Maritime India in the seventeenth century, describes the geographical features of Indian ocean its climate and ports. 'The legacy of the immediate past' presented in the second chapter gives an account of the Indian Ocean world prior to the arrival of Europeans. Kenneth Mc Pherson in his study, The Indian Ocean, A history of People and The Sea establishes the existence of a distinct Indian ocean economy constituted by the trade links

and commercial networks of the medieval period. The information provided by the author has helped in assessing the relationship between different merchant communities of the medieval period.

In addition to the above, many literary works dealing with the Middle East, like the History of the Arabs by Philip K. Hitti, History of Saracens by Ameer Ali and The Middle East by S.N. Fisher have also been used for the study. With the help of data gathered from the primary and secondary sources an attempt is made in this study to analyze East West trade of Arabs.

Aim and significance of the study

History has recorded that the medieval intercontinental trade of the Arabs was very lucrative and the main catalytic agent of European exploration of the East.

The present study is not a quantitative analysis of the Arab trade in commercial terms, but an attempt to analyze the commercial activities of medieval Arabs in a wider perspective of human interactions.

Many studies have been made on topics related to Arabs, Arab trade, Arab relation with other countries and Arab political, religious and commercial expansion. But no specific study is seen made focusing the attention on the impacts of Arab trade on different economies, societies and countries of the medieval

period. The main objective of this study is to bring out the major long standing changes that the medieval world witnessed as a result of the commercial expansion of the Arabs.

The space and time covered in this study is vast and long. Geographically it covers all the known world of the medieval period and chronologically it coincides with the golden period of Arab trade and civilization spanning over seven centuries from the ninth to the fifteenth AD. As the period of this study is historically enlightened one there are abundant sources of primary and secondary data connected with the topic. By utilizing the primary and secondary sources of information, an attempt is made in this study to assess the impacts of medieval Arab trade grouping them in to four as political, social, economic and cultural impacts.

It is a fact that the main limitation of this study is the vastness of the area and the length of the period. Segmentation of the area or the period or both will be helpful for a further micro level study of the topic.

Chapter Plan

This study is arranged in six chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the topic of study with a brief review of the sources and explains the aims, significance and limitations of

the study. This chapter also contains a brief history of Arab people.

The second chapter, History of Arab trade traces the background of Arab trade network from the hoary antiquity to the beginning of the period of this study. The chapter contains a detailed analysis of the factors that helped the Arabs to dominate medieval world trade. A brief description of the commercial practices and techniques of medieval Arab merchants forms the concluding part of this chapter.

The third chapter, the Arab merchandise, its social, political, economic and cultural values contain a detailed discussion of major commodities of medieval Arab trade. This chapter discusses the social, political, economic and cultural conventions attached to each item of trade. Source of production and course of supply of each item of merchandise is also included in this chapter.

The fourth chapter shows the structure of East-West trade of Arabs, grouping them geographically in to three as trade within the empire, trade with the East and trade with the West. Trade with the East is discussed in this chapter grouping them in to seven sections as trade with Sind and Hind, Trade with Malabar, Trade with Coromandel Coast, Trade with Bengal, Trade with Ceylon, Trade with Indonesia and Trade with China. Trade contacts with

Africa and European countries are discussed separately in the last part of this chapter. The concluding part of this chapter contains a brief discussion of the causes of decline of medieval Arab trade.

The fifth chapter, impact of Arab trade, examines the significance of Arab trade in facilitating the exchange of cultural, social and religious values between the major civilization of Europe, Africa and Asia. The impacts of Arab trade are assessed in this chapter under four subsections as Social impacts, Cultural impacts, Economic impacts and Political impacts.

The sixth chapter which is the concluding part of this study discusses the major findings of the Study.

THE ARABS, AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Ethnically, the term 'Arabs' refers to the nomadic people of Arabian Peninsula, who use Arabic as their mother tongue. The nomadic tribes of ancient desert Arabia were called in Akkadian "Aribi". Reference to Arabs as nomads and camel herders of north Arabia appear in Assyrian inscription of the ninth century BC. The term 'Aribi' is used in the ninth century BC as a cognomen of a rebellious chieftain, 'Gindibu the Aribi' who was defeated by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III²⁴ in 853 BC. From this time onwards the people of Babylonia and Assyria are mentioned in the Assyrian

²⁴ Peter Mansfield, *The Arabs*, London, (1976), P. 13

inscriptions as Aribi or Arabs. In the Biblical book Genesis reference to the Arabs can be found as merchants who buy and sell Jacob's son Joseph.

Literally, 'Arab' means a 'homeless child', a clear reference to the nomadic trait of the ancient Arabs. Linguistically, the word Arab is derived from the term, 'Abhar' which means 'to move' or 'to pass' the main feature of the Bedouins²⁵. Hence it can be seen that the term was originally used to designate the nomadic tribes of Arabia and indeed is still used in that sense as a secondary meaning.

As no invader had succeeded in penetrating the sandy barriers of Arabia, the Arabs were able to maintain their ethnic purity through out the ages. The aridity and hostility of their desert habitat was their best defence against encroachment from the outside world. Even the masters of the ancient world, Romans, had ignominiously failed in their attempt to fasten the yoke of dependence up on the Arab necks²⁶. Arabs, who were born democrats²⁷, never accepted social hierarchy or racial superiority. History has recorded that the Arabs were the only people who did

²⁵ *Ibid.* P. 14

²⁶ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London, (1974), P.28

²⁷ *Ibid.* P. 28

not send their ambassador to Alexander the great, who had planned to make Arabia the seat of his empire²⁸.

Tribalism and 'Asabiya', the clan spirit, was the basis of Arab society, especially among the Bedouins, until the advent of Islam. The inhabitants of ancient Arabia were of two groups, the nomadic Bedouins and settled folk. South Arabians were domiciled in the more habitable regions of al-Yaman, Hadramaut and neighbouring coasts while the north Arabians were mostly nomads, living in the desert regions of Hijaz and Najd known to the Romans as 'Arabia Deserta'. North Arabians depended mainly on caravan trade for their livelihood. South Arabians who were dominant in maritime trade built rich kingdoms of their own like the Sabaeen and the Minaean. The prosperity of south Arabia encouraged the Romans to call it 'Arabia Felix' or 'Happy Arabia'.

Saba or Sheba with its capital at Marib is the earliest and the most prominent kingdom in the south Arabian history. The story of the visit of the legendary Queen of Sheba to king Solomon (C.970-930 BC) suggests that trade relations were maintained between these two kingdoms²⁹. The Sabaeans occupied all the southern regions of the peninsula under their control and were the masters of the southern seas. As the Sabaeen kingdoms developed they

²⁸ Ibid . P. 46

²⁹ *Old Testament I Kings*, 10:1 - 13

built a huge earth filled dam, the Ma'rib dam, in the second half of the sixth century BC and developed a magnificent irrigation system. The main inland caravan route known as the 'Frankincense road' that connected the areas which produced frankincense with the Mediterranean passed through this capital city.

Between the fifth century BC and first century AD powerful South Arabian littoral kingdoms had extended their reach to Egypt, East Africa, Persian Gulf and India. The Periplus informs that the South Arabian port of Eudamon Arabia (Modern Aden) which flourished during third-second century BC. functioned as the primary transshipment point for goods exchanged between the Mediterranean lands and India³⁰.

Ma-in, a Sabaean (Sabeen) territory which controlled most of the incense trade gradually severed its ties with Saba by the end of the fifth century BC. Likewise Qatoban and Hadramaut, allies of the Sabaean Empire up to the fourth century BC also broke free and became independent kingdoms. These four kingdoms of more or less equal strength rivaled one another for the control of incense rich Southern Arabia and in C 250 BC. the Saba conquered the Minaean Empire and some parts of the west Qatoban.

³⁰ Sunil Gupta, *The Archaeo-Historical Idea of the Indian Ocean*, in *Maritime India* (ed.). V.N. Misra, Vol. XXVII. (Jan-June - 02)

In 115 BC. a new kingdom, the Himyarite Kingdom, came in to existence at Bab-al-Mandeb and flourished by the lucrative business of frankincense and myrrh. This empire conquered the other three Kingdoms and became the dominant state of Arabia by the early years of first century AD and lasted till the advent of Islam, though the Kingdom witnessed political subjugation by non-Arab powers like the Abyssinians and Persians during the sixth century AD³¹.

Al Kindah was the only settled society in the central Arabia. They were migrants from Southern Arabia. Rulers of the banu-kindah were the first to receive the title 'malik'³² in Arab political history. The great pre-Islamic poet Imrul-Quayse and Arab philosopher Yaqub Ibn Ishaq al Kindi were prominent kindites of the period. In pre-Islamic times kindites had attempted in vain, to unite the numerous tribes of Arabia around a central authority of one chief, which was later accomplished by the prophet of Islam.

The earliest North Arabian state was the Nabataean Kingdom founded by the nomadic tribe who came to the region from Trans Jordan area during the sixth century BC. This kingdom became rich by the caravan trade and was in no sense militaristic either in its inception or in its development³³. The capital of the

³¹ G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, P.16

³² Philip K. Hitti, *Op.cit*, P. 28

³³ *Ibid.* P. 67

Nabataeans, Petra, meaning 'rock' in Greek, was a vast city carved out of solid rock on the caravan route between Saba and the Mediterranean. This city was an important stop over of the South Arabian caravans as it was the only spot between Jordan and central Arabia where fresh water was abundant. Petra was the converging ground of trade routes from all parts of Arabia, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and Levantine ports. The Nabataean culture was synthetic, superficially Hellenic but basically Arabian and so it remained³⁴. As the sea routes to India became more familiar to the Roman sailors from the first century AD, Petra lost its advantageous position and the Nabataean kingdom began to decline. Then the east-west caravan route moved further to the north and Palmyra, a city on the route began to flourish. Palmyra reached its height between 130 AD and 270 AD when its international trade extended as far east as China. The Arab story tellers were so impressed by the magnificent ruins of this city that they narrated the city as the city of King Solomon, built for him by the Jinns. As the Palmyrene Kingdom began to decline, the Ghassanid Kingdom founded by Jafnah of an ancient south Arabian tribe, became prominent. The Ghassanids were the first christianized society in Arabia and lasted until the advent of Islam. Jabalah ibn al-Ayham, who adopted Islam for a short period

³⁴ Philip K. Hitti, *Syria, A short History*, London, (1959), P. 61

and returned to Constantinople after renouncing his new religion is the last king of the Ghassan dynasty.

About the beginning of the third century AD a number of tribes of Yemanite origin migrated in to the fertile region west of the Euphrates and settled at al-Hirah which later became the capital of the Lakhmid dynasty of the Persian Arabia³⁵. The Lakhmids were fire worshippers and were well advanced in the art of writing which they transformed to the whole Arabia. This dynasty reached its zenith during the sixth century and came to end with al-Numan III (580-602 AD) who was the first and only Christian King in the dynasty³⁶.

Advent of Islam completely reoriented the life of Arabs. It changed not only the Bedouin polity but also the outlook of each and every member of the society. The Hajjathul Vidah (Farewell Pilgrimage) proclamation of the holy prophet, which is unique in the constitutional history of the world, denounced all kinds of tribalism and racialism and united the stratified society in to a mighty community. Missionary urge of the new religion brought large numbers of Persians, Syrians, Copts, Berbers and others in to the fold of Islam. By the early decades of Islam, Muslim community had become a single 'Ummah', so much so that

³⁵ Philip K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, P. 81

³⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 84

marriages between members of different ethnic origin were not only common but also not considered as intermarriage. In the Umayyad Spain intermarriage with the fair skinned Galicians was considered highly desirable that the ethnic purity of the Arab race was diminished frequently in each successive generation³⁷. As the Arabs had very much assimilated to the local population, nationality and racial affiliation became a matter of least importance and an Arab henceforth became one who professed Islam and used Arabic as his language.

In the medieval history, there were two great dynasties of Arab origin, the Umayyads (661-750) and the Abbasids (750-1258). The Umayyads were centered at Damascus while the Abbasids founded their capital at Baghdad. During the caliphate period the Arab empire, known to the Arab writers as 'Mamlakkathul Islam', that is the Kingdom of Islam, was so vast that H.C. Verma narrates, "there was a time when the travellers and merchants could pass from the confines of China to the Pillars of Hercules³⁸, from the banks of the Sindh to the Sicilian Gates, from the Oxus to the shores of the Atlantic, without stepping outside the boundaries of the vast territory ruled over by the Caliph from Damascus or

³⁷ J.B. Trend, *Spain and Portugal, in Legacy of Islam*, (eds.) Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume, Delhi, (1995), P.6

³⁸ Philip K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, P. 940

Baghdad”³⁹. By the beginning of the period of our study, that is the ninth century, the Abbasid Caliphate had become extraordinarily wealthy and the Arab traders had established monopoly over several trade routes and items of trade. Though the Arab culture flourished during the Abbasid period the political unity of the Caliphate had declined by the tenth century and the empire had began to disintegrate in to rival dynasties, like the Fatimids, Seljuks, Ayyubids, Mamluks, Safarids, Samanids and Buwayhids. Finally, the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century, which ended in the destruction of Baghdad, in 1258 AD, put an end to the Abbasid Caliphate. But this paved the way for the eventual foundation of another great Caliphate known as the Ottoman which reigned the Middle East and most of the North Africa from 1300 to 1922 AD⁴⁰.

³⁹ H.C. Verma, *Medieval Router to India: Bhaghdad to Delhi*, (1978), P. 15

⁴⁰ Philip K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, P. 713

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF ARAB TRADE

In this chapter an attempt is made to trace the background of the trade network of Arabs from the hoary antiquity to the palmy centuries of the Abbasids. Literary sources, reports of analysis of numismatics and archaeological findings and reports of mineralogical analysis of artifacts form the materials for the study.

Trade, the main social activity of man started when he began to produce beyond his immediate needs. The surplus thus produced, he exchanged with other peoples taking from them, their surplus in return¹.

In macro economics the only way to create net wealth in a commune or locality is through external trade and reverses investments. Buying and selling within the same commune or locality is economically a zero-sum effort. Hence, foreign trade is a prerequisite for economic growth. Moreover, during the early historic period foreign trade had an important role in territorial expansion of empires. It was long distance trade, which motivated people to cross the seas and deserts which enabled intercontinental exchange of ideas, cultures, arts and technology,

¹ Rice Michael, *Search for the Paradise Land*, London, (1985), P.175

in addition to commodities and services. Assemblages of exotic materials in indigenous contexts are significant proofs of long distance contact and trade.

As the majority of the products of the ancient societies were consumed directly by the producers themselves, the proportion of goods available for trade was relatively small. Since the ancient societies were almost self sufficient in necessities the focus of trade was on luxury items.

In general terms, a necessity is an item of consumption, whose consumption does not increase in proportion with income; a luxury is one whose consumption increases more than proportionately with income. But this does not mean that the demarcation between necessity and luxury is clear-cut. A luxury in one society need not necessarily be a luxury in another. Even within the same society what is luxury to one class may not necessarily be a luxury of another². Likewise a luxury of a period need not be a luxury of another time.

The items of early trade consisted mainly of luxury and prestige goods such as spices, silk, precious metals and stones the demand for which came from the ruling chiefs, wealthy merchants and towns-folk. These items, which had less bulk and high value offered lucrative returns.

² Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean*, London, (1948), Pp.78, 80

The second half of the first millennium AD witnessed a remarkable increase in the world trade. Trade was transformed in nature from a low volume high value trade to bulk trade in a variety of commodities of daily consumption. This trade, which spread over the five different economic regions of Europe, West Asia, India, South East Asia and China was necessitated by two major factors. Firstly some communities or regions had a technological advantage which others lacked; for example silk and porcelain technology of China. Secondly geographical determinants of production such as spice production of Indonesian islands, pepper production of Malabar and Java and incense production of Arabia.

The nomadic pastoralist Arabs who walked behind the camels in the desert emerged as great sailors and navigators and undisputed masters of the world trade within a period of a few centuries. The factors which helped this transformation are analysed here.

La longue duree (the long term) concept of Braudel³ explains that the basic social attitudes of a people towards food, clothing, agriculture and trade are determined by the long term rhythms of their natural and human environment. Hence an analysis of the

³ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*, 2 Vols., New York, (1981)

long term environment of the Arabs will help us to understand the totality of their commercial activities.

Natural environment of Arabs

The geomorphology of Arabia has played a vital role in the growth of both maritime and land trade. The Arab regions as a whole have long been important points on the world's great trade routes. Arabian Peninsula which is situated at the meeting point of three continents, i.e. Asia, Africa and Europe acted as an entrance to every nook and corner of the world. The very long coast line which bounds the peninsula on the three sides favoured the development of sailing from Arabian shores. The most fertile and inhabited parts of Arabia, al Yemen, Hadramaut and Oman are situated near the coasts.

Arabia which stands at the cross roads of three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa, has the distinction of being the centre of the old world. Its shores are washed by the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Oman, and the Persian Gulf. Where the seas end, the historic rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris form the boundary between Iraq and Arabia⁴. Beyond Arabia, to the south-west it was easy to cross to East Africa, "to the east, the monsoon winds were very helpful for voyages to India and China. The Red Sea and Persian Gulf supplemented by the

⁴ Masudal Hassan, *History of Islam*, Vol. I Delhi, (1998), P.19.

Nile, the Euphrates and Tigris functioned as natural thoroughfare between the Mediterranean and East Asian countries. Hence, the Arabs were astride two of the world's trade routes"⁵. Moreover, the famous overland Silk Road to China was accessible through Persia and Central Asia. "From Persia it was possible to go to China via Balk or Samarqand by high passes over the Pamirs crossing the desert of East Turkestan; this was the ancient 'Silk Road' between West Asia and China"⁶. Nations, tribes, armies and pilgrims - people on the move have traversed the middle east, finding the land bridge convenient and along the way discovering the wealth of the area and the civilization of its people⁷. Since the Arabs stood in the past, as they stand today, in a most strategic geographical position; no people were in a more favourable position for exploring the ancient world than the Arabs⁸.

The outcome of this geographical advantage is affirmed concisely by Bertold Spuler as "only the Muslim geographers possessed a reasonably good knowledge of all civilizations of the world as the muslims were neighbours of all of them: Western and

⁵ S.N. Fisher, *The Middle East*, London, (1959), P.3.

⁶ G.F. Hudson, *The Medieval Trade of China*, London, (1970), P.150.

⁷ S.N. Fisher, *op. cit.*,P.3.

⁸ H.C. Verma, *Medieval Routes to India*, Delhi, (1978), P.1.

Eastern Europe, Black Africa, India and Indonesia, China and Central Asia”⁹.

As the climate of Arabia was extremely dry the people were generally hardy and they possessed robust health. Their constant struggle with the hardships of the desert, made them persevering and industrious. The desert life left on Arabs, an indomitable will and uncommon courage¹⁰. Hence the geographical configuration of the Arabian Peninsula such as irregular climate, scarcity of food and natural resources, hardship of deserts and the Bedouine nature of the Arabs, especially their tenacity and endurance helped them to become adventurous voyagers and vendors.

Except some coastal lands like Yemen, Hadramaut and Oman, whole other areas of Arabia are barren deserts and terrible empty land. As Arabia is bounded by water on three sides, the Arabs called it ‘Jazirat-al-Arab’, the Island of Arabia. According to Philip K. Hitti, “the Arabians called their habitat an Island and an Island it is surrounded by water on three sides and by sand on the fourth”¹¹. This geographical fate forced the Arabs to rely on trade both maritime and caravan, as the mainstay of their livelihood. Inhabitants of some of the regions like Dhofar at the extremity of

⁹ Bertold Spuler, *Trade in the Eastern Islamic Countries, in Islam and Trade of Asia*, (ed.) D.S. Richards, London, (1970), P. 20.

¹⁰ James D. Tracy (ed.), *The Rise of Merchant Empires*, Cambridge, (1990), Pp.1-21.

¹¹ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London, (1974), Pp.8-9.

Yemen and Qalhat at the Southern end of Oman were all merchants, who lived entirely on trade¹².

The vast desert area and the availability of domesticated camels, the ships of the desert led them to the arena of caravan trade. The caravans were generally composed of camels, the most frugal, patient and unruffled companions of man in arid lands, the only vehicle of transportation in the desert; without which the desert could not be conceived of an habitable place. The part which the camel has played in the economy of Arabian life is indicated by the fact that the Arabic language includes some one thousand names for the camel in its numerous breeds and stages growth, a number rivaled only by the number of synonyms used for 'sword'¹³. The Caliph Umar is quoted as having said, "the Arab prospers only where the camel prospers". Hence the Bedouin was described as the parasite of the camel"¹⁴.

The danger of bandits obliged travellers to travel together forming a caravan. There were important overland caravan routes leading to India and China, to Central Asia and Russia and to eastern and central Africa. Over these routes passed caravans loaded with rich merchandise. Ghana, the country situated in

¹² Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa-1325-1354* (Tr.) H.A.R. Gibb. New Delhi, (1990), Pp.114-118.

¹³ Philip K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P.22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* P. 22.

Western Africa in the basin of the river Niger, was known for its trade in gold. The Arab merchants traversed to Ghana for gold crossing the great desert Sahara passing through Awadghost Oasis situated north of it. As early as the tenth century AD the Arab merchants who traded with such remote regions were familiar with the use of commercial instruments like I.O.U (I owe you) and promissory notes¹⁵.

Arabs who were the masters of the medieval transcontinental trade had commercial contacts with the far off European countries like Scandinavia and Finland. The large amount of Arabic coins belonging to the period from seventh to eleventh centuries, found in European countries including Scandinavia, Finland, the British Isles, Baltic States and even as far as Iceland provide ample testimony for this contention¹⁶. The accounts of Ibn Battuta reveal that trade contacts were established with the unseen inhabitants of the far off regions like the Land of Darkness (northern Siberia according to Gibb) which was situated at a distance of forty days journey from Bulgar (the capital of the medieval kingdom of Great Bulgaria). The only way to reach there was to cross a desert of ice using sledges drawn by dogs. He informs that the journeys were made only by rich merchants, who

¹⁵ J.H. Kramers, *Geography and Commerce, in Legacy of Islam* (ed.) Sir Thomas Arnold, Delhi, (1996), P.102.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 100

had a hundred sledges or thereabouts loaded with food, drink and fire woods, for there were neither trees, stones nor habitation in it. He describes the mode of transaction with the inhabitants as “when the travellers have completed forty stages they alight at ‘the Darkness’. Each one of them leaves there the goods he has brought and they return to their usual camping ground. Next day they go back to seek their goods and find opposite them skins of sable, minever and ermine. If the merchant is satisfied with the exchange he takes them but if not he leaves them. The inhabitants then add more skin, but sometimes they take away their goods and leave the merchants. Those who go there do not know whom they are trading with or whether they be Jinn or men for they never see anyone”¹⁷.

Human Environment of Arabs

The history of maritime trade makes it clear that it was those who controlled the seas, controlled the trade. As naval supremacy was the basis of maritime trade supremacy, a study of maritime trade of a people must begin with an analysis of the navigational history of the people.

The age-long seafaring fire of the Arabs can be seen epitomized in the legendary exploits of Sindbad, the sailor, in the ‘Arabian Nights’. It is clear from various historical accounts that

¹⁷ Ibn Battuta, *Op. cit*, P. 151

the Arabs had attained and maintained a high degree of navigational skill since ancient times.

Almost fifteen hundred years before Columbus set sail from Europe, Arabs were making voyages that were in greater distance than what Columbus sailed. Historians credit the Arab Seamen with the remarkable achievement of inaugurating and maintaining direct voyage from Persian Gulf to South China¹⁸. Even the legendary discovery of the sea route to India by Vasco Da Gama, though it resulted in the eventual ouster of Arabs from the Seas, was made possible by the help of an Arab Seaman, Ibn Majid ¹⁹.

The skill and technology required for sea sailing was developed gradually over a period of long time in tandem with the economic and environmental imperatives of each generation. “The earliest Middle Eastern shipping technology evolved out of reed built rafts which plied the Nile and the rivers of Mesopotamia. Such craft, waterproofed with bitumen, were later adapted to sailing the shallow coastal waters of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf and for coast hugging forays along the southern coast of Persia to the mouth of the Indus by 3000 BC. Four thousand years ago sewn plank boats were in use in the Gulf and as far east as the Indus

¹⁸ C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, London, (1968), P.81

¹⁹ Sir Thomas Arnold (ed). *Legacy of Islam*, Delhi, (1998), P. 96.

river and were in evidence along the Coast of Africa 2000 years ago”²⁰.

In the Oman and Persian Gulf regions rowboats without sails were probably the first water crafts to be used by early sedentary communities. Bas-relief representations of rowboats have been found on the rock-out croppings at Jebel Jusasiyah on the Island of Qatar. The carvings are presumed to be of protohistoric date²¹. Ethnographically the boats depicted at Jebel Jusasiyah are similar to the ‘Sasha’, a row boat made out of palm leaf ribs and in use on the Oman coast till recent times²².

On the Oman coast bitumen has been found at the Bathinath Coast in context dated to the late 4th millennium BC²³. The evidence of bitumen at the Bathinath Coast in the form of tar at the base of a pot has been interpreted by archaeologists in the field as binding material for water crafts²⁴. Bitumen caulking of boats became established early in the Gulf-Oman littorals and it is

²⁰ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean, A History of the people and the Sea*, Oxford, (1993), P. 32.

²¹ Nayeem, M.A., *The rock Art of Arabia*, Hyderabad, (2000), Pp. 372-75

²² Heyerdahl. T., *The Tigris Expedition* (London, 1982) taken from (Joul). *Man and Environment*, Pp. 3-4

²³ Cleuzious and M. Tosi, *The South-Eastern Frontier of the Ancient*, in *Man and Environment* (Journal) (ed.) Sunil Gupta., (June - 2002), Pp. 3-4

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Pp. 3-4

possible that such vessels were used for crossing the sea of Oman to India in such early times²⁵.

Excavations at Ras-al-Junayz fishing and trading station of the Wadi Suk (period 3rd - 2nd millennium BC transition) on the Oman Coast have yielded some hundred pieces of bitumen from a room floor. The bitumen pieces carry impression of rope and mattings and are encrusted with barnacles indicating sailing in the high seas ²⁶.

Though Ras-al-Junayz flourished during 3rd and 2nd millennium BC transition, the archaeological records suggest that deep sea voyaging in the sea of Oman must have had long antecedents²⁷. The southeastern Arabians were possibly the ones who acted as intermediaries between Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Punjab, the three focal centres of earliest trade and gave their name to the great intervening sea²⁸.

The flourishing urban civilization of the Indus valley, the Mohenjodaro and Harappa had regular coastal trading links with the Oman and Dilmuan (Bahrain). As weaving of cotton cloth was pioneered in the Indus valley, traders from its cities sold cotton

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Pp. 13-14

²⁶ V.N. Misra (ed.), *Man and Environment, Jounl. Vol. XXVII No: 1*, (Jan-June-2002), P.4

²⁷ *Ibid.*, P.4

²⁸ Philip. K. Hitti, *Op-cit.*, P. 32

cloth in the markets of Mesopotamia using Oman and Dilmuan as entrepots collecting copper from there²⁹.

Bun shaped copper ingot and arsenic free copper objects of high nickel content found at Lothal on the Gulf of Cambay have been assigned as import from Oman. Study of the ingot has revealed that such ingots are certainly characteristics of third millennium copper production in Oman³⁰.

The south Arabians were the masters of the Southern Sea. They knew its reefs and harbours, mastered the monsoons and thus monopolized its trading during the last millennium and a quarter before our era. The circumnavigation of Arabia stated as a theoretical possibility by Alexander's admiral, Nearchus, was in their case an actuality³¹.

During the reign of King Solomon (974 - 932 BC) regular voyages were made to Ophir (most probably Beypore), once in every three years, the merchandise brought from there consisted of gold, silver, jewels, almug wood, ivory, apes and peacocks³².

The Persians, infact may well have learned the art of navigation not only from the Greeks but also from Arabs, since

²⁹ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *Op. cit.*, P. 25

³⁰ V.N. Misra (ed.), *Op. cit.*, P.5

³¹ Philip K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, P. 49

³² Maqbul Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations*, New Delhi, (1969), P. 79

they only began to make use of sea towards the end of the fifth century BC³³. The active part taken by the Arabs in the first century AD and earlier navigation and trade is clear from the statement in the Periplus that “the Island of Dioscordia (Socotra) was inhabited by foreigners, a mixture of Arabs and Indians and Greeks who had emigrated to carry on trade there³⁴”.

The Arabs were the principal intermediaries between the Indian and Western merchants who met at Muza or Aden, the two transshipment ports of the ancient times at the mouth of the Red Sea, when direct voyage was not yet made from India to Egypt. The Periplus describes the past glory of Aden or Arabia Eudaemon as “it was called Eudaemon, because in the early days of the city when voyage was not yet made from India to Egypt and when they did not dare to sail from Egypt to the ports across the ocean, but all came together at this place, it received the cargoes from both countries, just as Alexandria now receives the things brought both from abroad and from Egypt. But long before our time Charibael destroyed the place”³⁵.

³³ Rita Rose Di Megtio, *Arab Trade with Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula, Islam and Trade of Asia* (ed.)D.S. Richards, London, (1970), Pp. 105-106

³⁴ Schoff, W.H., *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, New York, (1912), P. 31

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Arabs who exploited the monsoon winds for intercontinental maritime trade became masters in deep sea voyaging. The monsoon sea routes were well known to the Arabs and were traced in Arab sea charts used by their nachodas for many centuries³⁶. “The Arabs first coined the expression ‘mausim’ to mean a season of winds”³⁷. Before the invention of steamships the seasonal reversal of monsoon across the Indian Ocean regions facilitated speedy movements of sailing ships across the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and South China Sea.

Mastery of monsoon enabled the Arabs to shrug off the constraints of coastal trading and undertake regular long distance maritime trade across the high seas. Arabs kept their knowledge of monsoon voyaging a trade secret and monopolized the deep sea maritime trade for a long period³⁸.

The accounts of Arab travelers make it clear that the Arab sailors and navigators were familiar with the following ‘seven seas’ of the period.

1. Bahr Fars (the Persian Gulf)

³⁶ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *Op. cit.*, P.5

³⁷ *Ibid.*, P. 9

³⁸ a. P.J. Thomas, *Roman Trade centres in Malabar*, Kerala Society Papers, P.259

b. H.B. Sarkar, *Trade and Commercial activities of Southern India in the Malayo-Indonesian World*,

Vol. I, Calcutta, (1986), P. 299

c. K.M. Munshi, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, Bombay, (1955), P. 620

2. Bahr al Larwi (the sea between Oman and the Laccadives named after the Lar, the old name of Gujarat)
3. Bahr Harkand (the Bay of Bengal)
4. Bahr Kalah (the Strait of Malacca)
5. Bahr Kaduranga (the sea of Panduranga)
6. Bahr Sanf (the sea of Champa)
7. Bahr Al-Sin (the sea of China)³⁹

Introduction of Lateen Sails with complex rigging suitable for sailing with strong winds was another proof of the navigational skill of the Arabs. Hourani notes, "one boon seems to have been brought by the Arabs to the Mediterranean: the lateen sails" ⁴⁰. The typical sail of Arabs is lateen, in fact it is the only sail used by them, now or at any recorded time in the past from Morocco to India, the Persian Gulf to Mozambique. The lateen is a triangular fore-and-aft sail, very tall and high peaked⁴¹. "In ancient world, the square sail was employed universally in the Mediterranean, on the sea going ships of Egyptians, Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans. Indians and North Europeans, too, used only square sails until the late Middle ages"⁴². Hourani continues Square rig has the advantage of stability on large ships and in heavy seas, and

³⁹ S. Maqbul Ahmed, *Op. cit.*, Pp. 95-96

⁴⁰ G.F. Hourani, *Op. cit.*, P. 52

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Pp. 100-101

⁴² *Ibid.*, P. 101

remained the principal type on European vessels until the latest days of sail. But for manoeuvring and tacking on rivers and narrow waters, the fore-and-aft sail has an advantage, since it can keep much closer to the wind. Therefore from an early age attempts were made to modify the square sail in that direction. Long before the European switched to using lateen type sails, the Arabs became masters of sailing. Hourani opines that quite probably, the lateen was brought to the Mediterranean by the Arabs. And if this is so, it may be counted as ultimately one of their major contributions to material culture. For without the lateen, the European mizen on the three masters would have been impossible, and the ocean voyages of the great explorers could never have taken place⁴³.

The Arab mariners of the medieval period were quite familiar with navigational instruments like magnetic compass, astrolabe, mariners' maps and sea charts. Though the directive property of the magnetic needle was discovered by the Chinese, it was the Arabs who made a practical use of the discovery by applying the needle to navigation. This use of compass must have taken place in the eleventh century if not earlier but for commercial reasons

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Pp. 102-104

was kept secret⁴⁴. “Compass was known as ‘rahnama’ among the navigators of Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf”⁴⁵.

Vasco da Gama’s comment about the map shown to him by his pilot to the East, Ibn Majid, “as a map of all the coast of India with meridian and parallels very closer than our maps” shows that the Arab mariners were in possession of the best sea maps of the period⁴⁶. Another important skill of Arab mariners was navigation by the stars. Using their knowledge of astronomy and equinoxes, Arab sailors could navigate their way across the seas by the stars rather than following the coastline. The use of astrolabes and other navigational devices was so common among the Arab mariners, that when Vasco da Gama showed his Arab pilot, Ibn Majid, a big wooden astrolabe and some other devices the latter was not impressed as they were using better instruments⁴⁷.

The encouragement of travel and exploration by Holy Quran⁴⁸ had been a strong stimulus to the Arabs, far greater in degree than the genetic stimulus of the nomads to wander. The famous prophetic tradition, “seek ye learning though it be in

⁴⁴ Philip K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, P. 669

⁴⁵ S.S. Nadvi, *Arab Navigation*, (tr. Mal) A. Kareem, *Arabikalude Kappalottam*, Tirurkad, (1976), P. 220

⁴⁶ Vasco da Gama, *The Three Voyages*, Quoted in Appa Dorai, *Economic conditions of South India*, Vol. II. P. 648.43.

⁴⁷ H.B. Sarkar, *Op.cit.*, P. 361.

⁴⁸ Quran 6:11

China” inspired the Arabs to undertake long and tiresome journeys throughout the then known world seeking knowledge. Loss of life during such a journey, “al rihlah fi talab al ilm” was considered to be equal to martyrdom in holy war. Arabs travelled widely as merchants and missionaries during the medieval period. Ibn Battuta informs that a pious ascetic, Burhan-ad-Din whom he met at Alexandria had told him to meet his three brothers, one each in Sind, India and China⁴⁹.

For most of human history sailors were recruited from fishing communities. Arabs and Persians from ports on the Arabian Peninsula and in the Persian Gulf were noted sailors 2000 years ago⁵⁰.

Arabs, who were geographically much closer to the Mediterranean people using nailed boats, used ships sewn with coir for their maritime activities. The reason for using sewn boats has generally been given as their resilience to take the shock of striking the reefs and shore and the constant pounding of the waves⁵¹.

Arab caliphs of the Middle Ages had shown keen interest in the development of navigational facilities of the empire. The

⁴⁹ Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, P. 47.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *Op.cit.*, P. 65.

⁵¹ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Foreign Notices of South India*, Madras, (1966), P. 252.

possibility of connecting the Mediterranean with Red Sea was considered during the caliphate of Umar the Great, but was abandoned fearing the risk of Western attack on holy cities. Later, thousand years before de Lesseps, an Arab Caliph, Harun, entertained the idea of digging a canal through the Isthmus of Suez⁵². The big waterways of Iraq were made navigable and the capital of the Arab Empire was linked to the Indian Ocean through the water system of the Tigris and Euphratese which jointly flowed in to the Persian Gulf. Abu Jafar-al-Mansur, the founder of Baghdad is supposed to have said about Arab naval supremacy, "this is Tigris, there is no obstacle between us and China; everything on the Sea can come to us"⁵³.

Pioneer mariners had always to face the lurking dangers of the unchartered seas. The dread of the sea dangers led early sailors to give dreadful names to some ports and bays. The entry in to the Red sea was called Babel Mandeb; the gate of Affliction, a nearby harbour got the name Mete, ie., death and an adjacent headland was called Gardefan, ie., the cape of Burial ⁵⁴. Arab travellers have described both the terrors of a rough sea and the horrors of a calm or motionless sea. A motionless sea without any

⁵² Philip K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, P. 344.

⁵³ C.G.F. Simkin, *Op.cit.*, P.81.

⁵⁴ Appa Durai, *The Economic Conditions of South India Op.cit.*, P.627.

⁵¹ Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, P.278

waves, winds or movements was a great obstacle in the maritime route, especially for sailborne vessels. Ibn Battuta has described the presence of such a region in the China Sea⁵¹. Other sea dangers like attacks of pirates, monster whales, cannibals and risks of violent sea currents, winds and rocks have also been narrated by many Arab travellers. Hence it is conceivable that regular sailing across such dangerous seas was maintained due to the enormous economic returns. Some of the Siraf merchants were said to have spent their lives on the water, but they were well rewarded. The home of an average merchant was worth more than one lakh dirhams and many merchants had fortunes exceeding 40 million dirhams⁵⁵. According to Ibn Buttuta the Arab community at Zaytun (China) was so wealthy that the only recipients of the tithes (Zakath) of their property were the wayfarers (travellers from other countries) who 'becomes as rich as the tithe givers'. Ibn Battuta himself became so wealthy by his maritime travels that he "dare not mention the number of his horses in case some sceptic should accuse him of lying"⁵⁶.

The ships crew in medieval times were expected to be a jack of all trades—carpenters, rope makers, caulkers, blacksmiths and plank makers and generally Arab sailors were well instructed in many of the arts of navigation, as there was no class wise division

⁵⁵ C.G.F. Simkin, *Op.cit.*, P. 82.

⁵⁶ Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, Pp.6, 288, 370.

of labour among them. In medieval India each of the above trade was reserved for each social class. Even traders and sailors were two distinct social classes, generally never encroaching upon each others activities. Sailors were considered socially inferior to merchants⁵⁷. As a result of this class wise division of labour, the Indian merchants were not in a position to compete with the Arab traders, many of whom were sailors cum merchants. It has also been suggested that the Arabs displaced Indians in the sea trade to the East as well as in that to the West, partly because they were strong and enterprising and partly because of the Brahmanical ruling that Hindus sinned by traveling on the Sea⁵⁸.

The presence of somany keywords of Arabic origin such as admiral, arsenal, average, cable, corvette, shallop etc., in the international nautical vocabulary of the modern world is a clear philological evidence for the former Arab supremacy on the Seas⁵⁹.

The advent of Islam unified and strengthened the Arabs and stimulated the process of Arab trade. The holly prophet himself was a trader. The holy Quran talked about trade in favourable terms. As the Muslim dominions grew in extent the scope of trade increased accordingly. Within the first hundred years of the rise of Islam, the Muslims were able to build an empire which stretched

⁵⁷ V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India*, Delhi, (1990), P. 84.

⁵⁸ C.G.F. Simkin, *Op.cit.*, P. 84.

⁵⁹ Philip K.Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P. 525.

from Sind to Spain extending over three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe.

It is evaluated that “men are always excited by new prospects caused by their own successful action, so that they display unusual enthusiasm in exploring and exploiting their possibilities. In this respect the medieval Arabs can be compared with the ancient Athenians after the repulse of the Persians, or the nations of Western Europe since the Renaissance. For several centuries the Arabs showed an unusual energy in all fields of life. The energy extended to warfare, travel, and commerce, as well as to literature of travel, geography and history”⁶⁰.

Islam, being a comprehensive code of conduct, has its own views and set of rules on trade and commerce also. To work and earn for a living through lawful means in Islam is part of worship. It encourages savings and its use for trade and commerce in the overall interest of the society. Quran States:

“O, you who believe, squander not your wealth among yourselves in vanity, but let there be trade and traffic amongst you by mutual goodwill”⁶¹.

Though Islam encourages earnings, it forbids all kinds of immoderate profiteering, thus protecting the interests and rights of

⁶⁰ A.J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Vol. I., London, (1934), Pp.75, 349.

⁶¹ Quran, 4:29.

customers. The Islamic law, 'Shariah', condemns hoarding, cheating, bribing, monopolizing and other unethical practices in trade and commerce that may be deployed to increase earning and wealth. Islam makes it a religious obligation to give full measure and to use a correct balance while weighing.

“Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight; that is the most fitting and the most advantageous in final reckoning”⁶².

Islam protects the interests of both the buyer and seller by denouncing unethical methods of trade and commerce and encourages honesty and mutual respect between the trader and customer. Some of the 'Hadiths', (traditions), of the prophet, illustrate this point.

- a) The truthful and trustworthy merchant will have the same rank as that of prophets and martyrs.
- b) The two (buyer and seller) should not depart except by mutual consent.
- c) Be careful of making exaggerated claims on a product. It may find better market but (eventually) it becomes rejected and devoid of blessing.
- d) Whoever sells a defective merchandise without disclosing the known defects, continues to be in the wrath of God.

⁶² Quran, 17:35.

- e) Whoever hoards up food grains for forty days, intending thereby a higher price detaches himself from God, and God disowns him.
- f) Every sin of a martyr shall be forgiven, except debts.
- g) Verily, you are entrusted with two critical subjects (weight and measures); the mismanagement of which caused the ruin of bygone nations⁶³.

In a trading community controlled by such explicit codes, customs and conventions, the outcome of an outcast was the loss of his credit and reputation; a merchant who was not worthy of trust would quickly exhaust his fund of goodwill and fall into commercial bankruptcy. Hence the Arabs kept a high degree of commercial morality and did not follow the Byzantine idea of commerce which was to get everything and to give nothing⁶⁴.

Among the several elements of dynamism and growth brought about by the expansion of Islam was the commercial ethic and commercial practices which spread through the Islamic lands like wild-fire, generating an economic growth in the Arab and neighbouring lands which sustained itself for several centuries⁶⁵. The spectacular economic growth of China during the Sung

⁶³ K.K. Usman, *This is Islam*, Cochin, (2001), Pp.112-113.

⁶⁴ H.C. Verma, *Medieval Routes to India*, *Op.cit.*, P.22.

⁶⁵ Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the 17th Century*, Oxford, (1994), P.33.

dynasty in (960-1279 AD.) was according to William Mc Neill, due to the extension to China, of the mercantile principles that had been long familiar in the Middle East⁶⁶.

The fair trade practices and unified trade laws and customs had a stupendous effect on the trading activities of medieval Arabs. The Muslim merchants were popular through out the world for their fair dealings and were welcomed honourably ⁶⁷ and allowed to do business according to their laws and customs. “Muslim traders were well received at the port of Canton and they were allowed to conduct their commercial and communal affairs through the traditional Islamic institutions⁶⁸. When the Zamorin founded Kozhikode (Calicut) he induced the Arabs to settle down there by providing certain special concessions. They were given freedom to convert people to Islam and were also given the monopoly of import and export trade⁶⁹. The Arab merchants always received every encouragement and protection for their property and religion from the native Kings of South India. During the time of Ibn Battuta every town in Malabar had its quota of rich Mussalman merchants.

⁶⁶ William H. Mc Neill, *The Pursuit of Power, Technology, Armed Force and Society*, Oxford, (1982), Pp.24-62

⁶⁷ Appa Dorai, *Economic Condition of South India*, *Op. cit.*, P. 564.

⁶⁸ K.N. Chaudhary, *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁶⁹ K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, Calicut, (1999), P. 52.

Another important factor that exalted medieval Arab trade was the acceptance of the value of mercantile activity by their new religion, Islam. The missionaries of this new faith were for the most part, made up of men from merchant families. These merchant missionaries effectively fused together the interests of their religion and mercantile activities. Both missionary and mercantile activity was quickly perceived as viable and worth pursuing. Missionaries and Sufis were the co-travellers of the Arab merchant community. The Arab trade centres were also their missionary centres of the period. Many Sufi orders were closely linked with merchant guilds and many important Sufis had the position of patron saints of the respective guilds⁷⁰. Under the aegis of 'Barakah'^{71*} of Sufis voyages were considered safe and offerings were made in their name as a safe guard against perils. The Shaik Abu Ishak of Kazerun was an important patron saint of the mariners in India and China trade, to whose shrine offerings were made in writing when in trouble at sea. Agents were employed at different ports to collect the lists and the amounts vowed, which generally came to thousands of dinars⁷². As this custom had become so much institutionalized, Spencer Trimmingham describes it as "a powerful insurance corporation"⁷³.

⁷⁰ Dr. Kunhali, V., *Sufism in Kerala*, Calicut, (2004), P.64.

⁷¹ * Super natural powers of a holy man.

⁷² Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, P. 97.

⁷³ Dr. Kunhali, V., *Sufism in Kerala*, *Op. cit.* P.64.

Since important trade links had existed between South India and South Arabia throughout antiquity it is not unlikely that Muslims arrived here at the beginning of Islam⁷⁴. The tradition that Islam spread in Kerala during the lifetime of prophet is probably true. Arab sailors and merchants who were trading with Kerala at that time must have been the first converts to Islam⁷⁵. It has been proved beyond doubt that the first Muslim who came to Malabar departed from the Arabian Peninsula⁷⁶. As the Arab merchants of South Arabia were particularly active in proselytization during the first two centuries of Islam, strong Hadrami influence can be seen in regions where Islam was introduced through trade contacts. Adherence to Shafi principles of Islamic jurisprudence is a clear indication to their continued contact with Arabia, Yemen and Hadramaut. In Malabar, various groups of tangals^{77*} or sayyids such as Ba-alavi, Ba-Faqih, Aydarus, Jifri and Ibn Shihab claim a Hadrami ancestor or descent from prophets family⁷⁸. This Hadrami influence can be seen even in the Arabic accent of the Malabar Muslims. The Malabari Muslim pronounces Arabic in exactly the same way as an Arab does⁷⁹. The popularity of Sahfi law along the

⁷⁴ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind*, Oxford, (1999), P.70.

⁷⁵ V. Kunhali, *Op. cit.*, P. 36.

⁷⁶ Cherian, A., *The Genesis of Islam in Malabar, India, Vo. 6, No. 1*, March, (1969), P.8.

⁷⁷ * Religious leaders of a major group of Mappilas.

⁷⁸ Kunhali, V., *Op. cit.*, P.128.

⁷⁹ Maqbul Ahmad, *Op.cit.*, p. 45.

coastal regions was due to the settlement of many Arab merchant cum missionaries in these regions. The large Arab merchant communities hailing from Basarah, Baghdad, Siraf and Oman and different regions of South Arabia like Yemen and Hadramaut or from Egypt who settled down along the Western and Eastern coasts of Peninsular India were followers of the Shafi school from very early days⁸⁰.

As Islam was introduced to the coastal south India, Sri Lanka, the Laccadives, the Maldives and the Malayan and Indonesian Islands through trade contacts with the Arabs, Muslims of all these regions inherited the Arab tradition and became followers of Shafi Madh-hab. Even now a days, Shafi school is predominant among the muslims of these regions.

The expansion of Islamic Empire across the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe consolidated and integrated large areas in the strategically located meeting points between the continents. J.H. Kramers assesses the vastness of medieval Islamic empire as “were we to draw a map of the political conditions of Europe, Africa and Western Asia about the middle of the tenth century of our era, we should see that by far the greater part of that inhabited world which the Greeks called the ‘Oikoumene’ was occupied by countries possessed of an Islamic government and an Islamic

⁸⁰ Maqbul Ahmad, *Op.cit.*, P. 50.

civilization⁸¹. The political unity and homogeneity of the vast Arab empire under the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates which lasted for seven centuries brought peace and prosperity through out a vast area. The emergence of thousands of Muslim aristocratic urban centres, the unprecedented demand and market for consumer and luxury goods and the demand for raw materials and minerals due to the development of medieval science, augmented the economic activities of the period and led to a rapid growth of commerce and industry.

The Arab caliphate was the biggest empire with the largest collection of economies and cultures under one political system that the world had ever seen. The empire integrated a wide range of manufacturing, farming and economic systems from the Atlantic to the Arabian Sea. This created an environment of growth in urban centres by restoring peace to the agricultural lands of the Middle East which had been long ravaged by wars between the Persian and Byzantine empires⁸². Because of the Arab conquests, the commercial and political rivalry of Byzantium and Persia came to an end and a single political power now linked the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean⁸³.

⁸¹ J.H. Kramers, *Geography and Commerce, Legacy of Islam, Op.cit.*, P.79

⁸² Kenneth Mc Pherson, *Op. cit.*, P. 95.

⁸³ Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, P.5.

By the conquest of the 'Fertile Crescent' and the lands of Persia and Egypt, the Arabs came in to control of the busy trade routes of the medieval period. When Sind was conquered, the Indian subcontinent as well as the Islands of the Eastern Sea were also integrated in to the Islamic trading system⁸⁴. The Arab conquests which resulted in the rapid demographic diffusion and the political unification of Egypt, Syria, Iran, Sind and North Africa created an enormously powerful zone of economic consumption.

The growth of the great urban centres, a universal feature of Islam, enhanced the demand for commodities of all kinds. This in turn quickened the pace of long distance trade. The revival of the sea and caravan routes across the famous international boundary lines, known to merchants, since Hellenistic times, owed much to the ability of the Islamic rulers to protect their property and persons against violence⁸⁵. John of Phenek, a Nestorian Christian of late 7th century Mesopotamia commented on the rule of Muawiyah over Persia and Byzantine Syria; "Justice flourished under his reign, and a great peace was established in the countries which were under the jurisdiction of his government.... The earth gave us its fruits abundantly, good health prevailed, friendship shone, commerce doubled, children played with joy, there was

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, P. 359.

⁸⁵ K.N. Chaudhary, *Op. cit.*, P.36

universal plenty⁸⁶. The peace and security of the empire stimulated caravan trade. Ameer Ali says, “the perfect safety of roads, the cisterns, tanks and reservoirs and rest houses which existed everywhere along the caravan routes, all aided in the rapid development of commerce and trade”⁸⁷. During the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, each large city had its own municipal police to oversee market and morals and to ensure that proper weights and measures were used. The chief of this police was called ‘Muhtasib’⁸⁸.

The Abbasid caliphs developed an elaborate system of highways connecting their capital city Baghdad with other important trade centres. The Khurasan Road connecting Baghdad with the frontier towns of ‘Jaxartes’ (Zarafshan) and the borders of China was one of the busiest highways of the time. Another main road stretched from Baghdad down the Tigris through Wasit and al Basra to al Ahwaz in Khuzistan and thence to Shiraz in Faris⁸⁹. Trans continental routes initiated by the Caliphs were given attention by the state for maintenance and maintaining security. It was a policy of the caliphs to keep the roads safe and secure for the speedy passage of pilgrims. From every part of the

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Ameer Ali, *A History of the Saracens*, New Delhi, (1926)

⁸⁸ Philip K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, Pp. 321-27.

⁸⁹ P.K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, P. 325.

Islamic world, Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, Turkistan, India, China, the Malay Archipelago, Spain, Morocco and the Sudan etc., pilgrims travelled to Mecca for Hajj. The pilgrims' road from Baghdad and Najaf to Madina which is known as the Darb Zubayda, after the wife of Caliph Haroon al Rashid, was studded with well kept reservoirs and tanks all along the route. It is said that endowments were provided from her property for their up keep⁹⁰. As trade centres sprang up along these pilgrim routes, they became busy trade routes also.

The caliphs of Baghdad erected among other buildings, houses, and hostels known as sarais or khanqas through out the caliphate for the use of travellers. The elaborate system of posts and roads maintained by the Arabs and Turkish rulers added to the attraction of trade and travel through out the kingdom. At intervals of every few miles, there was a postal station and a rest house where travellers could change horses, take rest and get more information about the roads and the people of different provinces. In order that these travellers might buy necessary articles themselves, shops were opened in the sarais ⁹¹.

Umayyad caliph Muawiyah was the first to introduce the postal service system. During the Abbasid period the postal

⁹⁰ Ibn Battuta, *Op. cit.*, P. 347.

⁹¹ H.C. Verma, *Op. cit.*, P. 212.

system was so developed that Baghdad had maps of the whole empire showing the various towns and roads and intervening distances. Ibn Khurdadbeh who wrote the *Kitabul Masalik wa Mamalik*. (The Book of the Roads and Provinces) was himself the *Sahib-al-barid* (Chief of the postal department) of the caliphate⁹². The postal system between Iraq and Sind was so effective that letters sent by Hajjaj reached Qasim in Sindh every third day⁹³. Ibn Battuta informs that this system was also used to transport fruits from Khurasan to India and to bring Sultan's drinking water from the river Kank (Ganges) when he used to stay at Duwlat-Abad ⁹⁴.

Development of Arabic language as an international language of trade and wisdom had a tremendous effect of facilitating speedy exchange of goods and ideas through out the whole Islamic empire. Wherever the Arabs went there also reached the Arabic language. As the holy Quran is in Arabic and prayers are performed in Arabic, the language always travelled with the religion. Arabic in alphabet, next to Latin, is the most widely used system in the world. It is the one used for Persian, Afghan, Urdu and a number of Turkish, Berber and Malayan languages. Even when writing Latin the Mozarabs, Arabised Spanish Christians, used Arabic letters. In cities like Toledo, Arabic

⁹² Philip K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P. 322

⁹³ H.C. Verma, *Op.cit.*, P. 218.

⁹⁴ Ibn Battuta, *Op. cit.*, P. 184.

was used as the written language of law and business for about two centuries even after the Christian conquest, by Alfonso VI, in 1085 AD. This Alfonso like several of his successors, stamped his coins with Arabic characters. One of the early kings of Aragon, Peter I (d. 1104 AD) could write only in Arabic script⁹⁵. “It is assessed that the dispersion and absorption of the desert Arabs through out the Near East and the Southern shores of Mediterranean and their early movements into East Africa and Sind were accompanied by an over whelming social, cultural and political ascendancy of Arabic as a language of universal use”⁹⁶. The large number of Arabic words still found in the trade vocabulary of European languages provides clear proof of the deep influence of Arabic language on the development of medieval commerce.

Another factor that accelerated the growth of Arab trade and travel was Hajj, the yearly holy pilgrimage to Mecca. It expanded the geographical knowledge of Muslims by providing contact among the Muslims of different countries visiting Mecca every year. Ibn Battuta, the famous traveller who journeyed all over the Muslim World, India, Ceylon, the Far East and China began his legendary journeys as a pilgrim to Mecca, at the age of 21⁹⁷. Hajj

⁹⁵ Philip K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, P. 543.

⁹⁶ K.N. Chaudhary, *Op. cit.*, P. 36.

⁹⁷ Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354*, (Tr) Gibb, H.A.R., London, (1929), P.3.

augmented religious unity and forged trade relationships among the Muslims of various countries. 'Hajj wa-hadjah' or pilgrimage and business was an age old custom of the Arabs. Islam allowed the pilgrims to carry on trade during pilgrimage. Holy Quran says, "there is no sin on you if you seek the bounty of your Lord (during pilgrimage by trading)⁹⁸. Pilgrims travelling to Mecca carried with them articles of merchandise intending thereby to make a profit and defray some of the expenses of the journey⁹⁹. As the incoming foreign pilgrim merchants from various countries offered their own homeland products, this seasonal pilgrim trade fair was a venue of product diversity offering a wide range of merchandise distinguished by price and quality obtained from a wide range of sources. During the sacred months of the pilgrimage, Mecca had to import consumer goods in large quantities. The Arab geographer and traveller, al-Muqaddasi has stated that he had counted and found that in a single pilgrim season as many as three thousand camel loads of grain and flour were exported every week from the milling town of al-Mashtal to the port of al-Qulzum for supplying to the pilgrim trade of Hijaz¹⁰⁰. During pilgrimage off-season, certain exports of consumer commodities were possible from Arabia. This seasonal market reversal helped the Arab

⁹⁸ *Holy Quran*, P. 2:198.

⁹⁹ Serjeant, P.B., *The Portuguese of the South Arabian Coast* Oxford, (1963), P. 15.

¹⁰⁰ K.N. Chaudhary, *Op. cit.*, P. 46.

merchants to achieve the resource base and business acumen needed to pursue a wide variety of commercial ventures.

Development of Arab coins, silver coin dirham and gold coin dinar as international currency gave an added impetus to the Arab trade. Arab coins were so widely circulated in the Indian Ocean regions that the dinar (Latin: denarius, equivalent to 10 or later 12 dirhams) became international currency of the whole area¹⁰¹. In the ninth and tenth centuries, western India and Gujarat had ceased to produce indigenous coinage and was incorporated in the dinar domain of the Arabs¹⁰². Moreover, Arab money was in use in the Christian kingdoms of the north, which for nearly four centuries had no coinage other than Arabic or French¹⁰³. Perhaps the earliest gold coin struck by Latins was the Byzantinius Saracenatus minted by the Venetians in the Holy Land and bearing Arabic inscription¹⁰⁴. The Arab coins, dinars and dirhams were the universal medium of exchange during the pre modern period and commanded the highest prestige in the world market¹⁰⁵. The ubiquity of dinar and dirhams even in the tiniest communities of medieval period testify the worldwide acceptance of Arab coins.

¹⁰¹ C.G.F. Simkin, *Op.cit.*, P. 84.

¹⁰² Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, P.331.

¹⁰³ Philip K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P. 529.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, P. 669.

¹⁰⁵ Masudul Hassan, *History of Islam*, Delhi, (1998), P. 712.

As the Caliphate collected duties on imports and exports the state had keen interest in the development of trade and commerce. The capital city of Abbasids, Baghdad was founded with keen business mind and the Tigris and Euphrates were connected with several navigable canals. In Abbasid times the Indian Ocean trade of the Arabs was the backbone of the intercontinental Muslim economy¹⁰⁶. Even during the period of conquests and war, caliphate had tried to protect the commercial activities of the regions. Caravans had a free way through the rows of opposed armies during the war between the Fatimids in Egypt and the Abbasids in the tenth century¹⁰⁷. From the days of their first attack Arabs showed great concern for the trade and material prosperity of the lands they swept over, and they provided every incentive and encouragement to the traders in their business¹⁰⁸. Spain under the caliphate was one of the wealthiest and most thickly populated lands of Europe¹⁰⁹.

The first Muslim military attack on an Indian Kingdom was in response to attacks on Muslim sea traders. The invasion of Muhammad Bin Qasim and his favouritism towards traders and merchants had given a big boost to the commercial activities in

¹⁰⁶ Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, Pp. 7-10.

¹⁰⁷ Bertold Spluer, *Op.cit.*, P.11

¹⁰⁸ H.C. Verma, *Medieval Routes to India, Op.cit.*, P.22

¹⁰⁹ Philip K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P. 527.

spite of the political uncertainties on the frontier regions. Even al-Hajjaj under whose banner Qasim was fighting in India was said to have ordered him that the artisans and merchants were not to be heavily taxed¹¹⁰. Arabs had maintained cordial commercial contacts with the Vijayanagar Kings even when they were perpetually at war with the Islamic Kingdom of Bhaminis¹¹¹.

Introduction of commercial instruments of credit such as letters of credit, Bills of Exchange, and promissory notes to trade and commerce widened the horizon of Arab trade. Islamic commercial law makes provisions for dealing in credit. Instruments of credit such as Al-hawala (transfer of debt, novation) and al-suftaja (letter of credit) are prime examples of this category of credit. Al-hawalah literally implies transfer. Legally al-hawalah is an agreement by which a debtor is freed from a debt by another becoming responsible for it or transfer of a claim of a debt by shifting the responsibility from one person to another. This implies a mandate to pay and its effect is the same as that of the bill of exchange (Al-Suftajah). Al hawalah and al-Suftajah have a similar purpose with dissimilar regulations and procedures¹¹². The use of promissory notes was also common among Muslim merchants¹¹³.

¹¹⁰ H.C. Verma, *Op.cit.*, Pp.227-28.

¹¹¹ S.S. Nadvi, *Arab-O-Hind Ke Taálluqat*, Allahabad, (1930), P.608

¹¹² Philip K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P. 527. Abdullah Aluri Haji Hassan, *Sales and contracts in Early Islamic Commercial Law*, Delhi, (1997), Pp. 181-84

¹¹³ Masudul Hassan, *Op. cit*, P. 712

Medieval long distance trade, both maritime and overland, required huge investment of capital towards cost of acquiring goods at distant points and expenditure for transporting them. Medieval modes of transportation and communication, the perilous condition of both sea and land travel, threat of pirates etc., enhanced the risks of such investments. Moreover, the lock in period of such investments was also long as the goods could be transported and disposed of under favourable climatic and market conditions. Medieval trade almost always involved both venturing and travelling. As the markets of the period were separated by long distance, cultural, political and economic tastes, traders of the time required much skill and knack to carry out the business profitably. In short, profit could be realized from the medieval trade only by a combination of capital and excellent salesmanship. Arab practice of Al-Mudrabah is the basic legal institution for combining capital and human resources. Al-Mudrabah, which is also known as al-qirad, and al-muqaradah is a contract or an arrangement in which an investor or a group of investors entrusts capital or merchandise to an agent manager to trade with and then to return to the investor(s) the principal and previously agreed share of profits. As a reward for the labour of the agent, he takes the remaining share of the profits. Any loss of an unsuccessful business venture is borne exclusively by the investor(s), the agent

loses only his expended time and effort. However, should the investor die, the contract is dissolved up on the death and the capital becomes heritable property. As in a partnership, profits and risks are shared by both parties, the investor risking profit, the agent his time and effort. The holy prophet, Mohammed, prior to his prophethood had acted as an agent in a Mudarabah contract with an investment provided by a noble Quresh lady, Khadeejah, who later became his wife. From this evidence it appears that Mudarabah was popularly practiced in pre-Islamic Arab trade and continued to be practiced profusely there after, as the mainstay of caravan and long distance trade. It appears very likely that the al-mudarabah, known as "commenda" in the west, was an institution indigenous to the Arabian Peninsula which developed in the context of pre-Islamic Arabian caravan trade. With the Arab conquests, it spread to the near East, North Africa and ultimately to Southern Europe¹¹⁴.

Islamic commercial law and customs also permit the formation of institutions like al-sharikah (mercantile partnership), Sharikat-al-Mufawadah (universal partnership or unlimited investment partnership or *societas qaestus*) and Sharikat-al-Inan (limited investment partnership) for mobilizing the capital required for commercial enterprises and for sharing the risks of such

¹¹⁴ Abraham L. Udovitch, *Commercial techniques in Islam and Trade of Asia* (ed). D.S. Richards, London, (1970), P. 48

ventures. Literally, Sharikah or al-Shirkah means a sharing, participating or co-partnership. Legally it signifies a property belonged to several owners or co-proprietors in common in such a way that each one has the ownership of every smallest part of it in proportion to the share allotted to him. The profit or loss is divided among all the partners in accordance with their agreement.

Sharikat al Mufawadah is the most comprehensive form of partnership. It may be best translated as a universal or unlimited investment partnership. In this partnership, the partners have equal right in capital, profit, loss and assets. Each partner in this partnership has full power and liability. This type of partnership reflects the family or clan nature of joint entrepreneurial activity. The essential feature of it are summarised by the eminent writer Quduri in Mukhtasar as: "Al sharikat al-Mufawada can occur when two people of equal wealth, religion and freedom of action enter into a partnership. It is permissible between two free Muslims, both of age and in possession of their mental faculties. It is not permissible between a free man and a slave, nor between a minor and one of age, nor between a muslim and a nonbeliever. It is contracted with the full powers of agency for both partners, and with each partner serving as surety for the other. Except for food and clothing for their respective families, whatever either of them purchases is on account of the partnership. Both partners are

equally liable, for any obligation undertaken by either of them in exchange for something valid within the partnership”¹¹⁵.

Sharikat-al Inan signifies a limited liability company or investment partnership. In this partnership each partner is only the agent and not the guarantor of his co-partner, and this mutual agency is valid only in the area of commerce covered by their partnership or to the extent of their joint capital¹¹⁶. Hence in this partnership there is only mutual agency but no mutual surety. This type of partnership engages the invested capital only and may be limited to specific kinds of transaction. The profits from this type of partnership are divided in accordance with the agreement between the parties and the loss will be charged on the capital¹¹⁷. The effect of commercial techniques of Medieval Arabs on trade is summed up by Abraham L. Udovitch as: “the prominence of the Muslim world in the trade of the early middle ages, if not attributable to, was certainly reinforced by the superiority and flexibility of the commercial techniques available to its merchants. Some of the institutions, practices and concepts already found fully

¹¹⁵ Al-Quduri, *Mukhtasar (Istanbul-1901) Vol. II. PP. 69-71 noted in Islamic History Papers*, Udovitch, *Commercial Techniques* (D.S. Richards-ed) London, (1970), P. 43

¹¹⁶ Abraham L. Udovitch. *Ibid.* P. 45

¹¹⁷ Abdullah Alavi Haji, Hasan, *Op. cit*, Pp. 108-109

developed in the Islamic legal sources of the late eighth century did not emerge in Europe until several centuries¹¹⁸.

Another factor that ameliorated the Arab trade was the establishment of several trade diasporas^{119*} or settlements of Arab traders in non-muslim trade centres. The rate of growth of settlements of a foreign commercial community in an area can be taken as an index, though a somewhat rough one, to their hold over trade. According to Pliny, writing in the first century AD, large number of Arabs had settled along the Malabar coast concentrating in the central and southern parts and in Sri Lanka. In antiquity, the people of Yemen and Hadramaut appear to have been numerous here. From the coast of Malabar and Sri Lanka the Arabs reached further to the Gulf of Bengal, and settlements of Arab traders are mentioned in Canton (China) in the fourth century and again in the first decades of the seventh Century¹²⁰. The traditional chronicle Keralolpathi speaks of the messengers of the last Ceraman Perumal who were sent as missionaries for the propagation of Islam. Later the Zamorins of Calicut is supposed to have encouraged them and given them special privileges. In return for

¹¹⁸ Abraham L. Udovitch, *Commercial Techniques in Islamic History Papers* (ed.) P.S. Richards, London, (1970), P.62

¹¹⁹ * The concept of a trade diaspora which is comparatively of recent origin, was introduced by Abner Cohen in 1971 to describe the interrelated commercial network of a nation of socially-interdependent but spatially dispersed communities.

¹²⁰ Andre Wink, *Op. cit.*, P.68

this the Arab merchants flocked in large number to the harbour (Calicut)¹²¹. These Arab traders in particular enabled the Zamorins to keep himself in touch with the rulers of Egypt, Persia and other muslim states as they had commercial connection with those Kingdoms¹²².

In the medieval times there were many Arab colonies in Malabar in the Konkan province of the Rashtrakutas, in Gujarat and other coastal regions of peninsular India. By the tenth century AD, large number of Arab merchants had settled down along the coastal regions of India and established matrimonial connections with the local communities. The children of such marriages came to be known among the Arabs as 'bayasira'¹²³.

At the time of al 'Masudi's visit (916 AD) there were ten thousand Muslims residing in the city of Chaul or Saimur, some of whom were biyasara, born in India while others were Arabs from Siraf, Oman, Basra and Baghdad who had left their country, and settled down there. They formed small communities and groups of their own and some of them had even acquired the right to self government. At the head of each community was appointed a person with the title of "hazimat" to administer their personal and

¹²¹ M.G.S. Narayanan, Calicut, *The City of Truth Revisited*, Calicut, (2006), P. 65

¹²² Appa Dorai, *Op. cit.*, P. 564

¹²³ Maqbul Ahmad, *Op. cit.*, P. 83

communal affairs. The hazimat of Chaul at the time of al Masudi's visit was one Abu Said Maruf bin Zakariya¹²⁴. Ibn Battuta states that majority of the inhabitants of Cambay (Kimbaya) were foreign merchants who were always building fine mansions and magnificent mosques and vie with one another in doing so. Speaking of China he says, "in every Chinese city there is a quarter for Muslims, in which they live by themselves" and each city has a Shayk al Islam and a Qadi to oversee matters concerning the Muslims and act as an intermediary between the government and the Muslim community¹²⁵.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there were many Arab settlements over the whole coast of Indian Ocean including the Eastern Archipelago. Marcopolo observes the presence of Muslim settlements in Mausul, Tauris, Persia, Yezd, Hormuz, Badakshan, Kashgar, China, Chempa, Sumatra, Ceylon, Madagascar, Aden, Eshar etc.,¹²⁶ These trade diasporas acted as intermediaries between the host society and traders coming from their own home country, rendering support to the Arab traders in their commercial enterprise. Such settlements provided them a

¹²⁴ Andre Wink, *Op. cit.*, P. 153 Maqbul Ahmad, *Al Masudi on Kings of India - Al Musudi Millenary commemoration volume*, Calcutta, (1960), P. 108

¹²⁵ Ibn Battuta, *Op. cit.*, Pp. 229, 283, 290

¹²⁶ Appa Dorai, *Op. cit.* P. 562

more congenial atmosphere to trade and brought them closer to the local merchant community.

Thus by exploring and exploiting the above mentioned factors, Arabs once commanded World trade and were the undisputed masters of the commercial thoroughfare, both maritime and overland. Their ships, of both sea and desert, loaded with all sort of merchandise roamed about the deep seas and deserts and reached in the every nook and corner of the then-known world. J.H. Kramers opines “Europe owes much to its own force and initiative, but it has also largely profited by the knowledge and the experience of those who were at one time the masters of the world. Therefore Europe ought to look up on them as its cultural ancestors in the domain of geographical knowledge, of discovery, and of world trade. The influence which Islam has exercised on our modern civilization in these spheres of action can be seen in the many terms of Arabic origin which are to be found in the vocabulary of trade and navigation”¹²⁷.

¹²⁷ Sir Thomas Arnold, *The Legacy of Islam*, Delhi, (1995), P.82

CHAPTER III

THE ARAB MERCHANDISE, IT'S SOCIAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL VALUES

It is a fact that trade is deeply influenced by the social, cultural, economic and political conventions of the consumers. Therefore, goods sent from production centres to distant consumers change in value, not only commercial but also social, cultural and political, as they move from one place to another. In medieval times, cowries of Maldives, having only exchange value in its source area had attained auspicious and magical qualities when they reached in Africa, where they were widely used as amulets for men and animals alike¹. Like wise Chinese silk reported by Ibn Battuta as the common cloth of the poor monks and beggars² of China was highly prized for its aristocratic value in Europe where rulers were even compelled to ban their wealthy subjects from wearing Chinese silk, to check the drain of their wealth to the East. Chinese porcelain which was as cheap as earthen ware at its source of production³, commanded the world's

¹ K.N. Chaudhary, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*, Cambridge University Press, (1985), Pp.18-19

² Ibn Battuta. *Travels in Asia and Africa* (Tr.) H.A.R. Gibb, New Delhi, (1990), P.283

³ Ibn Battuta. *Ibid.*, P.283

admiration in its aesthetic value the sooner it reached the Near East and Muslim India, where a cabinet of fine Chinese porcelain was a necessary adjunct to every palace⁴.

As the Egyptians used the Arabian incense, myrrh, to mummify their dead, uninterrupted supply of the same was a social necessity during the ancient period. Perpetual import of horses by the medieval South Indian Kingdoms was due to the political rivalry of warring states and history witnesses that some of the Kings even encouraged 'the naughty and unworthy practice of piracy' to ensure a steady supply of warhorses⁵. It was the lucrative spice trade of the Arabs that led the Europeans to discover a sea route to the spice countries⁶ and to the later brutal incidents of enslavement and forcible deportation of hundreds of inhabitants of the Spice Islands and uprooting of the spice trees in their desperate endeavours to establish monopoly over the trade⁷. The Portuguese, in order to get a dominant position on the south west coast of India for the effective control of pepper trade, even

⁴ C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, London, (1968), P.88

⁵ Marco Polo. *The Book of Sir Marco Polo*, (Tr. & ed.) H. Yule, Vol. II, London, (1929), P.395

⁶ R.B. Serjeant, *The Portuguese of the South Arabian Coast*, Oxford, (1963).

V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manuel*, Madras, (1989), P.38

Joseph De Barros, *A Portuguese Pioneer Traveller in Calicut*, Proceedings of SHC, 11th Annual Session, University of Calicut, 1-3 Feb. (1991), Pp.129-130

⁷ Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800 in Maritime India*, Oxford, (2004), Pp.48-52

deported all unmarried Portuguese men back to Lisbon and all married Portuguese and nearly all Eurasian families of Portuguese descent to Goa. It is estimated that about four thousand persons were displaced in this manner⁸.

As every item of medieval trade had its own cultural, social or political value in addition to its commercial value, a brief survey of the knapsack of Arab traders is indispensable for the analysis of the impacts of Arab trade.

Spices: Spices were very familiar to men from antiquity:

“This too was the Lord’s word to Moses
provide thyself with spices,
a stone of the best and choicest myrrh,
and half a stone of Cinnamon
and half a stone of scented cane,
a stone too of Cassia
all recorded by sanctuary weight”⁹

Principally, spices became the key item of spiciness in the medieval trade because they were not bulky, perishable or breakable and thus could be carried over long distances by both sea and land. Spices dominated the knapsack of Arab traders

⁸ *Ibid.*,P.84

⁹ Exodus XXX: 22-24

chiefly because of their high demand in the west and the rarity and localization of their production.

The general term 'spices' include a variety of sweet smelling substances used as condiments preservatives, perfumes, incense, medicines and antidotes. Crone¹⁰ defines the term "spices include incense and substance that gave off a nice smell on being burnt, perfumes, ointments and other sweet smelling substances with which one dabbed smeared or sprinkled oneself or one's clothes; things that one put in food or drink to improve their taste, prolong their life or endow them with medicinal or magical properties and they also included antidotes".

Gastronomic traditions of medieval Europe made spices an indispensable ingredient of the aristocratic tables and festive feasts. The "famous four" (geruimte vier) spices of the Europeans consists of clove, cinnamon, nutmeg and mace¹¹.

The demand for spices in the medieval Europe is noted by Rogers¹² as "it is difficult for us to imagine the eagerness with which our forefathers, as far as they could afford the luxury, sought after the spices of East..... they were excessively fond of spices

¹⁰ Crone Patricia, *Meccan Trade and Rise of Islam*, Princeton. N.J., (1987), P.12

¹¹ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean, A History of the People and the Sea, in Maritime India*, Oxford, (2004), P.171

¹² Rogers, *Six centuries*, P.154

and used them, when they could be procured, in all their dishes..... the spiced wine called Hippocras was a present to the princes and a seat near the spice box was a greater privilege than one above the salt”.

Speaking of the great demand for spices in Europe, Immanuel Wallerstein¹³ says “the spices were made in to aphrodisiacs, as though the aristocracy could not make love other wise. At this epoch, the relationship of Europe and Asia might be summed up as the exchange of preciosities. The bullion flowed east to decorate the temples, palaces and clothings of Asian aristocratic classes and the jewels and spices flowed west.

As the spice plants grew only in particular areas, the spice users had to depend wholly on import. Since the Arabs kept the sources of spices a trade secret¹⁴, Europe was wholly dependent on them for the supply of it. This made Arab spice trade a continuous process spanning over centuries.

South East Asia was the main source of spices. In this region there was hardly a place which did not produce one or other kind of spices. Moluccas was well known for cloves and nutmegs, Eastern Java and the lesser Sundra Islands were rich in sandal

¹³ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*. London, (1980), P.41

¹⁴ K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *Foreign Notices of South India*, Madras, (1939), P.175

wood, Malay Peninsula was famous for scented wood like Ud and aloes, Java produced pepper in huge quantities¹⁵.

Pepper, Cinnamon, Cardamom, Cloves, Nutmeg, Mace, Ginger Myrrh, Ud, Aloes, Amber, Camphor, Musk and Attars are the main items of spices on which majority of scholars agree as being traded by Arab traders during the medieval period.

Pepper (*Piper nigrum*):

Pepper, one of the oldest known spices was highly valued during the pre-modern period. Pepper is mentioned in the medical book of Hypocrite (460-377BC) and some other old medical references. When the Goths overran Rome in 410 AD, the ransom demanded to spare the lives of Romans included a down payment of 3000 pounds of pepper corns and an annual payment of 300 pounds. After the conquest of Caesarea in 1101 AD by Genoese, each soldier received two pounds of pepper as part of his booty¹⁶.

Pepper was in universal demand by Asians and Europeans alike and was regarded as the 'black gold'¹⁷. Its two chief sources of supply were the Malabar coast and the islands of the archipelago, especially Java and Sumatra. The accounts of Ibn

¹⁵ V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India*, Delhi, (1990), P.94

¹⁶ George Watt, *A Dictionary of the economic products of India* Vol. VI Part I, Delhi, (1892), Pp.264-265

¹⁷ R.B. Serjeant, *Haridrami Chronicles, The Portuguese of the South Arabian Coast*, Oxford, (1963), P,77

Khurdadbeh, Ibn Faqih, Idrisi and Dimishqi reveal that the Arabs carried pepper mainly from Kwalam (Quilon), Sandan (sindhudurg), Fandarina (Pandalayani), Jurbutan (Sreekandapuram) and Manjarur (Mangalore). Yaqut and Qazwini mention Malibar (Malabar) as an important source of pepper. Yaqut says that pepper is exported from here (Malabar) to all countries of the world¹⁸ and Qazwini mentions that pepper is exported from one end of the East to the other end of the West. He also remarks “many people are benefited by pepper trade and the Franks carry pepper in the Sea of Syria to the further west”¹⁹. This account shows that pepper was the chief merchandise that linked the Franks and Arabs during Qazwini’s period (1203-1283 AD). Some of these accounts also contain the description of pepper wine and pepper cultivation. Ibn Khurdadbeh reports that over every bunch of pepper, there is a leaf which protects it from rain, when the rain stops, the leaf raises itself up. But when it rains again it comes back. A similar report is produced by Yaqut also. But he says, a number of leaves cover up the pepper bunch so that it may not be scorched by the sun. When the sun goes off it, these leaves go off²⁰.

¹⁸ Yaqut, *Kitab Mujam-al-Buldan*, Vol. IV, (ed), Ferdinand Wusternfeld, Paris, (1867)

¹⁹ Qazwini, *Kitab Ather-al-Bilad Wal Akhbar-al-Ibad* (ed.) Wusternfeld, Gttingen, (1850), P.82

²⁰ S.M.H. Nainar, *Arab Geographers’ knowledge of Southern India*, Madras, (1942), Pp.202-203

Ibn Battuta describes the land of Mulaybar (Malabar), which extends for two months journey along the coast from Sandabur (Goa) to Kawlam (Quilon) as the pepper country. He adds “Manjarur (Mangalore) is the port at which most of the merchants from Fars and Yemen disembark, pepper and ginger are exceedingly abundant there”²¹.

According to Marco Polo, Malabar and Gujarat produced a large quantity of pepper and he says “the ancient Arabs did not ignore where the pepper they received through Siraf or Aden came from; early among them, the name of Malabar was synonymous of the country of pepper”²².

Europeans were the main consumers of pepper. Marco Polo’s accounts reveal that great quantities of pepper were consumed by the Chinese also. The great import from Asia to Lisbon was pepper or pepper and spices. The rise of consumption of pepper in Europe was due to the increase in the meat consumption. Hence pepper was not quite an aristocratic luxury item, but at the same time was beyond the reach of common men. The divisibility and durability of pepper as well as its profit margin

²¹ Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa (Tr.)* H.A.R. Gibb, New York, (1929), Pp.232-233

²² Carl Henry-Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, Haklyut Society, (1866) Vol. II, P.133

made it an excellent item of export to the West. In return what Asia principally got from Europe was bullion, silver and gold²³.

Large quantities of pepper was consumed in the East itself. Marco Polo's accounts reveal that great quantities of pepper were consumed by the Chinese also. Speaking of the kingdom of Vijayanagar, Barbosa says "much pepper is used here and every where throughout the Kingdom"²⁴. He remarks about the food habit of Zamorin "all the food which he eats, whether of flesh or fish or vegetable or other viands, is flavoured with so much pepper that no man from our countries would be able to eat it". He adds 'the food of Moors of Ormuz and other places was well spiced'²⁵.

Regarding the quality of pepper, there seem to be no doubt that Malabar pepper was superior to those of other places²⁶, and even within Malabar, a word of praise was sometimes given to the pepper produced in the Kingdom of North Cananor in North Malabar and Hili²⁷.

History shows that it was the brisk pepper trade of Arabs that kindled the enterprising spirit of Medieval Europe. It was the high

²³ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The modern World System*, London, (1980), P.329

²⁴ Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, Vol.I (ed-M.H.Dames) Haklyut Society, (1871), P.203

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Pp.23,95

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9, 184

²⁷ Marco Polo, *Op.cit.*, P.385

demand for pepper in the Europe that motivated the Portuguese to discover a sea route to India. This is evident from the fact that the first cargo of Vasco da Gama when returning to his native country was pepper²⁸. Portuguese discovery of the Indian ocean maritime route was no chance an incident but the result of long, careful planning and execution. About ten years prior to Vasco da Gama's celebrated voyage to India, the Portuguese King, Dom Joao, decided to send a secret mission to Malabar to investigate the spice country and to study the way of life of the people and the modus operandi of trade and commerce in the famous pepper city of Calicut. Pero da Covilha, a Portuguese Christian by birth and parentage, who was selected for this secret mission by the king started his journey in 1487 from Santarem in Portugal. Disguised as a Mohammedan merchant he reached Aden via Valencia, Barcelona, Rhodes Island and Alexandria. From Aden, sailing by an ordinary merchant ship he reached Cannanore and proceeded to Calicut. He spent a whole year in moving across the country and made an elaborate report to His Majesty Dom Joao II. In his report he had narrated the Arabs' trade monopoly in the Indian Ocean and the way how it was being conducted by the Arab merchants and traders swarming the Malabar Coast. It was this valuable report which led the Portuguese to the later discovery of the Sea

²⁸ V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Madras, (1989), P.38

route to India in 1498, with the help of an Arab pilot named Ibn Majid²⁹.

Cloves (*Eugenia Caryophyllata*):

Cloves are the dried flowers of an evergreen aromatic tree which produces a great profusion of flowers. Yaqubi describes two types of cloves, Zuhr and Thamr as “the Zuhr is small and resembles in appearance the twigs of black hellebore. The Thamr is thick and resembles the kernel of the date or the Olive. It is said that it is the fruit of a big tree resembling the lote tree. The best and the most excellent kind is the Zuhr which is strong, arid, dry, sharp pungent to taste and sweet to smell”³⁰.

The Indonesian Islands, also known as the Spice Islands are the chief sources of cloves. It is described as a product of Moluccas by Ibn Battuta³¹ and Barbosa³² and of Java and Necuveran (Nicobar) Islands by Marco Polo³³.

²⁹ R.B. Serjeant, Hadrami Chronicles, *The Portuguese of the South Arabian Coast*, Oxford, (1963). and Joseph De Barros, *A Portuguese Pioneer Traveller in Calicut*, Proceedings of SHC, 11th Annual session, University of Calicut, (1-3, Feb. 1991), Pp.129-130

³⁰ Yaqubi, *Fragmenta*, (ed) M.J. de Gorja, London, (1885), P.369

³¹ Ibn Battuta, *Voyages of Ibn Battuta*, (ed) Defermery IV, Paris, (1858) P.243

³² Barbosa, *Op.cit.*, P.202

³³ Marco Polo, *Op.cit.*, P.272

Cloves are used for different purposes, as a flavour in food, as a preservative, as a mild anesthetic, as an ingredient in perfumes and as an antiseptic in dentistry.

When the Portuguese and Dutch appeared in maritime trade in the sixteenth century, they tried to regulate the supply of cloves and keep the prices high even by ruthlessly uprooting the clove trees that grew in the Indonesian Islands and compelling the native farmers to grow other crops³⁴.

Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum Zaylanicum*):

Cinnamon is the dried bark of the Cinnamon tree. After removing it from the tree trunk and twigs, the bark is rolled and dried. Cinnamon oil is widely used in medicines. Cinnamon was once more valuable than gold. In the early days it was sought for embalming and witchery in Egypt³⁵. A fifteenth century saying “no man should die who can afford Cinnamon” shows the medicinal value attached to this spice during the period. The Arab traders obtained Cinnamon chiefly from Ceylon³⁶. Ibn Battuta says “It (the town of Battalah in Silan, Ceylon) is a small pretty place surrounded by a wall and bastions of wood. The whole coast in the

³⁴ Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade and the Orient, 1600-1800, Maritime India.*, Oxford, (2004), P.45

³⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol17, London, (1964), P.778

³⁶ R.H. Major (ed.), *India in the Fifteenth Century*, Delhi, (1974), Pp. IV, 5, *Op.cit.*, Pp. IV, 5.

neighbourhood is covered with trunks of Cinnamon trees washed down by the torrent. These trees are heaped on the shore and look like a sort of hillock there³⁷. Malabar coast was another important centre of Cinnamon trade during the medieval period³⁸.

Cardamom (*Elettaria Cardamomum*):

Cardamom had an important place in the imports of Arabia during medieval period. Idrisi informs that Fandarina (Pandalayani) was the main centre of Cardamom trade. He adds, "Cardamom which grows in the slopes of this hill is exported to all countries. It grows like the grains of hemp and the grains are enclosed in pods"³⁹. It is used mainly to flavour food items, medicinally it is used as an aromatic stimulant, carminative and flavouring agent⁴⁰.

³⁷ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Op.cit.*, P.269

³⁸ Maqbul Ahmad, *Indo Arab Relations*, New Delhi, (1969), P.86

³⁹ S.M.H. Nainar, *Arab Geographers Knowledge of Southern India*, Madras, (1942), P.196

⁴⁰ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. IV, London, (1964), P.889

Incense:

In the Old Testament it is said of Solomon that he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places⁴¹. Frankincense (oblibanum) and myrrh, the main components of Arabian incense were obtained from trees that grew in the Southern part of Arabian Peninsula. As the incense trade grew the ancient kingdoms of Southern Arabia became wealthy. It is said that there was not a temple or wealthy home in Babylon, Egypt, Greece or Rome which did not require these precious resins to please their gods. Ptolemy refers to ancient Arabia as 'Myrrifera Regio' or the myrrh country.

For centuries, the Egyptians had stuffed mummies with myrrh. Myrrh is mentioned in the Bible; one of the three gifts that Magi brought to Jesus Christ was myrrh⁴². Greeks and Romans used large quantities frankincense in the pyre to cover the odor during cremation.

Pliny tells us that at the funeral of Nero's wife (65 AD) an entire year's harvest of frankincense was burned which resulted in a massive shortage of frankincense throughout the entire Roman world.

Ibn Battuta gives a first hand information about frankincense, "We left Dhafari for Oman in a small ship belonging to a man from

⁴¹ I. Kings 3:3

⁴² Mathew 2:11

Masira. On the second day of our journey we disembarked at the roadstead of Hasik, which is inhabited by Arab fishermen. Here they have a great quantity of frankincense trees. They have thin leaves out of which drips, when they are slashed sap like milk. This turns in to gum which is the Frankincense"⁴³. In medieval times, frankincense oil was used as a drug to dress wounds and myrrh was the main ingredient of perfumes and ointments. Avicenna (Ibn Sina) recommends it for tumours, ulcers of the head and ears, affections of the breast, vomiting, dysentery and fevers⁴⁴. Even in modern days myrrh is used as an antiseptic in mouth wash and tooth pastes.

Aloe:

Aloe wood (which belong to the family Liliaceae) has been mentioned as one of the important articles of trade by many Arab writers. They mention several kinds of aloes and their uses. Ibn Khurdadbeh mentions four types of aloes on the basis of place of production as Hindi aloe, Qumari aloe, Sanafi aloe and Qumaruni aloe⁴⁵. Yaqut says "aloes came from islands situated beyond equator. As no one had visited these islands no one knew the shape of aloe's leaves. As the aloe was brought by water what was

⁴³ Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, (ed), Gibb, P.115

⁴⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol.9, London, (1967), P.801

⁴⁵ Ibn Khurdadbeh, *Kitab-ul-Masalik Wal Mamalik*, (ed) M.J. de Goeje, London, (1889), P.16

deposited ashore was collected and one tenth of the aloes such collected was given to the king as his share”⁴⁶.

Ibn Khurdadbeh, Yaqut, Abu Zayd and Masudi have mentioned ‘Qumar’ as the source of Qumari aloe. According to S.M.H. Nainar, ‘Qumar’ may be either Khumayr (Cambodia) or Qamarun (Assam) or even the area around Cape Comorin as the Tamil word ‘Kumari’ is used in the past and present alike to denote ‘wild aloe’⁴⁷.

Masudi informs “the greatest part of the revenue of the king of Multan comes from the rich presents of genuine aloe, brought by the pilgrims, one mann of which is worth two hundred dinars”⁴⁸. Abu Zayd mentions that merchants used to purchase from the priests, fine quality aloe which receives impression of seal like wax, offered to the idols by the pilgrims to Multan⁴⁹. According to Yaqut “aloe that sinks in water is the best quality and there is nothing better than that”⁵⁰ Some species of aloe contain much resin and oil, which were widely used in medicines.

Oud or U’d :

⁴⁶ Yaqut, *Marasid-al-Ittila*, Vol.II, (ed. & Tr.) T.G.J. Juynboll, P.169

⁴⁷ S.M.H Nainar, *Op.cit*, P.187

⁴⁸ Masudi, *Kitab Muruj al Dhahab wa Maadin-al jawhar*, (ed) Barbier, Paris, (1877), P.376

⁴⁹ Abu Zayd, *Op.cit.*, P.130

⁵⁰ Yaqut, *Op.cit*, P.169

U'd is a sweet smelling resin deposit obtained from a particular type of tree native to the Far East countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Borneo. The tree produces this resin as an immune response when it is infected by a particular type of fungus. When much of a tree becomes covered with the resin deposit it is harvested. Ud was a very costly incense and was regarded as a sign of wealth and status. The report of Abu Zayd in his book *Silsilat al tawarikh*⁵¹ that "due to shipwreck and pirate attack on trading ships, the price and availability of Ud in Basra and Baghdad was much affected" shows the magnitude of demand for this incense during the ninth century AD. The early Chinese traveller Fa-Hien had noted the riches of the Arab traders who dealt in Ud.

Amber:

Yaqubi, Abu Zayd and Masudi describe amber as a product obtained from sea. 'The amber grows like a plant at the bottom of the sea. When the sea is very rough it throws up the amber to the surface and the pieces of amber look like mushroom or truffle'⁵² Masudi informs "several merchants of Siraf and Uman, who had travelled to the Island between the sea of Harkand and the sea of

⁵¹ Abu Zayd, *Op.cit*, P.131

⁵² Reinaud (ed), *A supplement to sulayman's Silsilatut-Tawarikh*, Paris, (1845), P.138.

De Geoje (ed), *Kitab Aliag al Nafisah*, Leiden, (1892), P.138

Larawi told me that the amber grows in the bottom of the sea and is of various sorts and these are different kinds of resin”⁵³.

Ginger (Gingiber Officinale) :

Ginger, the knobby roots of the ginger plant, native to the tropical areas was well known to the Arabs as a spice. It was used as a flavouring agent and medicine. Different varieties of ginger, such as beledi, columbine and coilumin are mentioned in the medieval writings. The beledi meaning ‘country’ in Arabic is the common type produced through out the West Coast of India and was regarded as inferior in quality. The columbine ginger of the Coilum region was known to Marco Polo as coilumin⁵⁴.

Perfumes:

Ibn Battuta says “they (the Meccans) use a great deal of perfume and Kohl....The Mecean women too make great use of perfumes to such a degree that they will spend the night hungry in order to buy perfumes with the price of their food..... when one of these women goes away the odour of the perfumes clings to the place after she has gone⁵⁵.

⁵³ Masudi, *Muruju adh Dhahab Wa-Macdain al Jawhar*, Journal Asiatique, (1865), P.350

⁵⁴ Marco Polo, *Op.cit.*, P.375

⁵⁵ Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, P.76

Manufacture of perfumes and essences from various flowers flourished in Damascus, Shiraz and Jur. The cultivation of flower plants was promoted on a large scale for commercial purposes. Attar of flowers was exported as far as China eastward and al-Maghrib west-ward. The famous attar of roses manufactured in Persia by distilling the petals of flowers was first brought to China as a tribute offering at the time of the Five Dynasties (907-60). So powerful was its perfume that even when put in glass phials sealed with wax the fragrance leaked out⁵⁶.

Musk, the sticky substance produced by the abdominal gland of the male musk deer, was one of main ingredients of Arab perfumes imported from India. Musk was also used as an aphrodisiac since ancient times. According to *Hudud-e-Alam* (tenth century) the Indian exports included perfumes such as musk, aloes, amber and camphor and pearls of various varieties and sizes, diamonds and innumerable kinds of medieval herbs⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ K.N. Chaudury, *Trade and civilization in the Indian Ocean*, Cambridge, (1985), P.53

⁵⁷ S. S. Nadvi, *Arab-O-Hind Ka Taalluqat* (Tr.) Syed Shahabuddin, Allahabad, (1930), Pp.39,41

Bamboo and Tabasir

One of the chief weapons of medieval Arab cavalry was the rumh (lance) made using shafts of bamboo. In early days bamboo native to the coast of Bahryn was used and later bamboo was imported from India⁵⁸. Two types of bamboos namely Qanna and Khayzuran, were imported from India. Ibn Khurdadbeh says that Kawlām (Quilon) and Sandan (Sindhudurg) were the main centres of bamboo trade in India. Barus (Broach), Daybul, Saymur (shirur) and Thana were also important bamboo trading centres.

Tabasir or mungaluppu in Tamil meaning bamboo salt is a siliccous and crystalline substance found in the interior hollow of some bamboos⁵⁹. It was very scarce that the quantity brought out every year is three or four mann⁶⁰ not exceeding five mann. It was so precious that it was valued as one hundred times costlier than gold⁶¹.

Camphor (Cinnamomum Camphora):

Camphor is the pulp of a tree obtained by cutting the bark or by splitting the tree. Camphor was much in demand in Arabian

⁵⁸ P.K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, p.173

⁵⁹ George Watt, *A Dictionary of the Economic products of India*, Vol I, Calcutta, (1889), P.370

⁶⁰ Mann, *A weight of two rothls*

⁶¹ S.M.H. Nainar, *Arab Geographers Knowledge of Southern India*, Madras, (1942), Pp.192-193

counties as an incense, medicine and an ingredient in perfumes and was imported from India and China. Camphor trees are found on the slopes of the mountains between Kulam (Quilon) and Mandarquin (Madurai) and it is said that camphor was obtained in large quantities when there was much thunder, lightning and earthquake. In less tempestuous years the camphor was found in smaller quantities⁶². Best quality camphor was obtained from Faysur. Marco Polo speaks of the camphor produced in Kunsur or Kaisur as selling for its weight in gold⁶³.

Paper:

Paper, an invention of the Chinese, was an important item of Arab merchandise during the medieval period. Though, paper was not very suitable for transport over long distances, the Arab merchants imported it from China to Baghdad. But after the capture of Samarkand, they brought some Chinese paper makers to start the industry at the Abbasid capital⁶⁴. The art of manufacturing paper from flax, linen or hemp rags was first introduced to Samarkand from China in 751 AD. The busy scientific and literary activities of the Abbasid age led to a great demand for paper and by the end of the eighth century, paper

⁶² *Ibid.*, P.195

⁶³ George Watt, *A Dictionary of the Economic products of India*, New Delhi, (1889), P.86

⁶⁴ C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, London, (1968), P.89

manufacture flourished in Baghdad. It was soon introduced to Spain and paper came within the reach of common man. Bookshops on a commercial basis began to appear in Baghdad during the ninth century and by the end of the century the capital had more than one hundred book dealers congregated in one street. The oldest Arabic paper manuscript that has been recorded in the history is the work by Abu-Ubayd al Qasim ibn Sallam, on tradition entitled Gharib-al-Hadith dated Dhul-Qaidah AH 252 (Nov.13-Dec.12 866 AD) which is preserved in the Leyden University Library. The oldest by a Christian author is the theological treatise by Abu Qurrah dated Rabi-ul Awwal AH 264 (Nov.11-Dec.10, 877) which is preserved in the British Museum⁶⁵.

Paper manufacture was introduced to Europe through Muslim Spain. France owed its first paper mill to Spain and not to returning crusaders as claimed by some⁶⁶. Hitti has produced a philological evidence to this historical fact. The English term 'ream' which is derived through old French 'rayme' from Spanish 'resma' is a loan word from Arabic 'rizmah' the term used to quantify a bundle of paper.

Silk:

Though silk moth is a native of many areas like China, Assam and Bengal, only the Chinese discovered the process of obtaining

⁶⁵ P.K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London, (1940), Pp.347-411

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, P.504

unbroken silk threads from the cocoons and kept it a secret for a long period. During this period, the whole world was dependent on China for the supply of silk. The surnames of trade routes like silk Route and silk Road show the supremacy of silk among the ancient merchandise. Silk was a highly prized luxury item through out Europe during the early medieval period. Great quantity of gold was spent for the import of this coveted item. Such was the flow of bullion from the empire for the import of this delicate item that Roman emperor Tiberius (AD. 14-37) was forced to issue a decree, prohibiting the Romans from wearing silk, to check the drain of his treasury to the East.

Sericulture spread to Khotan in the fifth century when a resourceful princess-bride smuggled out silkworm eggs and mulberry seeds in her head dress. Later in AD 551, two monks from Serinda came to Justinian, offering to give relief from Sassanian extortion by bringing silkworm egg to Constantinople. Promised a good reward they returned two years later with the eggs hidden in their staves⁶⁷.

Sericulture was wide spread in the Medieval Middle East. Silk was exported to India and to the West during the period. Decorated Silks, a unique product of Moslem handlooms in Egypt and Syria were so highly prized in Europe that they were

⁶⁷ C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia, Op.cit.*, P.87

chosen by crusaders and other Westerners above all textiles as wrappings for relics of saints⁶⁸.

Ibn Battuta says “from Herat we journeyed to the town of Jam (a province of Khurassan) which is of middling size in a fertile district. Most of the trees are mulberries and there is a great deal of silk here. We travelled from there to Nayasbur, one of the four capitals of Khurassan. It gives the name of ‘Little Damascus’ because of its beauty and the quality of its fruit trees, orchards and stream. They manufacture here garments of silk and velvet which are exported to India⁶⁹. Thus the silk route which remained as one way road from East to West in the case of silk up to the early medieval period witnessed a reverse traffic also of silk from west to East. This shows that techniques and technologies that are exchanged through trade contacts becomes over a period of time the common heritage of mankind.

Cotton Textiles:

Cotton textiles were a major item of Arab merchandise and included a wide range from coarse cotton to fine cotton stuffs which resembled the spider web in appearance and smoothness⁷⁰. As the mummies are found wrapped in Indian Muslin, the antiquity

⁶⁸ P.K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P.423

⁶⁹ Ibn Battuta, (ed) Gibb, *Op.cit.*, Pp.176-177.

⁷⁰ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Op.cit.*, P.175

of the Indo-Egyptian textile trade can be traced to the time of Pharaohs⁷¹. Speaking of the items of imports of Arabia during the early years of AD, (50-60 AD) the Periplus says “the merchandise imported there (Port Muza or Mocha) consists of purple cloth both fine and coarse; clothing in the Arabian style, with sleeves, plain ordinary, embroidered, or interwoven with gold, muslins, cloaks, blankets (not many) some plain and others made in the local fashion⁷². India was the major source of cottons of all varieties and it was this cottons which drew thousands of Arab merchants to a peaceful domination over the ports of Gujarat and Malabar⁷³. Islam penetrated Malaya-Indonesia because Moslems had the trade in cotton which was the only satisfactory clothing for ordinary people⁷⁴.

Thana was famous for cotton fabrics called Thana textiles which were exported from here to foreign markets⁷⁵. A major item of export from India, especially Gujarat and Bengal was textiles such as silk, brocade, cotton and jute⁷⁶.

⁷¹ J.G. Wilkinson, *Manners and customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, London, (1837), Vol. II, P.237

⁷² The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, Tr. W.H. Schff, New York, (1912), P.24

⁷³ C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, *Op.cit.* P.254

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, P.254

⁷⁵ S.S. Nadvi, *Arab O Hind*, *Op.cit*, P.30

⁷⁶ L. Gopal, *The textile Industry in Early Medieval India 700-1200 AD*. Journal of the Bombay Branch of Royal Asiatic Society (1964-5) Vol. 39-40, P.15

As furniture, such as carpets, cushions, canopies and draperies, of the aristocratic Asian families of the medieval ages were all textile items, textile industry flourished during the period. Ibn Battuta says “we then entered the territories of the king of Iraq, visiting Aqsara (Akserai) where they make sheep wool carpets which are exported as far as India, China and the land of the Turks⁷⁷.

It is reported that Caliph Al Mustasim’s mother had a rug specially ordered for her at a cost of 13 crore dirhams bearing figures of all sorts of birds in gold which had rubies and other precious stones for eyes⁷⁸.

Attabi a striped fabric first manufactured at Attab in Baghdad in the twelfth century was imitated in Spain and became popular in France, Italy and other lands of Europe under the name tabi and the taffeta of middle age Europe was the Persian cloth taftah of the Arab merchants⁷⁹.

Food stuffs:

Rice which comprised of a great number of varieties was a widespread cargo of the medieval trade as it was the staple food of many of the Asians and Africans and as it could be kept for several

⁷⁷ Ibn Battuta (ed) H.A.R Gibb, *Op.cit.*, P.131

⁷⁸ P.K.Hitti, *History of the Arabs, Op.cit.*, P.344

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Pp.345-346

years without being damaged. Rice produced in Qamuhul, Kambayat, Sindan and Saimur, wheat produced in Kiz, Mihran and Bhakkar and white sugar known to Arabs as al-faniz were items of Arab merchandise collected from India. According to Ibn Battuta the people of Dhofar at the extremity of Yemen used the rice imported from India⁸⁰. Idrisi describes Cambay as “fertile in wheat and rice and also says that the land of Jirbattan (south of Coromandel Coast) supplied food provisions to Sarandip (Ceylon)⁸¹. Rice, sheep, chickens, ghee and spices were imported to the Maldives from Ma’bar, Mulaybar and Maqdashav⁸². Before the introduction of sugar in to the west, the Europeans had only honey for sweetening their foods⁸³. During the medieval period sugar was used in Egypt as a remedy against plague⁸⁴.

Fruits like the peaches, apricots and apples of Samarkand were exported to India. Ibn Battuta says “the town Antaliya (or Adalia) contains many orchards and produces fine fruits including an admirable kind of apricot called by them Qamar-ad-din which has a sweet almond in its kernel. This fruit is dried and exported to Egypt where it is regarded as a great luxury. During the medieval

⁸⁰ Ibn Battuta, *Travel in Asia and Africa*, Tr. H.A.R Gibb, New Delhi, (1990), P.113

⁸¹ V.K. Jain, *Op.cit.*, P.104

⁸² Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, P.24

⁸³ P.K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P.667, 696

⁸⁴ Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, P.125

period apricots were known as the plums of Damascus”⁸⁵. Watermelons were exported from Khwarizm to the courts of al-Mamun and al Wathiq in lead moulds packed with ice. Such fruits would sell in Baghdad for seven hundred dirhams each⁸⁶. Mangoes were imported from sandan (sindhudurg) and saymur (shirur)⁸⁷ and other fruits like pomegranate⁸⁸, jack fruits, lemon, citron, jamons also had a minor place in the knapsack of the Arab traders⁸⁹.

Coconut (*cocos nucifera*) was imported to Arabia in the form of nuts, copra or kernels and in later periods as oil. The accounts of Istakhri, Ibn Hawqal and Idrisi reveal that Sindhudurg (Sandan) Bullin (Island Baliq) Subara (Island Tara) and Shirur (Saymur) were important centres of coconut export⁹⁰. Ibn Battuta mentions Maldives as a centre of coconut export. He adds “coir made out of the hairy integument of coconut was exported to India, China and Yemen. This coir was used for sewing the Indian and Yemenite ships”. He narrates the advantage of sewn ships over nailed ships that “the Indian ocean is full of reefs and if a ship is nailed with iron nails it breaks up on striking the rocks, where as if it is sewn together with cords, it is given a certain resilience and does not fall

⁸⁵ P.K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P.665

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Pp.350-51

⁸⁷ Muhammed Zaki, *Arab Accounts of India*, Delhi, (1981), P.37

⁸⁸ S.M.H. Nainar *Op.cit.*, P.37

⁸⁹ Maqbul Ahmed , *Op.cit.*, P.86

⁹⁰ S.M.H. Nainar, *Op.cit.*, P.197

to pieces”⁹¹. Coconut wood was imported by Arabs for making ships. “The older Arabs and Persians used either to import coconut wood from India and its Islands, or to go and build their ships on the spot. The Maldives and Laccadives were the scene of a remarkable ship building activity, for these ships were built entirely of the diverse products of the coconut tree: hulls, masts, stitches ropes and even sails. The ships made in this way were then loaded with coconut wood and fruit and brought to Uman and Gulf”⁹².

Gold and Silver:

Gold and Silver may seem as avoidable luxuries in the case of individuals. But in the case of countries and empires, both poor and rich, not only of the ancient times but also of the modern, they are unavoidable necessities as they are the ballast of the financial system of every country. From antiquity, gold and silver were the most widely used medium of exchange. As international economic exchange was based on the index of value created by fixed units of these scarce metals, kingdoms and states through out the ages showed keen interest in accumulation of these metals. Moreover, accumulation of gold and silver has been considered by all civilizations as a process of social and material enrichment. The economic tradition that possession of material goods is a

⁹¹ Ibn Battuta, (ed) H.A.R Gibb, *Op.cit.*, P.243

⁹² G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring, Op.cit.*, P.91

contribution to wealth and welfare explains the cause for the perpetual accumulation of these precious metals. Empires and kingdoms converted their surpluses in to gold. During the ancient and early medieval periods, the only way of keeping the surpluses of nations and empires was to convert them in to ingots of gold and silver as other forms of investments were unknown. It has been estimated that by AD 23, the Chinese emperor Wang Mang had accumulated a gold treasure of about 1,56,200 Kilograms, equivalent to about 54,00,00,000 denarii⁹³. The magnitude of this sum can be best understood on comparison with the amount left in the Roman treasury at the time of Emperor Tiberus's (AD 14-37) successor, which was only 7,50,000 denarii⁹⁴. The surpluses of favourable trade balance of medieval India were converted in to gold and silver and hoarded in temples, monasteries and palaces. The large quantity of gold and silver that the Turks obtained on their conquest of North India as booty was this accumulated treasure of long term trade income⁹⁵.

Gold and silver were the main items of imperial luxury of the Abbasid Caliphs. According to al-Masudi, al Mu'tazz (866-9) the thirteenth Abbasid Caliph, used golden saddle and gilded armour

⁹³ Simkin, *Op.cit.*, P.45

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, P.46

⁹⁵ Andre Wink, *Al Hind, The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, Vol.I, Oxford, (1999), P.64

while all caliphs before him have used silver decoration⁹⁶. “It is reported that Harun al Rashid’s wife, Zubaida would tolerate at her table no vessels ‘not made of gold or silver and studded with gems”. The wedding ceremony of al-Mamum was conducted on a gold mat studded with pearls and sapphires and al-Mutawakkils gorgeous banquet was served with golden tables and trays. In 917 AD, when the caliph al Maqtadir received in his palace the envoys of the young Constantine VII, his royal audience chamber, dar-al-shajarah (the Hall of the Tree) was decorated with an artificial tree of gold and silver weighing 500000 drams in the branches of which were lodged birds of the same precious metals so constructed that they chirped by automatic devices⁹⁷.

In the region of Ghana, salt from the desert was first exchanged, in the eighth century for gold from regions further to the south. By the tenth century there was a regular gold-salt exchange across the Sahara and gold flowed to the Muslim Mediterranean in massive amount and west Africa became the ‘bilad al tibri’ the land of gold, of the Arabs⁹⁸.

Gold and Silver were the basis of Arab monetary system. Arabs used gold coin ‘dinar’ and silver coin ‘dirham’ as the

⁹⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddhimah*, Vol.VII, (Tr.) F. Rosenthal, London, (1967), P.15

⁹⁷ Hitti, *Op.cit.*, Pp.302,303,345

⁹⁸ Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, Pp.25-27

international currency through out the medieval period and these coins enjoyed the highest prestige in the world market⁹⁹. Dinar was minted out of gold weighing about four grams and in Caliph Umar's time was equivalent to 10 dirhams, later to 12 dirhams¹⁰⁰. Large amounts of Arab coins of the middle ages unearthed from such far off countries as Scandanavia and Finland testify the domination of Arab coins through out the medieval trade centres¹⁰¹.

Precious Stones:

Ceylon and South India were the main sources of precious stones. There was a general belief that in India its sea are rich in pearls, its mountains in rubies and its trees in incense¹⁰². Ibn Battuta mentions "the Island of Silan (Ceylon) as the source of precious stones. Among the gems some are taken from the bay and others are taken out of earth. The custom of the people is to reserve for the Sulthan all precious stones of the value of a hundred "fanam" or more; the sulthan pays the price and takes them for him. Stones of a lower value are retained by those who find them¹⁰³.

⁹⁹ Masudul Hassan, *History of Islam*, Vol. I, Delhi, (1998) P.712

¹⁰⁰ P.K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P.171

¹⁰¹ Masudul Hassan, *Op.cit.*, P.712

¹⁰² S.S. Nadvi, *Arab-O-Hind* (Tr.) Sayyid Shahabuddin, Allahabad, (1930),P.19

¹⁰³ Ibn Battuta, (ed) H.A.R. Gibb, *Op.cit.*, p.257

The Arab geographer Al Idrisi informs that in the mountain of Sri-Lanka “all kinds of rubies and various types of precious stones are found... and in its rivers diamonds are found and on all its coast there are diving beds of excellent, precious and costly pearls¹⁰⁴. Abu Zaid mentions that in the mountains of Sarandib (Ceylon) they find precious stones of various colours, red, green and yellow¹⁰⁵. During the medieval period Arab writers composed books on precious stones which later became a special genre, ‘the lapidary’. Nearly fifty Arabic lapidaries have been catalogued; the famous among them is the work of Shihab al-Din al-Tifashi (d. in Cairo AD 1154) which gives extensive information about twenty five types of precious stones their origin, geography, examination, purity, price, application for medicinal and magical purposes and so on¹⁰⁶.

The medieval Muslim monarchs and aristocrats were ready to spend large amounts for precious stones. Pearls, sapphires, rubies, emeralds and diamonds were favourite with the royalty and turquoise, Carnelian and onyx with the lower classes. One of the best known gems in Arab history is the big ruby which Harun acquired for 40,000 dinars. It is said that the ruby was so large that if it were put in the night in a dark room it would shine like a

¹⁰⁴ V.K. Tain, *Op.cit.*, P.92

¹⁰⁵ Abu Zaid, *Silsitat-ut-Twarik*, (ed) Renandot, Paris, (1845), P.83

¹⁰⁶ Max Meyerhof, *Science and Medicine, legacy of Islam*, (ed) Sir. Thomas Arnold, Delhi, (1995), P.341

lamp. It is said that Yahya ibn Khalid, the Barmakid once offered 70,00,000 dirhams to a Baghdad merchant for a jewel box made of precious stones but the offer was refused¹⁰⁷. Al Masudi speaks of an emerald known as Makkan carried from Cambay by way of Aden to Mecca where it found a good market¹⁰⁸.

As glass was viewed as a gem or gem substitute during the early days of glass making, major portion of glass was made in to beads. South India was the leader in production of beads of both stone and glass for centuries¹⁰⁹. Arikamedu near Madras was famous for its beads. Archaeological excavations have revealed wide spread use of Indian beads in ancient civilizations and suggest that Indian beads were the greatest trade beads and perhaps one of the greatest trade items of all time¹¹⁰. Gemstones of the Kongu region of the Chera country were sent overland to Musiris, (Cranganore) via Palghat gap, on the Kerala coast for shipment to the Roman world. Beads of sapphire, beryl, agate, carnelian, amethyst, lapis lazuli, jasper, garnet, soapstone, quartz

¹⁰⁷ P.K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, Pp.347-8

¹⁰⁸ V.K. Jain, *Op.cit.*, P.103

¹⁰⁹ Peter Francis, *Early Historic South India and the International Maritime Trade*, in *Man and Environment Journal* (ed.) Sunil Gupta, Vol. XXVII, Pune, (2002), No:1, P.159

¹¹⁰ Felix A. Chami, *People and Contacts in the Ancient Western Indian Ocean Seaboard or Azania*, in *Man and Environment* (JI), P.40

and onyx were the main products of the gem industry of the region¹¹¹.

Beads were highly prized in the Negro lands. Ibn Battuta narrates "a traveller in this country (Iwalatan) carries no provision whether plain food or seasonings and neither gold nor silver. He takes nothing but pieces of salt and glass ornaments which the people call beads¹¹². The glass of Sidon, Tyre and other Syrian towns was proverbial for its quality and thinness and was in great demand as articles of utility and luxury.

Pearls, another precious item of medieval trade were obtained from the Gulf of Mannar (Tamil Nadu) and the Bahrayn Sea. The Periplus mentions that condemned criminals were used at Pandyan port of Korkai in Gulf of Mannar for pearl fishing¹¹³. Due to the frequent migration of pearl oysters to opposite pearl beds in the gulf of Mannar of India and Ceylon, the pearl divers had to move frequently between Tamilnadu and Ceylon coasts. It is said that, in Ceylon, when about to begin gathering of pearl oysters, a human being and some tens of animals were killed in sacrifice to the gods of the sea¹¹⁴. The pearl fisheries of Bahrayn sea are situated between Siraf and Bahrayn in a calm bay like a wide river.

¹¹¹ K. Rajan, *Maritime Trade in Early Historic Tamil Nadu, Man and Environment (JI)* Vol. XXVII, No.1 (2002), P.85

¹¹² Ibn Battuta, H.A.R Gibb (ed.), *Op.cit.*, P.322

¹¹³ P.K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P.346

¹¹⁴ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Op.cit.*, P.291

During the months of pearl fishing, April and May a large number of boats come to this place with divers and merchants from Fars, Bahrayn and Qathif¹¹⁵.

Metals:

The metallurgical advancement of many civilizations during the medieval period, boosted the demand for metals like copper, tin, iron and arsenic. Metals were in great demand for the manufacture of military items and utensils. Under the Umayyads, Spain was highly developed in metal industry and the metals from here were imported to Egypt by Arabs and later re-exported to India. Norman A Stillman points out that lead and copper in a variety of forms were imported into Egypt from the west¹¹⁶. The geniza records of the Jews refer to raw iron being sent to Aden from Western India¹¹⁷. The accounts of Ibn Battuta show that wares, probably copper wares from India and Sind were despatched to the Iraq, Fars and Khurassan through the markets of Jurawan in Hormuz¹¹⁸. The Arabs carried Indian iron products to East Africa through Sofala. Sofala had the best and largest iron

¹¹⁵ Ibn Battuta, (ed.) H.A.R Gibb, *Op.cit.*, P.121

¹¹⁶ V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India*, Delhi, (1990), P.92

¹¹⁷ S.D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and institution*, London, (1966), Pp.339-42

¹¹⁸ Ibn Battuta, (ed.) H.A.R Gibb, *Op.cit.*, P.119

mines which produced largely for the Indian metallurgical industry¹¹⁹.

Among the Indian steel products, Indian swords were in great demand in Arabia and Europe. It is pointed out that the pre-Islamic Arab poetry had many references to Indian swords, which were quite popular among the warring tribes, the Bedouins. The swords produced in India were excellent ones surpassing those made by other peoples, and Idrisi praises Indian craftsmen for making such excellent swords¹²⁰. The swords of India, called by Arabs 'al-Muhannad' had the reputation of being very supple and sharp. At that time it was held that no iron was comparable to the Indian one in sharpness¹²¹. Swords manufactured in Yemen were also made of iron imported from India. The demand arising from the crusades generated wide market for Indian swords in the West.

Teak:

Teak is considered as the most valuable of all known timbers. This wood which was mainly used for ship building was one of the chief items of Arab trade. The Konkan supplied a massive amount of teakwood which during the early conquests seem to have been indispensable to the Arabs for construction purposes especially

¹¹⁹ Maqbul Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations*, New Delhi, (1969), P.23

¹²⁰ Idrisi, *Kitab Nazubat-al-Mushtaq fiktrraq*, Rome, (1592), P.23

¹²¹ Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, Pp.600-1

ship building in Iraq and Arabia¹²². As the Gulf area lacked durable timber, the merchants of Siraf had to import teak from India and South East Asia for their shipyards at al Ubullah and for their own residences and warehouses¹²³. Ibn Jubayr says that the timber for ship building at Aydhab was imported from India and al Yaman¹²⁴. 'Malabar had economic importance to the Moslems, as the source of that teak wood with which not only the houses of Siraf but also ships were built'¹²⁵.

Rhinoceros horn:

Ibn Khurdadbeh (844-8) says "the Kingdom of Kamaroun (Kamarupa) which touches China, abounds in rhinoceroses. This animal has a horn in front, one cubit long and the thickness of two palms. We find a sort of figure marked in the direction of its length. When it is slit, inside one could find standing out in white on a black ground the image of a man, horse, fish, peacock or some other bird¹²⁶. In China and India rhinoceros horn was valued at its weight in gold for its supposed aphrodisiac and other qualities. The horns were used as a panacea and the Indian Kings made knives out of them and used them for detecting poison in

¹²² *Ibid.*, P.68

¹²³ Simkin, *Op.cit.*, P.83

¹²⁴ S.M.H, Nainar, *Op.cit.*, P.200

¹²⁵ G.F. Heurani, *Arab Sea faring*, New York, (1975), P.71

¹²⁶ H.B. Sarkar, *Trade and commercial Activities of Southern India*, Calcutta, (1986), P.126

food by dipping them in it. The horns were also used for making necklaces and other ornaments which were sold at high prices¹²⁷.

Ivory:

African ivory was considered superior to Asian ivory in weight and colour. Ivory was used for making ornaments and aesthetic objects. Al-Musadi informs that ivory was brought from Zanj (Zanzibar) to Oman and from there it was shipped to India and China¹²⁸. The Arab geographer and traveller Abu-Hamid Muhammad al-Mazini (1080-1170) of Granada who visited Russia in 1136 informs that fossil mammoth ivory was exported from the Volga region to as far as Khwarizm¹²⁹.

Cowries:

Cowries were procured by the islanders of Laccadives and the Maldives from the surface of the sea. To fish them up they take a branch of the coconut tree and put it in the sea and the cowries attach themselves to it. The Islanders give the cowries the name of Kahtaj¹³⁰. Though cowries were used as a medium of exchange in some parts of Africa, India and the Maldives, they had only a limited money value. The Maldivian islanders used cowries as

¹²⁷ Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, Pp.60,351

¹²⁸ V.K. Jain, *Op.cit.*, P.98

¹²⁹ P.K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P.569

¹³⁰ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Op.cit.*, P.122

money and sold them to the people of Bengal in exchange for rice, for cowries were used as money in Bengal also. Cowries were used as the medium of exchange among the negroes also in their native country¹³¹.

Cowries were regarded as objects of symbolic meaning and the imitation terracotta cowries found in Han period tombs in Yunan, South China, suggest that cowrie shells were highly esteemed during the period¹³². They were regarded as prophylactics and served as amulets and ornaments for children and donkey saddles in the Muslim west, and in Middle Ages also as eye powder in pulverized form¹³³. Though the values of cowries varied greatly from place to place and time to time, they were always in demand as an item of trade.

Porcelain:

Chinese porcelain, the finest of all makes of pottery¹³⁴ commanded the worlds admiration and was a mark of medieval luxury and good taste especially in the Near East and Moslem India. A cabinet of fine Chinese porcelain was considered indispensable for every palace¹³⁵. There was even a widespread

¹³¹ Ibn Battuta, (ed.) Gibb, *Op.cit.*, P.243

¹³² Sunil Gupta, *The Archaeo-Historical Idea of the Indian Ocean, in Man and Environment*, Pune, (2002), P.10

¹³³ Maimonides-Meyenof, Geniza letter, P.63 No.127, Fn.120

¹³⁴ Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, P.282

¹³⁵ Simkin, *Op.cit.*, P.88

belief in Asia that the pale sea-green celadone ware of China could reveal the presence of poison in food¹³⁶. According to Ibn Battuta, “it is exported to India and other countries even reaching as far as our own land in the west”¹³⁷. The report that imitation clay potteries were produced in Kulam and sold as Chinese porcelain¹³⁸ bears testimony to the fact that Chinese porcelain was a highly esteemed item of medieval trade. The Near East itself had a great ceramic tradition,¹³⁹ and during the Abbasid era, Samarkand, Rayy, Baghdad and Damascus were famous for their decorated porcelains and for their glazed tiles of blue, green and Turquoise shades¹⁴⁰. Qastani tile, decorated with conventional flowers which was introduced from Persia to Damascus, was widely used for exterior and interior decoration of the middle ages buildings and the various-kinds of coloured tiles still favourites in Spain and Portugal are a legacy from the Arabs¹⁴¹.

Leather and Leather items:

A great number of skins of various animals such as those of goat, oxen, buffaloes, unicorns etc. were dressed in the province of Gujarat and loaded every year in a number of ships for Arabia

¹³⁶ Chaudhury, *Op.cit.*, P. 39

¹³⁷ Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, P.282

¹³⁸ S.M.H. Nainar, *Op.cit.*,

¹³⁹ Simkin, *Op.cit.*, P.88

¹⁴⁰ S.N. Fisher, *The middle East. A History*, London, (1950), P.90

¹⁴¹ P.K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, Pp.423, 582

and other quarters from Thana and Cambay¹⁴². Leather products such as shoes and creaking leather sandals were exported from Cambay and the towns around it like Sindan and Sufarah to Baghdad¹⁴³. The Kufa leather workers who had settled in the west coast of India trained the Makran and Sind tanners the art of tanning leather with dates which improved the finish of the indigenous leather products and made them softer¹⁴⁴. Leather industry flourished in Spain during the caliphate period and from Spain the art of tanning and embossing leather was carried to Morocco and from these two lands it was brought to France and England¹⁴⁵.

Slaves:

Various systems of slavery existed across the ancient world, from the Mediterranean to China. Appearance of black captives in Egyptian iconography suggests the existence of slave trade during the third millennium B.C. The oldest reference to the Arab slave trade can be found in the Biblical book 'Genesis' where Arabian merchants buy and sell Jacob's son Joseph. It is traditionally presumed that Joseph was sold into slavery in the 1720's BC and was made Governor by Pharaoh a decade later. The first specific

¹⁴² V.K. Jain, *Op.cit.*, P.100

¹⁴³ S.S. Nadvi, *Arab-O-Hind, Op.cit.*, P.40

¹⁴⁴ S.A.A. Rizvi, *The wonder that was India, Op.cit.*, P.2

¹⁴⁵ P.K. Hitti, *History of Arabs, Op.cit.*, Pp.527-8

reference to an organized slave trade by the Arabs occurs in the Periplus of the first century AD. By the fourth century AD, Africa from Ethiopia to Madagascar was the chief source of slaves for markets as distant as Europe and China¹⁴⁶.

Advent of Islam appreciably improved the position of slaves in the Arab society. Liberation of slaves was regarded as something most pleasing to God and directed as an expiation for many sins. When liberated the slave enjoyed the status of a client to his former master; now his patron. In case the patron dies without heirs, the client inherits his wealth. According to Islamic tradition, children of a female slave to her master belong to the master and were, therefore, free and the status of the mother slave is raised to that of Umm-Walad (mother of the child). Umm-Walad could neither be sold nor given away and was free on the death of her husband master.

In the medieval Muslim social system, a slave was generally the body servant or retainer of his master and slavery was in no sense the economic basis of Muslim Society. Master and slave thus stood in a more humane relationship than did the slave cultivator to the Roman landlord or the American planter. H.A.R. Gibb narrates the story told by a theologian about a slave he bought from the slave market. This slave returned seven blows to

¹⁴⁶ Kenneth Mc Phesson, *The Indian Ocean*, London, (1948), P.52

his master when he was whipped ten times as a punishment saying that three blows were enough for the punishment and the seven were his rightful retaliation¹⁴⁷. This liberal relationship which grew in to a state of 'elite slavery' resulted in getting the slaves all opportunities in every walk of life. Thus high officers, military commanders, governors, theologians and even emperors were grown in Islamic countries from among the slaves once exchanged through trade.

Speaking of the slave system of Muslim Spain J.B. Trend explains "the Muslims of succeeding generations preferred the mothers of their children to be those fair complexioned slaves captured in the north of Spain, rather than or in addition to their own women folk. The purchase of a slave was not so simple a transaction as is often imagined. It had to be concluded in the presence of a notary and the purpose for which a female slave was required as well as her capabilities and treatment were carefully considered¹⁴⁸. Yazid III (744 AD) was the first Caliph in Islam, born of a slave mother. The mother of Fatimid Caliph, al Mustansir (1035-94) was a Sudanese slave once purchased from a Jew¹⁴⁹. The systematic use of slaves in the army and the administration,

¹⁴⁷ H.A.R. Gibb, *Introduction to Ibn Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa*, Pp. 1325-1354, 30-31

¹⁴⁸ P.K. Hitti, *History of Arabs, Op.cit.*, Pp.279,621

¹⁴⁹ J.B. Trend, *Spain and Portugal, Legacy of Islam* (ed.), Sir. Thomas Arnold, P.6

commonly in the highest positions was unique of Islam and alien to the pre-Islamic heritage. It is sometimes thought that elite slavery was the only or the predominant form of slavery in Islamic society with next to it merely the common place form of domestic slavery¹⁵⁰. The Turkish slave body guard of Samanids, Alptigin was promoted as the governor of Khurassan in 961 AD. He captured Ghazna and established an independent realm which developed in to the Ghaznavid empire of Afghanistan and Punjab that flourished during AD 962 to 1186¹⁵¹. Abu-al-Misk- Kafur, who ruled the Turkish dynasty Ikhshidid from 966 to 968 AD was an Abyssinian black slave purchased by the founder of the dynasty, Muhammed Ibn Tughj (935-46), from an oil merchant for the equivalent of about eight pounds¹⁵².

The rise and prosperity of a dynasty of slaves, the Mamluks, is recorded only in the history of Arabs. It is the history of slaves of yesterday who became army commanders of today and the Sulthans of tomorrow¹⁵³. For about three centuries (AD 1250-1517) the Mamluk dynasty, founded by the slave widow of Ayyubid al-Salih, Shajar-al-Durr, reigned the Syro-Egyptian region during its most turbulent period.

¹⁵⁰ Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, Pp.13-14

¹⁵¹ P.K. Hitti, *History of Arabs, Op.cit.*, Pp.463-4

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, P.456

¹⁵³ P.K. Hitti, *History of Arabs, Op.cit.*, Pp.672

Rabia al Adawiya (d 185 H/801 AD) the famous mystic saint of Basra, who had disciples and associates like Malik Ibn Dinar and Sufyan al-thawari was a slave girl. Her sanctity secured her freedom and she led the life of a sufi¹⁵⁴. The servile war in the Fertile Crescent, recorded in the history as Zanj slave rebellion bears testimony to the fact that the slaves had acquired a social predominance strong enough to conduct a long war against a King. This revolt which was conducted by the slaves engaged in the Saltpetre mines on the lower Euphrates lasted for 14 years (870-883 AD) during the reign of al-Mutamid (870-92). It was in the course of this "bloodiest and most destructive rebellion in the history of western Asia" that Egypt, one of the first and fairest provinces, fell away from the caliphate under the rule of ibn-Tulun¹⁵⁵. The Arabs collected slaves from different parts of Africa, Europe and Asia. During the medieval period slaves were obtained by trade, raid or war. Prisoners of War were considered as slaves. Slave trade became very brisk and lucrative to the Arabs during the medieval period of conquest, when they got thousands of prisoners of war. Musa-ibn Nusayr, the energetic viceroy of Abd-al-Malik and al-Walid is said to have captured 3,00,000 captives from Ifriquiya and 30,000 virgins from the Gothic nobility in Spain¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵⁴ Dr. K.K. Usman, *This is Islam*, Kottayam, (2001), P.140

¹⁵⁵ P.K. Hitti, *History of Arabs*, *Op.cit.*, Pp.467-68

¹⁵⁶ P.K. Hitti, *History of Arabs Op.cit.*, Pp.207-235

Benjamin of Tudela in the eleventh century gives a clear picture of slave raid, as “negro slaves, like animals eat the herbs that grow on the banks of the Nile and in the fields. They go about naked and have not the intelligence of ordinary man. When the men of Assuan make a raid to their land they take with them bread, and wheat, dry grapes and figs and throw the food to those people who run after it. Thus they bring many of them back prisoners and sell them in the land of Egypt and in the surrounding countries”¹⁵⁷. The northern Somali coast was called Ra’s Asir or cape of captives during the medieval period. Slave trading was probably the single most important business in early medieval Europe, conducted with the Arabs to the east and to the South-West¹⁵⁸.

During the fifteenth century, when enslaving was predominantly for colonial plantations, the colour of the slaves changed from white to Black and there was a growing tendency to treat slaves in the mass as an impersonal item of commerce rather than as an individual who worked for a family or a farm as a domestic servant or agrarian labourer¹⁵⁹. This inhumane commercialization of slavery deteriorated drastically the personal life and social status of the slaves.

¹⁵⁷ Andrew Wink, *Al Hind, Op.cit.*, P.33

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, P.36

¹⁵⁹ Anthony Luttrell, *the Transllantice Slave Trade*, Pp.78-79

Horses:

Horses, especially war horses, as an item of trade was very important in the context of medieval feudal polity of war and conquest and was a prized item of Arab trade. Thousands of horses of the Arab region of Persia, Arabia, Balkh, Kamboja were sent every year for sale in India from various places such as Kish, Hormuz, Dofar, Aden, Oman, Kilahat, Crimea and Azov¹⁶⁰.

The Afghan mountains to the west of Sindh had a very long history as a horse breeding area and the name of the Afghans has been linked with the "Asavaka" (horse people) of Gandhara from the time of Mahabharatha. Kizkanan was famous for its own variety of horses and one of the reason for its invasion by the Arabs in AD 659, which lasted for twenty years, was to obtain horses from that province as they were considered to be famous for their strength and proportion¹⁶¹.

The Arab traders were specially welcomed by both the Hindu and the Muslim rulers of Southern India in connection with import of west Asian horses, which constituted a very great factor in the military strategy of the time as the sale of these noble animals to the one or the other rival ruler influenced the whole course of the

¹⁶⁰ V.K. Jain *Op.cit.*, P.95

¹⁶¹ H.C. Verma, *Medieval Routes to India, Baghdad to Delhi*, Delhi, (1978), Pp.236-7

war¹⁶². Horses were brought to India by land as well as by sea. In the ships coming from the west horses invariably formed one item of shipment in addition to other cargoes. Marco Polo tells us “as ships had no deck a cover was spread over the cargo when loaded. This cover consists of hides and on the top of these hides they put the horses which they take to India for sale”¹⁶³. The Arabs also used special ships named “thareetha” for transporting horses¹⁶⁴.

In medieval India, cavalry was the most powerful and mobile wing of the armed forces and often the deciding factor in the battles. Hence there was a great demand for good robust horses from Arabia and other countries of West Asia¹⁶⁵.

Speaking of the country of Azaq (or Azov) Ibn Battuta says “the horses in this country are as numerous as sheep in our country or even more so. A single Turk will possess thousands of horses. They are exported to India in droves of six thousand or so each merchant possessing one or two hundred of them or less or more”. He informs that the price of horse brought in to India ranged from one hundred dinars to four thousand dinars each

¹⁶² H.B. Sarkar, *Trade and Commercial activities of South India*, Vol. I Calcutta, (1986), Pp.117-118

¹⁶³ Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo (Tr. & ed.)*, H. Yule, London, (1871), P.198, II P.395

¹⁶⁴ S.S. Nadvi, *Arabikaluke Kappalottam* (Mal.), (Tr.) K.K. Mohammed Abdul Kareem, Angadipuram, (1976), P.34

¹⁶⁵ K.N. Chitnis, *Socio Economic History of Medieval India*, New Delhi, (1990), P.284

depending on its quality and adds that though the horse merchants coming by land paid heavy duty at various places, still the margin of profit for them was very high¹⁶⁶.

The supply of warhorses was a matter of the highest importance to the Kings of the medieval period and every endeavour was made by them to ensure a steady traffic in horse. In the Kingdom of Vijayanagar the merchants produced the tail of horses dead on sea and the officers readily paid the merchants the cost of the horses, so that the merchants should not incur loss or stop bringing horses. Marco Polo says that even piracy was encouraged by the royalty for procuring highly sought horses. He comments, "I assure you that it is by the will of their king or he has made a covenant with the pirates, who have to give him all horses they capture.... and all other goods including gold and silver, and precious stones fall to the pirates share..... The practice is naughty and unworthy of a king¹⁶⁷. The ports on the Gujarat and Konkan coasts were controlled by the rulers of Gujarat, Ahmad Nagar, Bidar and Bijapur, but ports sometimes changed hands due to the overriding needs to import Arabian horses for military purpose¹⁶⁸.

¹⁶⁶ H.A.R Gibb, *Ibn Battuta, Op.cit.*, Pp.145-146

¹⁶⁷ Marco Polo, *Travels, Op.cit.*, Vol. II, P. 395

¹⁶⁸ H.B. Sarkar, *Trade and Commercial activities of Southern India in the Malayo-Indonesian world., Op.cit.*, P.215

Cannanore, in the middle ages was a famous disembarkation point for horses from western Asia¹⁶⁹. William Logan describes that Cannanore, the capital of Kolathiri Chief (Lord of horses) was in former days a great emporium of trade in horses between Arabia, the Persian Gulf and Southern India¹⁷⁰.

As the Indians were very ignorant of the proper management, training and feeding of the horses, the mortality rate among the horses was very high, which resulted in the constant need of importing warhorses. Marco Polo informs that though the Indians did not have farriers, the horse merchants not only never bring any farriers with them but also prevent any farriers from going thither, lest that should in any degree baulk the sale of horses which brings them in every year such vast gains. The want of proper management of horses was so serious a defect that out of the two thousand horses imported by one king, there was not one hundred left by the end of the year¹⁷¹.

In addition to the warhorses fine thoroughbred race horses were also imported to India from Yemen, Oman and Fars for the use of the royalty and the elites. The price of such noble horses ranged from one thousand dinar to four thousand dinars each¹⁷².

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, P.211

¹⁷⁰ William Logan, *Malabar*, Madras, (1989), Vol I, P. 276

¹⁷¹ Marco Polo, *Travels II*, *Op.cit.*, P. 340

¹⁷² H.A.R Gibb, (ed.) Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, Pp. 113-145

It was the Arabs who introduced the Arabian horses in to Europe. In the eighth century, Europe got Arabian horses, the renowned breed for its physical beauty, endurance, intelligence and touching devotion to its master, through Spain. During the crusades the English horse received fresh strains of blood through contact with the Arabian¹⁷³.

Other items:

The accounts of both Arab and non-Arab travellers show that the items of Arab merchandise included almost all the items of goods that were available for exchange during the medieval period. As it ranged from dried fish to live falcons a complete enlistment is almost impossible. It is reported that even snow was an important article of trade, which was transported in enormous quantities from the western mountains of Iran to Baghdad and preserved in caves until the next summer to be used to cool not only victuals but also the subterranean living rooms of the Caliphs and other well-to-do people¹⁷⁴. Hence in short, Arab merchandise included not only necessities and luxuries but also hedonic articles.

¹⁷³ P.K. Hitti, *History of Arabs Op.cit.*, P. 21

¹⁷⁴ Bertold Spuler, *Trade in the Eastern Islamic Countries, in the early centuries, Papers on Islamic History II*,(ed) D.S. Richards, London, (1970), P.19

P.K. Hitti, *History of Arabs. Op.cit.*, P.335

CHAPTER IV

STRUCTURE OF ARAB TRADE

Before examining in detail the medieval trade contacts of Arabs with the East and West, let us have a brief survey of their commercial activities within the Arab Empire. By the ninth century the Arab World which stretched from Spain to Sind had completed more than two centuries under the reign of the Caliphs. The Arabs, by this period had very much assimilated to the local Muslim population that a differentiation between the Arabs of pure descent and arabicized citizens of the empire was impracticable and senseless¹. Yet regional variations were visible in the mercantile activities within the empire. Inhabitants of the Persian region were predominantly active in caravan trade through the silk route, while inhabitants of the Southern Arabia were dominant in maritime trade².

The commercial life of the empire was so widely radiated and intertwined that geographical categorization of the trading activities as 'East trade' and 'West trade' has been made in this chapter, on the basis of the direction of movement of goods along

¹ Bertold Spuler, '*Trade in the Eastern Islamic Countries, in the Early centuries*', in *Islam and Trade of Asia* (ed.) D.S. Richards, Oxford, (1970), P. 13

² Rita Rose Di Meglio, '*Arab Trade with Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula, from 8th to 16th Century*', in *Islam and Trade of Asia* (ed.) D.S. Richards, Oxford, (1970), P. 105

the trade routes. But it can be seen that even this route, in the case of many items of goods, especially manufactured items like paper, silk, textiles, porcelain and metals had varied according to the diffusion of technical know-how of the period.

A country's trade items consist of its own produce and items imported from other countries. As the geographical boundary of the medieval Arab empire was so vast that a remarkable portion of the goods which were available to the population of the empire did not come from their 'East' or 'West', but from the diverse regions within the empire like Egypt, Persia, Syria, Sind or Spain. Iran was the major supplier of food stuffs, fruits and sugar to the Caliphate. Africa supplied natural products like ivory, rhinoceros horn, frankincense, slaves and iron, taking in return manufactured goods like cloths, beads, copperware, Islamic earthenware and glass. Through Alexandria and Constantinople Spanish products such as cotton, olive oil, figs, saffron and sugar were available all over the Empire. As cottage industry was greatly developed during the Abbasid period, rugs, tapestry, silk, cotton and woolen fabrics, satin brocade, sofa and cushion covers and other items of furniture and kitchen utensils were easily available through out the whole empire.

The Arab empire by the Abbasid period was in possession of vast lands from Pyrenese in Europe to Morocco in Africa to the

shores of the Caspian Sea in the north and to the confines of China and the Bay of Bengal in the East. The Abbasid countries were the leading industrial and manufacturing regions of the period. Hence it is clear that within the Arab Empire, as it stood in the ninth and following centuries many of the rare items, which the Mediterranean world had always brought from distant countries were available uninterrupted. It was not necessary to go to China for silk as silk was produced in Merv and Bukhara, ambergris, pearl and precious stones were available off the coasts of Arabia and in the mountains of Persia, cotton and sugar cane, myrrh and incense, woven and embroidered stuffs, rare and sweet smelling woods, ivory and metals of almost every kind could be obtained without ever crossing the borders of the Kingdom of Walid or even of the shrunken realm of Harun-al-Rashid³. The regional consolidation of Syria and Persia by the Arabs resulted not only in the abolition of the unnatural frontier between the nations but also in the political unification of the trade routes of Persian Gulf and Red Sea. When the Persian Gulf and Red Sea came under the control of one Caliph these sea routes were used side by side for exchanging goods between the East and West.

Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasids since 762 AD was the most important trade centre within the caliphate during the

³ H.C. Verma, *Medieval Routes to India, Baghdad to Delhi, A study of Trade and Military Routes*, Calcutta, (1978), P. 20

medieval period. It functioned as the centre of the Islamic world and as an intermediary between its various ports. Baghdad was founded with keen business mind and was connected with several roads and canals. This circular city had four equidistant gates connecting four highways which radiated from the centre of the city to the four corners of the empire like spokes of a wheel⁴. The big water ways of Iraq were made navigable up to Baghdad. Baghdad grew rapidly to the position of a new Babylon, a vast centre of population, wealth and luxury, consequently it became the commercial metropolis of the middle East⁵. With the foundation of Baghdad, several important commercial centres like Basra, Kufa, Wasit, Siraf and al-Ubulla developed in the northern sector of the Gulf. The commerce between the Persian Gulf and India and China flourished greatly under the Abbasids so long as Baghdad was the metropolis of the Middle East. Hence Baghdad was the Central Empire of the medieval period – not China though it was called itself the Middle Kingdom⁶.

Both history and legend have recorded that the most brilliant period of Baghdad was during the Caliphate of Harun al-Rashid (786 – 809). Though less than half a century old, Baghdad, by the early years of ninth century, had grown in to an emporium of trade

⁴ Philip K. Hitti, *'History of the Arabs'*, London, (1974), Pp.292-93

⁵ G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, New York, (1975), Pp. 53, 64

⁶ Bertold Spuler, *Op. cit.* P. 19

and commerce and as a political centre of greatest international importance. It was then that Baghdad became “a city with no peer through out the whole world”⁷. Its advantageous position as a shipping centre made all parts of then chartered world accessible to it. Merchants played a leading part in the Baghdad community. Members of each craft and trade had their exclusive shops in the same market as in the present day. The markets of the city was rich with trade items like porcelain and silk that came from China, spices, minerals and dyes from India and Indonesian Archipelago, rubies, lapis lazuli, fabrics and slaves from Central Asia, honey, wax, furs and white slaves from Scandinavia and Russia, ivory, gold dust and black slaves from Eastern Africa. It is reported that Baghdad continued to flourish during the period of reign of third and ninth Caliphs, namely Al-Mahdi (775 AD), Al Hadi (785) Harun al Rashid (786), Al Amin (809), Al-Mamun (813), Al Mu’tasim (833) and Al-wathiq (842), the golden period being the days of Harun al-Rashid and his son Mamun. By this period the Abbasids had remoulded the whole Middle East in to a single monetary exchange system and their coins, dinar and dirham, became the international medium of exchange of the period. After al-Wathiq, Baghdad began to step backward keeping pace with the downward course of the empire until the Caliphate met its final collapse at the hands of Halagu, a grand son of Chengiz Khan. This happened in 1258 AD,

⁷ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs, Op.cit.*, Pp.301-302

during the period of the thirty seventh and last caliph of the line, al Mu'tasim⁸. 'The city was devastated on such a scale that for three years the streets ran with blood and the water of the Tigris was dyed red for miles along the course'⁹.

By the first decade of the ninth century, Ubaidullah al Mahdi (909-934) had established the Fatimid dynasty in North Africa. Under the Fatimids, Cairo became a metropolis of world wide renown. In the eleventh century, with the decline of the central power of Baghdad and also with the ascendancy of Fatimids of Egypt, a major portion of the Eastern trade was diverted from the Persian Gulf and Baghdad to the Red Sea and Egypt. This rejuvenated the ancient trade centres like Aden, Cairo and Alexandria. By this redirection, Cairo and Alexandria became the mediating centres of Asia and Europe through which oriental goods travelled to the West. The disintegration of Constantinople in 1204 AD and the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 made Egypt the new centre of commercial activity. During this period, the Egyptian trade was controlled by the rich and well organized Karimi merchants (Tujjar-al-Karim) who had fleets of their own. They were, without doubt, the great mercantile travellers of the time and were the most promising section of the Middle Eastern bourgeoisie. They were dispersed and ruined when the Egyptian

⁸ *Ibid.*, Pp. 301-302

⁹ K. Ali, *A study of Islamic History*, New Delhi, (2003), P. 289

ruler Barsbay (1422-38) converted the spice trade a government monopoly. It is reported that due to this monopolization, European merchants were forced to pay 80, 100 or even 120 dinars for a load of pepper which was available for 2 dinars at the Indian ports of export and was sold in Mecca for 10 dinars¹⁰. Europeans tried to overcome this crisis by finding out a sea route to the pepper country and the Portuguese succeeded in this effort when Vasco da Gama reached Calicut in 1498 by sailing round the Cape of Good Hope.

At the beginning of the ninth century, the Umayyad caliphate of Spain was about fifty years old and had completed the reign of first two Caliphs Abdur-Rahman, its founder (756 - 88), his son Hisham (786 - 96). Though Umayyad caliphs ruled over Spain for a period of nearly eight centuries the zenith of its prosperity was during the period of the first few caliphs, especially during the reign of Abdur-Rahman III (912 - 61). Through out the Umayyad period, Cordova was the capital and was considered as the Western rival of Baghdad in splendour¹¹.

Spain under the Umayyads was one of the wealthiest lands of Europe. The capital Cordova was a centre of weaving industry and had some thirteen thousand weavers. Leather processing was

¹⁰ Charles Issawi, *'The Decline of Middle Eastern Trade', in Islam and Trade of Asia* (ed.) D.S. Richards, Oxford, (1970), P. 262.

¹¹ Philip K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P. 505.

so developed in Cordova that later when the art was carried to France and England, the terms cordovan or cordwaines became widespread. Sericulture, which was introduced by the Arabs flourished in Spain. Toledo produced world famous swords and Almeria fine glassware and brass ware. Valencia was famous for its fine ceramics and glazed tiles. By introducing West Asian agricultural methods and exploiting the favourable climate and soil, Spanish Arabs produced fruits, grains and other agricultural product in large quantities. As the industrial and agricultural products of Muslim Spain were more than sufficient for domestic consumption they exported it to Damascus, Baghdad and Mecca. After the death of Hakam II (961 - 976) there were no efficient caliphs and the caliphate began to wane after the death of the talented regent al Hajib al Mansur (1002 AD) who has been considered as the "Bismark of the tenth century and the greatest statesman and general of Arab Spain"¹². Then the caliphate disintegrated in to so many petty kingdoms and principalities which quarrelled each other for a long period and gradually succumbed to the Christian Kingdoms of the north. With the fall of Granada in 1492, Muslim rule vanished for ever from the west.

Arab trade with the East

¹² *Ibid.* Pp.527-529.

When the capital of the Arab empire was shifted from Damascus to Baghdad by the Abbasids, the capital of this vast empire was for the first time connected by the waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris with the eastern seas. Thus the Persian Gulf became the main artery of the Middle Eastern trade with the Indian Ocean¹³. In the eighth and ninth centuries the Indian Ocean had practically become an Arab lake bordering Sudan and Ethiopia in the West, Yemen, Oman, Iraq and Iran in the north, Sind and Gujarat in the east, all under Arab rule. All along the coasts of this "Arab Mediterranean"¹⁴ there were so many Arab or Muslim settlements in the non-Arab regions. During this period, the Indian Ocean trade was the backbone of the inter continental Muslim economy¹⁵. With the expansion of the Gulf trade to Africa, India, Indonesia, the Malay peninsula and China the Arab capital Baghdad became the world's largest harbour¹⁶ receiving the traffic of the then chartered seas. The merchants of Baghdad carried with them to India and China textiles, perfumes, rugs made in Islamic countries and brought silk and porcelain from China, spices and aromatics from India and Indonesian Islands which were also exported to Europe. A lively traffic was kept up with the Ceylonese and Malabar ports also. The Indian Ocean routes to India and to

¹³ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean*, London, (1984), P.96

¹⁴ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind*, Vol. I, Oxford, (1999), P. 65

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, P.7

¹⁶ G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, New York, (1975), P.61

China through the Moluccan Islands were controlled by the Arabs from the seventh century to the time of Vasco da Gama's exploration of Indian Ocean. This maritime monopoly allowed the Arabs to control much of the commerce in silk and spice. Thus the medieval Indian Ocean, unlike the Mediterranean was not a sea of war but a sea of trade and it remained so till the appearance of European traders in it.

Trade with Sind and Hind

Though the Arabs had trade contact with India since antiquity, with the advent of Islam and again with the foundation of Baghdad; it expanded and reached its peak in the ninth century¹⁷. The Arabs bipartitioned and called the lands of the Indian subcontinent as 'Sind' and 'Hind'. Sind was conquered by the Arabs in 711 AD (under al Hajjaj) and annexed to the eastern province of the Caliphate. Soon a large number of Arab merchants, missionaries and travellers migrated to this province and made it their permanent home. But in the Abbasid period Sind was gradually parcelled out among a number of Arab chieftains who were not appointed by the Caliphs. These chieftains in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries became subordinate to the Fatimid Caliphs of Cairo who were Ismailites and on perpetual rivalry with the Abbasid Caliphs of Baghdad. In Sind,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, P.83

Ismaili propaganda and Arab trade developed side by side¹⁸. The Fatimid conquest of Egypt and the translocation of the Mediterranean trade routes augmented commercial traffic through the Red sea and Egypt's role in the India trade became more dominant. During this period the Fatimid coinage was widely used in the port towns of Western India. It has even been deduced that the Shia-Sunni rivalry between the Fatimid Caliphs of Cairo and Abbasid Caliphs of Baghdad was, on one level, an ideological translation of the commercial rivalry between the Red sea and the Persian Gulf as both began to compete more intensely for the India trade¹⁹.

Arabs maintained both overland and maritime contact with the regions of Sind. Both the caravan route and coastal sea route to the East passed through Sind. Al Mansura and Multan were the important cultural centres of Arabs of Sind²⁰.

Daybol was the main port and trade centre in Sind where ships from China, Oman and Hindustan anchored for days and days²¹. Tiz and Kiz, Qallari, Panjgur, Qandabil, Alor and Mansura were the other trade centres of this period. Kambayat was a city with a naval station and merchandise of every country was found

¹⁸ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, Op.cit.*, P.216

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, P.216

²⁰ Maqbul Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations*, New Delhi, (1969), P.6

²¹ Al-Idrisi, *India and the Neighbouring Territories* (Ed.) S. Maqbul Ahmad, Leiden, (1960), P. 41

there and was sent to other countries. Ibn Battuta states that the majority of the inhabitants of Kambayat were foreign merchants who were always building fine mansions and magnificent mosques and vie with one another in doing so²². It was also a city with plenty of wealth and riches²³. Items of food stuffs exported from the Sind region were rice from Kambayat, wheat from Kiz and fruits like banana, mangoes, grapes and pomegranates from Famahul, al Mansura, Alor, Panjgur and Kirman. Makran was famous for white sugar known to the Arabs as al-Fanis which was largely exported from the coast of Gujarat to all countries and cities. Other items like timber, spices, cotton, silk and woolen cloths, tobacco, leather products etc. were exported from the towns of Thatteh, Sijistan, Shakkar, Attack, Multan, Uchh, Jhelem, Chenot, Ludhiana and Lahore.

As the adjacent kingdom of Sind, the great Gurjara Pratihara whose dynasty extended from Gujarat to the lands of the Ganges was constantly in war with the Caliphate, Arab travellers and merchants were not in a position to cross into the Kingdom. This is the reason for the absence of Arab literature on North and Central India of the period²⁴.

²² Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, P.229

²³ Marco Polo, *The Book of Sir. Marco Polo* (Tr. & ed.) H. Yule, Vol. I, London, (1929), Pp.329, 397, 398

²⁴ Maqbul Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations, Op.cit.*, P.7

Al-Hind of the Arabs was the region beyond Sind which the Arabs left unconquered and it included the Islands in the Bahr-al-Hind (Indian Ocean). Unlike the Romans, the Arab traders who came to India settled down permanently. They were welcomed honourably and well treated not only by the native Hindus but also by the rulers so much so that they were even allowed to have lands in their names and acquire and accumulate property²⁵. The Arabs always reached South India as traders and travellers and occasionally as missionaries but never as conquerors. Unlike in Sind where the Arabs exercised their political power, the relationship between the Arabs who settled in South India and the host society was based on the cordiality of commerce; never on political or racial antagonism²⁶. The safe and navigable coasts of the South India, the favourable social, economic and political policies of the Kings of the regions, amiable attitude of the natives and above all availability of precious spices attracted thousands of Arab traders to the coasts of Indian peninsula. Whole of the Indian coast from Konkan to Bengal coast was busy with commercial activities during the medieval period. The main features of this trade are included in their accounts by almost all Arab travellers from Sulayman to Abdur Razak. As there were so many Arab settlements along these coasts, Arab travellers of the period like

²⁵ Tharachand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, II edition, Allahabad, (1963), Pp.19,33

²⁶ Maqbul Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations, Op. cit.*, P.7

Al-Beruni and Ibn Battuta had got direct personal contacts with the people of these regions which facilitated them to give vivid first hand information in their accounts about the economic, social and other activities of the peoples.

Unlike the European merchants of the later days, the Arab merchants did not try to acquire trading or capitulatory right for themselves. They settled down in the host countries as peaceful; merchant communities. Gujarat, Konkan and Malabar regions were important trade centres of the period. Gujarat's coastal region became the core region of Indian Ocean trade during the period of Abbasids due to its advantageous location within the easy reach of the Arab empire.

Though there were Arab settlements on the South Western coast of India long before the establishment of Caliphate, wide spread settlements of Arabs sprang up along the coasts of whole South India during the tenth century. These communities had their own chiefs appointed by the native rulers and were given the right to administer their communal affairs. Unlike the European merchants who later appeared in the Indian Ocean trade these Arab merchants always co-operated, and kept a cordial commercial relation, with the native merchant communities like the Gujaratis, Banias of Konkan and Chettis of Coromandel Coast. They settled as peaceful merchant communities and began to establish

marriage connections with the local communities. The children of such marriages were called by the Arabs as bayasira²⁷. The Konkani Muslims²⁸ of the Konkan Coast, Navayats of Canara Coast, Mappilas of the Malabar Coast, Chulias, Marikkayars and Ilappais (Labbais) of the Coromandel Coast²⁹ Jonegans of Tanjore are examples of bayasira communities of the South India.

The Arab traders were specially welcomed by both the Hindu and Muslim rulers of south India in connection with the import of West Asian horses, which constituted a very great factor in the military strategy of the time as the availability of these war animals to the one or the other rival king influenced the whole course of war³⁰.

As the medieval Indian kings depended wholly on Arabs for the supply of war horses they had made every effort to attract the Arab horse traders in to their kingdom. Taking the opportunity Arab horse traders had cast a wide net of trade across the Indian subcontinent reaching as far as Chittagong in Bengal in the east³¹.

During this period Arabia and Central Asian regions, particularly

²⁷ S. Maqbul Ahmed, *op.cit.*, P.83

²⁸ Nairne, *The Konkan*, Bombay Gazetteer I, Part II, P.7

²⁹ Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the seventeenth century*, Oxford, (1994), Pp.205-206

³⁰ H.B. Sarkar, *Trade and Commercial Activities of Southern India in the Malayo-Indonesian world, upto AD 1511*. Vol. I, Calcutta, (1986), Pp.117-118

³¹ Abdul Kareem, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal*, Decca, (1959), P.14

Guzgan, Gharjistan, Tukharistan, Khuttal and Chaghaman were the major suppliers of horses to India³².

Through out the eight and ninth centuries the Persian Gulf remained predominant in maritime trade with India and China and the Mediterranean coast continued to diminish in relative importance³³.

Al-Ubullah was the busiest port of the Persian Gulf with the India trade. Hence it was called by Arabs as Farj al Hind meaning 'the frontier of India'. They also called it Ard al Hind, ie, the realm of India. Siraf a well established harbour town of eastern Persian Gulf which flourished in the ninth century was another major port of the Indo-Arab trade. The Arab travellers have described the splendour of its buildings that 'stretched in a continuous chain as far as the eye can reach' and affirmed that its wealth was exclusively derived from the trade with India, China and Africa.

The port of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf was the great transshipment centre for horses from Persia and Arabia. The merchants of Hormuz brought to Cambay, in addition to horses, other items like silver, gold, silk, opium, alum, vitriol, copper, seed

³² H.C. Verma, *Medieval Routes to India*, Baghdad to Delhi, Calcutta, (1978), P.23

³³ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind*, *op.cit.*, Pp.18-19

pearls and they carried back from Cambay its natural products such as food stuffs and clothes³⁴.

Though the Arabs had both overland and maritime contact with the Sind, their contact with the “Hind” was mainly maritime. It was not possible to extend the caravan trade of the Sind to the South due to the enmity of the Gurjara Pratihara dynasty, the immediate neighbours of Sind. More over, development of Baghdad as a port of international trade facilitated easy maritime contact with the west Indian ports like Cambay (kambayat), Tanah, Broach, Sindan, Sindabur, Saymur, Kulam Mali, Sanjili (Muzris) and Kulam (Quilon). Gujarat, Konkan and Malabar region were important trade centres of the period. Gujarat coastal regions became the core region of Indian Ocean trade during the period of the Abbasids due to its advantageous location within the easy reach of the Arab empire.

Broach at the mouth of ‘Narbada’ was an important port of medieval period. Four Arab writers Masudi, Idrisi, Yaqut and Dimishqi make mention of this port as ‘Barus’. Broach was a port for vessels coming from China and from Sind³⁵. South to Broach there were many ports in the kingdom of Balhara with whom the

³⁴ Tome Pires, *The Suma Oriental*, Hakluyt Society, London, (1944), Pp.42-43

³⁵ S.M.H. Nainar, *Arab Geographers Knowledge of Southern India*, Madras, (1942), P.27

Arab traders had maintained very close commercial contacts due to the friendly attitude of its rulers.

Masudi informs that of all the kings of Sind and India, there was no one who paid greater respect to the Arabs and Muslims than the Balhara. In this Kingdom Islam was safe, honoured and respected³⁶. Historians are of difference of opinion about the territories of Balhara Kingdom. Sulayman, Ibn Khurdhadbeh and Ibn Rusta opined that Balhara area begins from Kamkam (Konkan) on the West coast of India and extends all over the subcontinent up to border of China. But Istakiri, Ibn Hauqal and Idrisi noted that the land of Balhara was from Kambaya (Cambay) to Saymur³⁷. Sopara (Sopara), Thana, Dabhol, Sindan, Sindabur, Hanur (Honawar), Barqali (Batal) and Saymur were the important ports of the Balharas.

Sopara situated in the northern part of Konkan is identified as modern Surat³⁸. Sopara was the most urbanized port of the medieval period which was surrounded by a vast hinterland of production centres in a variety of goods. Manufactured items like cotton textiles and leather goods were exported from this port.

³⁶ Masudi, *Muruj al-Dhabab Wa Ma'adin al Jawhar*, Vol.I, (Ed. & Tr.) A Sprenger, London, (1841), P.382

³⁷ Ibn Hauqal, *Surat al-Ard* (Ed.) J.H. Kramers, Leiden, (1938), P. 283

³⁸ Appa Dorai, *Economic Conditions of South India*, Madras, (1936), Vol. II, P.507

Thana was the next port to the Southern side from where Arab traders exported drugs particularly tabashir, leather items and cotton goods. The Arabs imported to this port metals like gold, silver and copper. Thana is the only ancient port of the region which has preserved its ancient name up to the present days.

Dabhol was an important port where many horses were brought from Egypt, Khurasan, Tarkestan and Arabia³⁹.

Sindan is identified with Sindhudurg. The Arab travellers like Ibn Khurdhadbeh, Masudi, Istakhri, Ibn Hawkal, Maqdisi and Idrisi mention this port. Masudi says, "it is a neighbouring town of Kambaya where Kambayan sandals were made"⁴⁰. The people of this port were wealthy merchants and great travellers. The major items of export from this port were rice, honey, coconut, banana, mangoes etc.

Sindabur, which was later known as Goa was the most important port of the Balhara Kingdom. Its most favourable location adjacent to the Mandovi river provided excellent shelter for a number of large vessels. 'Many ships of Moors came hither from Mecca, the city of Aden, Ormuz, Cambay and Malabar'⁴¹. The

³⁹ Athnadius Nikitin, *The Travels- in India in the fifteenth century* (ed) R.H. Major, Delhi, (1974), P.20

⁴⁰ Masudi, *in Arab geographers knowledge of South India, (Ed), S.M.H. Nainar, Madras, (1942), P.66*

⁴¹ Appa Durai, *Economic conditions of South India, Vol.II, Op.cit., P.593*

Arabs imported horses to India through this port taking in return rice, sugar, iron, pepper, ginger and other spices. As Sindabur was situated at the mid point of the coast between Gujarat and Malabar it also functioned as a mid way stopover for the coastal vessels plying between the two busy commercial centres of the period.

Hanur (Honawar) or Hinawr was a port situated on the north side of the extensive estuary of Sharavati river. It was the principal port of the Nayaks of Ikkeri and had functioned as an important port in the coastal trade, especially in pepper. Ibn Battuta informs that the inhabitants of Hinawr “live by maritime commerce and have no cultivated land”⁴².

Barqali (Batal), the next port to the South of Honavar was the major port of Vijayanagar. The main item of export from this port was pepper.

Saymur or Shirur was an important seaport during the tenth century. It exported aromatics to the west. During the period of Bhamini Kingdom this port was famous for horse trade. As supply of horses was a matter of great importance to the kings of Deccan there was a steady traffic of horses to this port from the ports of Red sea and the Persian Gulf.

Trade with Malabar

⁴² Travells of Ibn Battua, (Ed.), H.A.R. Gibb, *Op.cit.*, P.230

It was the spice trade of Arabs that made Malabar an important trade centre of the medieval period and gave it the famous surname 'the pepper country' ie. biladul fulful. The term Malabar itself was first used by an Arab, Al Beruni (AD. 970-1039 AD)⁴³. Even the medieval history of Europe especially its maritime history, is closely connected with the pepper trade of Malabar⁴⁴.

Malabar had some geographical advantages that assisted the growth of navigation and commerce during the medieval period. The tall mount Eli which was the main visible land mark of the Western Coast from very far out at sea acted as a light house to guide, the sailors to the land.

As many of the Malabar ports were situated near river estuaries, ships could be sheltered in the river mouths during boisterous monsoon season. The mud banks formed out in the sea in parallel to the coast line between Alleppey and Cranganore by eroding mud from the steep Western Ghats acted as a natural protective wall, beneath which the vessels of Cochin and Muziris ports could be anchored in the sea even at the height of stormy south west monsoon⁴⁵.

⁴³ C.A. Innes, *Al-Beruni's India*, Malabar District Gazateer, Vol.I, Madras, (1951), P.76

⁴⁴ K.V. Krishna Iyer, *A History of Kerala*, Coimbatore, (1968), P.1

⁴⁵ Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford, (1994), P.9

The vast navigable inland backwaters known as “Kayal” which extended over 120 kilometers from Ponnani to Alleppy running almost parallel to the Arabian Sea coast provided access and cheap transport to the hinterlands of Malabar, where best quality pepper was available in great quantities.

The native rulers of Malabar had given every encouragement and special privileges to the Arab traders to attract them to their ports. Shaykh Zainudheen has noted in his *Tuhfal-al-Mujahideen*, that the rulers of Malabar had made it convenient for the Muslims to organize Friday congregation prayers and Id celebrations, ‘a death sentence on a follower of their religion was never carried out without the consent of the elders of the Muslim community and converts to their faith were not molested’. The Zamorin of Calicut who enjoyed greater power and reputation among the rulers of Malabar had treated the Muslims especially the foreign Muslims with great affection and respect⁴⁶. In return for this the Arab merchants flocked in large numbers to his harbour⁴⁷. When they began to establish matrimonial contacts with the native community, their descendants came to be known as Mappilas. As many of the Mappilas of the period were engaged either in trade or in navigation Ludovico di varthema, the Italian traveller (AD 1503-

⁴⁶ Shaykh Zainudeen Maqdum, *Tuhfat ul Mujahideen, Op.cit.*, Pp.35, 45-46.

⁴⁷ M.G.S. Narayanan, Calicut; *The city of Truth, Revisited* , Publication Division, University of Calicut, (2006), P.65

1508) says that at the time of his visit all the sea trade and navigation of Calicut were in the hands of Muslim inhabitants. He thought them so influential that “Malabar would have had a Moorish king if the Portuguese had not come to Malabar”⁴⁸. It was a custom in this city that “as soon as any foreign merchant reached the city, the king assigns him a Nayre to protect and serve him and a clerk to keep his accounts and look after his affairs and a broker to arrange for him to obtain such goods as he had need of”⁴⁹. The rulers of Calicut were very particular in extending justice to the foreign merchants, that many of the Arab travellers appreciated the justice and security that prevailed in the city during their period⁵⁰.

By the favour of the rulers, the settlers enjoyed a high social status and they lived peacefully in the society abstaining from interfering with the social customs of the host society. It is noted by Shaykh Zainuddin that the Muslims of Malabar lived in great comfort and tranquility in consequence of their abstaining from exercising any oppression towards the people of the country⁵¹.

⁴⁸ Ludovico di Varthema, *The travels of Ludovico di Varthema (Tr)*. T.W. Joned, Reprint, New Delhi, (1989), P.151.

⁴⁹ Duarte Barbosa, *Op.cit.*, P.77

⁵⁰ R.H. Major (ed.) Abdur Razak, *India in the 15th century*, P.14. Elliot, Abdur Razzak, *History IV*, P.98

⁵¹ Shaykh Zainudeen, *Op.cit.*, P.103

Moreover the peculiar social structure of the native community of Malabar, and the benign attitude of its natives helped the Arabs to establish a 'business empire' of their own in Malabar. There was a belief among the Hindus of the medieval period that sea travel was forbidden to them and in the caste hierarchy merchants were of low social status. Hence the ruling and high class Hindus kept aloof from trade and navigation. Moreover, unlike the other regions of Indian peninsula absence of the Hindu merchant community, the Vysyas, in the Malabar gave ample room to the Arab merchants to establish and maintain their presence in Malabar. Thus it is said that Arab merchants were invited in to Malabar by the spices, settled by its princes and maintained by its natives.

The Arab merchants brought to Malabar horses, dates and frankincense from Arabia, Carpets from Bukhara, silk handkerchiefs from Kufa, linen textiles from Egypt and silk from Shiraz. They took with them in additions to pepper so many other spices like ginger, cardamom, camphor and malabathram. Goods like coconut, coir, teak wood, bamboo, jack fruit, lemon, mango were also exported from Malabar.

The maritime route and itinerary of Arab merchants to Malabar is clearly described in many of the accounts of the Arab travellers. The duration of deep sea journey from the Arab coast to

the Malabar Coast was about one month if led by the north east monsoon of the months November and December. While making coasting voyages they used to call at the ports of Qays, Hormus, Tiz in Makran, Daybol, al Mansura in Sind and then at the Konkan ports like Broach, Sindan, Sindabur, Saymur and finally at the ports of Malabar coast.

Malabar ports

Ibn Battuta describes the land of Mulaybar (Malabar) which extend for two months journey along the coast from Sindabur (Goa) to Kawlam (Quilon) as the 'pepper country'. Major ports of Malabar frequented by Arab merchants were Fakanur, Manjarur, Jurfattan, Hili, Badfattan, Dahfattan, Fandarina, Kaliqut, Shaliyat, Sanjili and Kwalam.

Fakanur was an important port on the Malabar Coast which is mentioned by Yaqut and Dimishqi. It is identified with Barkur which was the traditional capital of the Tuluva. The Chief of the Muslim community at Fakanur was known as Basadaw⁵².

Manjarur, the next important port of Malabar is the modern Mangalore. Dimishqi and Abul Fida give much information about this port. Abul Fida says that Manjarur is the biggest town in Manibar (Malabar). Ibn Battuta mentions Manjarur as a town at

⁵² Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa* (Tr.) Gibb, New York, (1938), P.233

which most of the merchants from Fars and Yemen embark and a place where pepper and Ginger were exceedingly abundant. At the time of his visit there was a Muslim colony of about 4000 inhabitants in a suburb along side the city.

Jurfattan (Srikandapuram) is described as a major port in the accounts of Arab travellers. It is a populous town on a small gulf⁵³. Large quantities of rice grain and pepper were exported from Jurfattan to Sarandib (Sri Lanka)⁵⁴.

Ibn Battua describes Eli (Hili) as a large and well built city situated on a big inlet and the farthest town reached by ships from China. He informs that it was one of the three ports of Malabar where the Chinese traded, the other two were the ports of Kawlam (Quilon) and Kalikut (Calicut)⁵⁵. Eli was an important port of Malabar frequented by ships from Persian Gulf. The accounts of Shaykh Zainuddin that the third Mosque in Kerala was built at Ezhimala (Eli) by Malik Ibn Habib, nephew of Malik Ibn Dinar shows that there were Muslim settlements at this port from the very early days of the advent of Islam to Kerala. According to Ibn Battuta, the town of Hili was venerated by both Muslims and infidels on account

⁵³ Elliot and Downson, *Op.cit.*, P.90

⁵⁴ S.M.H. Nainar, *Op.cit.*, P.41

⁵⁵ Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, (Tr) H.A.R. Gibb, New Delhi, (1990), P.234

of this Cathedral mosque and sea farers used to make many vow offering to it.

Badfattan (Baliapattam), the present day Valarpattanam is mentioned as Babatan by Ibn Khurdhadhbih as Batbatan by Ibn Hawqal and as Badfattan by Dimishqi. It is situated five miles north of Cannanore. As a town and a port it had an important role in the Arab trade of medieval period.

Dahfattan (Dharmadam), or Dharmapattanam ie. 'the place of charity' was a busy port during the medieval period. It is traditionally believed that it was from this port that Cheraman Perumal bade farewell to Malabar and sailed for Mecca⁵⁶. Shayk Zainuddin has mentioned Dharmadam as the place where one of the earliest mosques of Malabar was built by Malik bin Habib, the companion of Malik Dinar.

Fandarina (Pantalayani Kollam)

Fandarina situated at the north of Calicut was one of the most historically important places of Malabar. Almost all the Arab and non-Arab travellers and geographers have mentioned it. Once it was the capital of Kollam Raja of Payanad. Ibn Battuta described it as a large and fine town with orchards and bazars.

⁵⁶ Shaykh Zainuddin, *Tuhfat-al-Mujahidin*, *Op.cit.*, P. 32

It was a famous marketing centre of early medieval Malabar and before the predominance of Calicut this port was the most important port of the region. Al Idrisi says, 'the inhabitants are rich, the markets well supplied and trade flourishing'⁵⁷. Cardamom and pepper were the main export of this port. S.M.H. Nainar reports that cardamom grown on the slopes of the hill is exported to all countries⁵⁸.

Kalicut (Calicut)

Calicut became a great coastal emporium from eleventh century. The trade shift of the 11th century to 13th century and the Zamorin's patronage of Muslims from abroad were the main factors of the growth of this city⁵⁹.

The Chinese writer, Wang Ta-Yuan reported that Ku-li-fo (Calicut) is the most important of all the maritime centres of trade⁶⁰.

"The goods traded by the Chinese in this city were gold, silver, coloured satin, blue and white porcelain, beads, musk, quick silver and camphor"⁶¹. Ibn Battuta reckoned Calicut among the greatest ports in the world, at par with Alexandria and Canton

⁵⁷ S.M.H. Nainar, *Op.cit.*, P. 35

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁹ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind*, *Op.cit.*, P.76

⁶⁰ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Op.cit.*, P.294

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, P.298

when he disembarked in this port he saw thirteen Chinese vessels in the port. It was frequently visited by traders from China, Sumatra, Ceylon, the Maldives, Yemen, Fars and from all other quarters⁶². Abdur Razzak compared Calicut port to Hormuz which was visited by merchants from every city and every country. During the palmy days, Calicut was described as “the richest mart of all the cities in which was available all the spices, drugs, nutmegs and other things that can be desired, all kinds of precious stones, pearls and seed pearls, musk, sanders, aguila, fine dishes of earthen ware, lacker, gilded coffers and the fine things of China, gold, amber, wax, ivory, fine and coarse cotton goods both white and dyed of many colours, much raw and twisted silk, stuffs of silk and gold, cloth of gold, cloth of tissue, grian, scarlet, silk carpets, copper, quick silver, vermilion, alum, coral, rose water and all kinds of conserve. Thus every kind of merchandise from all parts of the world was available in this great emporium”⁶³.

Calicut was regarded as the “city of truth”⁶⁴ and the honesty of the city can be seen recorded in history. The story of the Arab merchant from Maskiyath (Muscat) narrated in the Keralolpathi Chronicles (Genesis of Kerala) is a clear testimony for the honesty of Calicut. It is said that this merchant in order to find out an

⁶² Ibn Battuta, *Op.cit.*, P.234

⁶³ Appa Dorai, *Economic Conditions of South India* , *Op.cit.*, P.603

⁶⁴ M.G.S. Narayanan, Calicut, *The city of Truth Revisited*, Calicut, (2006)

honest place to establish his business, travelled in many countries including Calicut. He entrusted with the ruler of each country a closed jar for safe keeping until his return telling that it contained pickles. But he had secretly put some gold in each jar under the pickles. After a short period he returned to each of the countries and took back the jar from the ruler and inspected it. He found that all the gold he had put in the jars were lost except that in the jar entrusted with the king of Calicut. When he realized that this city was the most honest city he settled down there⁶⁵. Abdur Razzak appreciated the honesty of Calicut city saying that 'rich merchants bring to it from many countries large cargoes of merchandise which they disembark and deposit in the streets and market places and for a length of time leave it without consigning it to anyone's charge or placing it under a guard'.

Shaliyat (Chaliyam)

Shaliyat the modern Beypore was known to Romans as Phohar⁶⁶. Ibn Battuta describes Shaliyat as a most beautiful town in which the fabrics called by its name are manufactured⁶⁷. Abul Fida mentioned it as one of the cities of Manibar (Malabar). The Beypore river which flowed through the excellent teak forests of

⁶⁵ Dr. Hermen Gundert, *Keralolpathi (Mal)* (ed) Edamarug, Balan Publications, Trivandrum, (1961), Pp.101-102

⁶⁶ Dr. Kunhali V., *Construction of Indian Vessels in 16th century in Malabar* (Jnrl) The Malabar, Calicut University, Vol.I, (Sept. 2001), P.16

⁶⁷ Ibn Battua, (ed) Gibb, *Op.cit.*, P. 240

Malabar brought teak wood to Beypore which was either exported to other countries as logs or used for building the ships. It was the teak of Malabar that gave pre-eminence to Beypore in ship building⁶⁸.

Thandiyur (Kadalundi)

It may be Kadalundi. It is a small port and a fishing village. “This Kadalundi is supposed by some as Tyndis of Ptolemy”⁶⁹. Abul Fida mentioned it as the extremity of Manibar.

⁶⁸ V. Kunhali, *Op. cit.*, P.17

⁶⁹ S.M.H. Nainar, *Op. cit.*, P.83

Sanjili (Kodungallur)

Sanjili situated at the river estuary of Periyar and at the mouth of Arabian sea is mentioned as an important port in the Arab and non Arab travellers' and geographers' accounts and also in the indigenous works but with various names like Moyirikode, Makotai, Jingili, Chinkali, Shinkli, Singuigli, Shenakala, etc⁷⁰.

Ibn Khurdhabih, Idrisi, Dimishqi and Abul Fida described Sanjili as a great trade centre. Malik Ibn Dinar, built his first Mosque in Kerala at Kodungallur. Beads manufactured at Arikkamedu near Madras were brought overland to this port via Palghat Gap and were exported along with the native products such as coir and pepper.

Kodungallur was the meeting place of various diasporas of Jews, Christians and Arabs. It was the capital of the native rulers of matrilineal successors of the Ceraman Perumal up to 1341 AD. After the great flood of the year in River Periyar which resulted in the silting and blocking of the harbour by mud bank the trade was shifted to Kochi or Kochazi.

Kawlam (Quilon)

The geographical peculiarities itself made Kollam an important commercial centre of medieval Kerala. It is situated in between Arabian sea and the Ashtamuti Kayal. More over, the

⁷⁰ K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol. I, Delhi, (1982), P.313

various branches of Ashtamuti Kayal facilitated this port to have connection with the interior markets.

Eight Arab writers like Ibn Khurdhadbih, Sulayman, Ibn Faqih, Idrisi, Yaqut, Qazwihi, Dimishqi and Abul Fida mention this port. In its golden days, Quilon was ranked with Alexandria on the one hand and Zayton on the other. Ibn Battuta says, "this is the nearest port of the Mulaybar town to China and it is to it that most of the Chinese merchants come. It has fine bazaars and its merchants are immensely wealthy; a single merchant will buy a vessel with all that is in it with goods from his own house"⁷¹.

Trade with Coromandel Coast

Arabs called the Coromandel Coast "Ma'bar" meaning "a ferry" or crossing place. The Coromandel Coast was a crossing junction of the Arabs because it was from this coast that they changed the direction of their voyage either to the Bengal coast or to the Eastern archipelago and China.

By the ninth century there were many Arab settlements in the Coromandel Coast and in Madurai region. A Tamil Copper plate of 875 AD speaks of the facilities given by the king of Madurai to a group of Arab traders settled in the region⁷².

⁷¹ Ibn Battuta, (Ed.) H.A.R. Gibb, *Op.cit.*, P.238

⁷² M.Y. Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Karnatic*, Madras, (1974), P.53

During the great age of Cola expansion Muslim settlements flourished on the Coromandel Coast and in Madurai regions⁷³. The encouragement of Cola rulers at their increasing demand for Arabian horses were the main reasons for the wide spread settlement of Arab merchants in the Coromandel region.

By the eleventh century Arabs settled along the Coromandel Coast of South India had attained social and political predominance. A Saracen became the King's chief minister and governor of the sea ports of Battan, Malipattan and Koil and a Pandya King had Musalmans in his service⁷⁴.

Like the Mappilas, the coastal Muslims of Coromandel region were prosperous maritime traders and shipping magnates and they were shafite as well. Later they came to be known as Maraikkayar or Kayalar and emerged as a maritime community quite distinct from the rural Hanafi Muslims of the Tamil hinter land who were cultivators, weavers, pretty traders and the like. Later this Maraikkayar Community became highly influential groups in the socio-economic fields and under them, Kayalpatanam and Adirampatanam became great centres of trade⁷⁵. As the Maraikkayar and Labbai traders got the support and patronage of

⁷³ T. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, London, (1913), P. 276

⁷⁴ Elliot (ed.), Amir Khusru, *In History told by its own Historians*, Vol. III, P.550

⁷⁵ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, Op. cit.*, Pp.78-79

native rulers, the Colas of Coromandel and the Nayaks of Madurai, they became prosperous and their trading activities spread in to the international entrepots of Java, Sumatra and Malay Peninsula. As the Lebbai merchants were specialized in gem and pearl trade the term Lebbai became a synonym to “jeweller”⁷⁶. Extension of Maraikkayar and Lebbai trading and sailing activities to the Malay and Indonesian archipelago resulted in the rapid spread of Islam to the eastern regions. Compared with the West Coast of South India, the East Coast had not apparently as many important harbours during the medieval period.

Dattan (Devipattanam), Tanda (Thondi), Abatu (Adirampattanam), Kayal (Kayal Pattanam), Manifattan (Nagapattanam), Podouke (Arikamedu) and Motupalli were the main centres of medieval trade along the Coromandel region.

Dattan (Devipattanam) situated in the Ramnad district was a major port of Coromandel coast. Dimishqui has noted it as one of the major cities of big Ma’bar before Tanda (Thondi). Tanda also known as Colan Tondi which had trading contacts with the Chinese⁷⁷ from very early days was a great centre of Arab trade and maintained its importance even in the centuries of Muslim invasion⁷⁸. Masudi, Yaqut, Qazwini and Abul Fida mention Mandari

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 79

⁷⁷ V.R.R. Dikshitar, *Silappadikaram*, (Eng. Tr.) Oxford, (1939), P.204

⁷⁸ Dr. S.K. Ayyangar, *South India and by Mohammedan invaders*, P.206

(Mandarqin) as a centre of trade. Masudi says that Mandarfin is opposite to the Island of Sarandib (Ceylon). According to Yaqut Mandarquin produced Qanna and sandal wood and tabashir was exported. Abatu or Adirampattanam is situated in the north west corner of Palks Bay: It is said that the modern name Adirampattanam is a contraction of Ati-Vira rama-pattanam, named after the Pandyan king Ativira-Raman (1562-7)⁷⁹. Adirampattanam was a port with a vast hinterland of rice and textile producing villages.

Kayal (Kayalpattanam) mentioned by Marco Polo as Cail was a great port and city situated in the delta of the Tamraparni river, on the coast of Tinnevely district. It was the most celebrated port of the Maraikkayar traders during the medieval period. Marco Polo described this port as a very important trading station of his period⁸⁰. "It is at this city that the ships touch that come from the west, as from Hormos and from Kis and from Aden, and all Arabia, laden with horses and with other things for sale"⁸¹. This deep water port ruined later due to sand silt and now lays buried in sand three kilometres inland⁸².

⁷⁹ Tanjore Dt. Gazetteer, Vol. I, P.251

⁸⁰ Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, (Tr. & ed.), H.Yule, Vol. II, London (1871), Pp.370-4

⁸¹ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Foreign Notices of South India*, Madras (1939), P. 179.

⁸² Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime India*, Oxofrd, (1994), P.25

Manifattan is the modern Nagapattanam, which had served as an outlet for the Kingdom of Tanjore. It was the chief city of the Naga people from whose name the term Nagapattanam is derived. Rashid Ud Din referred it as Malifattan and later when it became a Portuguese settlement area it was called by them the city of Choromandel. During the eleventh century it was a busy port of Buddhist traders and a large Buddhist Vihar was established to accommodate the large number of indigenous and foreign Buddhist traders⁸³.

Podouke or Arikamedu was the leader in the production and export of beads both stone and glass for centuries. Beads produced in this region were sent overland via Palghat gap to Musiris port for shipment to the Roman world⁸⁴.

Motupalli was a famous port for the export of most delicate buckrams (fine cotton stuffs) and diamonds. Marco Polo is of the opinion that in smoothness the buckrams were comparable to spider web and that there were no king or Queen in world but might be glad to wear them⁸⁵. The Motupalli charter known as the Abhayasasana granted by the Ganapathi Deva Maharaja shows

⁸³ R. Champakalekshmi, *Growth of Urban Centres in South India; Kudamukku-Palaiyarai, the twin city of Colas, Studies in History*, Vol.I, No: I, (1979), P.26

⁸⁴ *Man and Environment*, (Journal), *Op. cit.*, P.85

⁸⁵ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Op. cit.*, P.175

that the native rulers were very keen to attract merchants to their kingdom⁸⁶.

Horses were the most important item of import to the Coromandel regions while the main items of export were glass, beads, pearls, coral, gems and other precious stones, camphor and cotton stuffs.

Marco Polo has noted the perpetual import of war horses by the Arab merchants of Kiz, Hormus, Dofar, Soer and Aden for the Kings of Coromandel, saying that a great part of the wealth of the countries was wasted in purchasing horses. He has stated that as people of the region were ignorant of proper breeding and management of horses, mortality rate was very high which necessitated a continuous import of large numbers of horses every year⁸⁷.

Trade with Bengal and Indian Ocean Islands

Arabs called the Bay of Bengal as the sea of Harkand which is perhaps a corruption of Sanskrit Harikeliya a term used to denote East Bengal⁸⁸. They established permanent mercantile settlements in the South East regions of the Bay like Arakan and Dacca⁸⁹. They brought cowrie shells to Bengal, in shiploads from

⁸⁶ Appa Dorai, *Economic Conditions of South India*, Vol. II, *Op. cit.*, P.607

⁸⁷ Marco Polo, *Travels of marco Polo*, (ed.), Yule and Cordier, Book III, Pp. XVI, XVII

⁸⁸ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind*, *Op. cit.*, P.256

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, P.82

the Laccadives and Maldives. These sea shells were known in Bengal as kaparddaka puranas and were used as a medium of exchange in local trade. In return they took rice, sugar and textile items.

Cowries were in great demand in Bengal and near by regions that the Chinese traveller, Wang Ta Yuan (1330-1349 AD.) has pointed out that “every sea trader takes one shipload of Cowries to Wu-tieh (Orissa?) and Peng-Ka-la (Bengal) where he is sure to exchange it for a shipload of rice and more, for these people use cowries as money and a very ancient style of currency it is”⁹⁰.

Sugar was exported in large quantities from Bengal to Ceylon, Arabia and Persia⁹¹. Rhinoceros horn was another costly items of export from Bengal⁹².

The deltaic nature of the Bengal coast with its constantly shifting channels and inlets, though provided easy access to great inland waterways, was a great hindrance in the establishment of permanent ports in the region⁹³. The food stuffs and other agricultural items such as cotton, indigo and other dye stuffs produced in the fertile hinter lands were exported from regions like

⁹⁰ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Op. Cit.*, P.293

⁹¹ Barbosa, *An Account*, (Ed.) M.L. Dames, Hakluyt Society, (1918), II, Pp.112, 146

⁹² Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, Op. cit.*, P.272

⁹³ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean*, Oxford, (1993), P.87

Mainamati and Lalmaic according to the rhythms set by the monsoon. Silhat was another important centre of Arabs⁹⁴. The major items of exports from Bengal during the early medieval period were textiles, such as silk brocade, cotton and jute⁹⁵. Before the establishment of Arab trade settlements all along the Indonesian regions Bengal's trade relations were confined to their West, but with the expansion of Arab trade in the Indonesian archipelago Bengal trade began to extend to South East Asia. During the period between the seventh and eleventh centuries traders of South East Bengal especially textile traders maintained perpetual contacts with the Arab merchants who had settled in the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago. Gold and Silver were used as international medium of exchange especially to pay for the "extremely fine and unrivalled cotton textiles" which were the bulk export of the country⁹⁶. Though Bengal cotton trade began to decline from the twelfth century due to the introduction of Coromandel cotton fabrics of the Cola kingdom to the markets, Arabs maintained commercial contacts with the coastal regions of Bay of Bengal till their ouster from the region by the Europeans.

⁹⁴ S.S. Nadvi, *Arab Navigation (Tr.Mal.)*, Kareem, Arabikalude Kappalottam, Tirurkad, (1936), P.2

⁹⁵ L. Gopal, *The Textile Industry in Early Medieval India (AD.700-1200)* *Jourl. of the Bombay Br. Of the Royal Asiatic Society (1964-65) Vol.39-40*, Pp. 95-103

⁹⁶ Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, P.272

Ibn Battuta calls Bengal as 'Bengala' and says that it was vast country abounding in rice and nowhere in the world had he seen any land where prices were lower than these; on the other hand it was a gloomy place hence the people of Khurasan called it "a hell full of good things". The port city of Sudkawan (Chittagong according to Yule) situated on the coast of the great sea, Laknawthi (Lakshamanawati) was the capital city of the excellent ruler of Bengal, Sultan Fukr-ud-Din⁹⁷. Laknawti (Lakshmanawati), Sylhet (Kamrub), Sunurkawan (Sonargaon) were other important cities of the Bengal during the period Duarte Barbosa, when he visited Pegu (Burma) had seen that Pegu's foreign trade was in the hands of Muslim Indian or Arabs⁹⁸. The main export from Pegu was gold, silver, rubies, sapphires, lead, Beniamin (Benzoin), rice, wine and sugar.

Though the Arab merchants were familiar with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of the Bay, there were no Arab settlements on the Islands. Arab merchants on the way from Coromandel or from Ceylon to South East Asia or to China maintained contact with the inhabitants of these Islands. Arab travellers say that the inhabitants of these Islands wore few cloths and when the boats of the merchants passed by them, they rowed up to them in small and big canoes made up of a single piece of wood to sell coconuts,

⁹⁷ Ibn Battuta, *Op. cit.*, Pp.267-68

⁹⁸ C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, London, (1968), P.159

sugar cane, bananas, coconut wine (toddy) and some amber. They exchanged these items with the Arabs for iron and the transactions were made by signs for they did not follow the language of Arabs⁹⁹.

Arabs considered the islands of Laccadives and the Maldives as part of Al-Hind. Laccadives, a contraction of Sanskrit Lakshadwipa meaning one lakh islands, consists of 27 islands most of which are uninhabited situated west to the Malabar Coast¹⁰⁰. They are the northern most and smallest islands of the central Indian ocean. The Maldives named after their capital Māle contains 1200 islands of which less than 200 are inhabited lie south to the Laccadive Islands. As all these islands, collectively known to the Arabs as the Dibayat¹⁰¹ or Dibajat¹⁰² lie across the sea route from South Arabia to South India, Ceylon and Far East, the Arabs used these islands as their main stopovers to take on board fresh water and repair their ships.

Ibn Battuta called Maldivian islands as Dhibat-al-Mehal and described it as one of the wonder lands of the world¹⁰³.

Ibn Battuta who lived there for about four years informs that, 'the islands' inhabitants used coconut timber and coir for making

⁹⁹ Maqbul Ahmed, *Indo-Arab Relations, Op. cit.*, Pp.101-102

¹⁰⁰ Andre Wink, *Op. cit.*, P.81

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, P.82

¹⁰² Genevieve Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea*, Oxford, (1988), P.40

¹⁰³ Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, (ed.) Gibb, *Op. cit.*, P.241

ships. They used coir for sewing their ships and for stitching sails. Such ships made entirely by using their only natural resource, coconut palm, were exported to Oman, Yemen and other Arab regions.

According to Al Idrisi, Arab sailors, especially from Oman and Marbat came to the Laccadives and Maldives islands where they constructed boats using coconut wood. After the boats were built they loaded them with coconut wood and other goods and carried them away to their homeland¹⁰⁴. Dried fish called Qulb-al-mas and coir called qanbar were exported to India, China and Yemen¹⁰⁵.

The seas surrounding the Maldives produced large quantities of ambergris which was considered as the property of Māle Sulthan and it is said that he used to punish with death all those who had tried to take it from him¹⁰⁶. Sulayman and Masudi have also recorded the abundance of ambergris along the shores of Maldivian Islands¹⁰⁷.

As there was no agriculture at any of the Islands of Maldives except that a cereal resembling millet in one district, food stuffs

¹⁰⁴ Al Idrisi, *India and the Neighbouring Territories*, (Tr.) S. Maqbul Ahmad, Leiden, (1960), P.30

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Battuta, (ed.) Gibb, *Op. cit.*, Pp.242-243

¹⁰⁶ Genevieve Boucher, *Regent of the Sea*, *Op. cit.*, P.42

¹⁰⁷ Sulayman, *Akhbar*, *Op. cit.*, Pp.3-6

Al-Masudi, *Muruj al Dhahab*, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, Pp.335-336

like rice, chicken, spices etc. were imported from Bengal, Ma'bar, Mulaybar and Maqdashaw¹⁰⁸.

As Islam was introduced to the Laccadives through merchants from South Arabia and Malabar coast they became followers of Shafi Madhab. Before their conversion to Islam, the inhabitants of the Laccadives were followers of Hindu caste hierarchy and matrilineal kinship system. Even after becoming Muslims they have maintained a social hierarchy and the Malabari matrilineal kinship system¹⁰⁹. The inhabitants of the Maldives before their conversion to Islam were Theravada- Budhists without any caste system and were followers of patrilineal kinship system. Though Islamization of Maldives had started very early by the Arab merchants it gained momentum by the conversion of the king of Maldives in 1153 AD and was completed by the thirteenth century¹¹⁰.

Coconut, coconut wood, rope, dried fish called boinsto¹¹¹, cowrie shells and ambergris were the main exports of Maldives. At the time of Ibn Battuta's visit the Maldives were ruled by a queen called Khadija and the export items of the period were dried fish,

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Battuta, (ed.) H.A.R. Gibb, *Op. cit.*, P.247

¹⁰⁹ Andre Wink, *Op. cit.*, P.82

¹¹⁰ Andre Wink, *Op. cit.*, P.82

¹¹¹ Genevieve Bouchon, *Op. cit.*, *Regent of the Sea*, P.40

coconuts, cloths and cotton turbans as well as brass utensils of which they have a great many, cowrie shells and qunbar¹¹².

Trade with Ceylon

The Island of Ceylon known to the Arabs as Sarandib on their maritime route to the Eastern archipelago had Arab settlements from the beginning of the Christian Era¹¹³.

According to Bayly the Arabs accommodated in Sri Lanka as settlers from southern Arabia particularly from Yemen and Hadramaut as early as Malabr ie. in the first century AD¹¹⁴. Arabs maintained commercial contacts with Sarandib (Sri Lanka) from the very early days of their contact with the East due to the strategic location of the island in the Indian Ocean. As Adam's Peak, the supposed place where Adam is said to have stayed in repentance after his banishment from Paradise¹¹⁵, is situated in Sarandib, Muslims began to visit the Island from the very early days of Islam. Soon commercial contacts were established between the Muslims of Sarandib and their co-religionists in the Middle East, Malabar, Coromandel and South East Asia. Tradition says that it was with a missionary group returning from Adams Peak that the Ceraman Perumal travelled to Mecca. Its strategic position, religious

¹¹² Ibn Battuta, *Op. cit.*, P. 243.

¹¹³ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, Op. cit.*, P.80

¹¹⁴ Bayly S., *Islam in Southern India*, Leiden (1986), P. 43

¹¹⁵ Adrew Wink, *Al Hind, Op. cit.*, P.81

sanctity and the availability of precious stones and gems made Sarandib a place of greatest interest to Arab travellers and merchants. Many of the accounts of Arab travellers contain detailed information of Sarandib. Sulayman describes Sarandib, situated in the sea of Harkand, as the most important island of the archipelago where pearl fisheries are found. He informs that the region around the Adams Peak, was abundant with precious stones like rubies, topaz and sapphire¹¹⁶. According to Al Idrisi, Sarandib is a large and well known Island where rubies, crystals, pearls and many types of precious stones and diamonds are found, a variety of scents and perfumes, aromatics, aloe woods, the musk producing animals and the civet cats and where rice, coconuts and sugar cane are grown¹¹⁷.

There were many Arab settlements along the north-east, north and western coast of the Island important among them were Trincomalee, Jafna, Manar and Mantotte. They traded with Egypt, Arabia, Persia and Malabar on one side and with the Coromandel, Bengal, Malacca, Sumatra, Java, Moluccas and China on the other.

Like the coastal regions of South India, Arab traders made matrimonial alliance with the native women. Baladhuri has

¹¹⁶ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Op. cit.*, P.122

¹¹⁷ Maqbul Ahmed, Al Idrisi, *Op. cit.*, Pp.27-30, 108-109, 122-125

reported the presence of “Muslim women who were born in Sarandib, their fathers having been merchants”¹¹⁸.

The main item of trade of medieval Sarandib was precious stones. According to Idrisi “none of the kings of Al Hind possesses as much wealth as the ruler of Sarandib (Ceylon) in the form of precious pearls, magnificent rubies and different kinds of stones”¹¹⁹. Abu Zayd mentions that in the mountains of Sarandib (Ceylon) they find precious stones of various colour, red, green and yellow¹²⁰.

Ibn Battuta says that in the Island of Ceylon rubies are found in all parts but marvellous rubies called bahraman (carbuncles) were found only in the town of Kunaker, Ceylon.

Cinnamon was available in Ceylon in large quantities. According to Ibn Battuta, Cinnamon was collected from Silan (Ceylon) by the people of Ma ‘bar (Coromandel) and Malabar without paying anything but by making presents to the Sultan. “He describes the town of Battalah in Silan is a small and pretty place, surrounded by a wall and bastion of wood. The whole coast in the neighbourhood is covered with trunks of cinnamon trees washed down by the torrent. These trees are heaped on the shore and

¹¹⁸ Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al Buldan*, Cairo, (1932), Pp.41-42

¹¹⁹ Maqbul Ahmad, Al Idrisi, *Op. cit.*, P.28

¹²⁰ Abu Zaid, Renaudot, *Ancient Account*, P.83

look like a sort of hillock there. The people of Ma 'bar and Malabar take them without paying anything. In return for this favour however, they make presents to the Sultan, of cloth and similar things"¹²¹. Major towns of Sarandib at the time of Ibn Battuta's visit were Battala, Dinawar, Qali (Print de Galle), Kalanba (Columbo).

Arab trade with Ceylon was not disrupted even during the Cola occupation of the island from 993 to 1020 AD as "the Cola Court did not attempt to gain tight control over maritime trade" for itself¹²².

Trade with Indonesian Archipelago

Indonesia consists of a cluster of Islands located in the South East Asia. Geographically the Islands are divided in to two as those of Indian Ocean and those of the Pacific Ocean. The major Indian Ocean Islands are Sumatra, Java, Bali and Lesser Sunda Islands. The major Pacific Ocean Islands include Borneo, Celebes and the Moluccas.

The Islands of South East Asia were collectively known as Spice Islands as there was hardly an Island in this region which did not produce one or the other kind of spices. Pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, nutmegs and scented woods like Ud, aloes,

¹²¹ K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *Op. cit.*, P.269

¹²² Andre Wink, *Al Hind, Op. cit.*, P. 325

sandal wood were widely distributed in these Islands. Ibn Battuta says that the Sultan of Sumatra gave him a great deal of aloes wood, camphor, cloves, sandal wood when he bade farewell after his two months stay in the Island¹²³.

The strait of Malacca which was the entrance to insular South East Asia was controlled by Srivijaya Empire from the seventh century onwards. By the eleventh century maritime monopoly of the Srivijaya began to decline when Chinese and South Asian shipping increased in the South China Sea and by the rise of new states like Singhasari in Southern Sumatra and Majapahit in Java¹²⁴. As the Indonesian Islands are situated at the peripheries of opposing wind systems of the Indian Ocean at the Chinese Sea, these Islands became the natural waiting places for ships for favourable winds. Hence the ports of the regions became a meeting place of merchants from the East and West and the ports developed as entrepots. Though Arabs had established settlements in Canton (China) in the fourth and early seventh centuries, their first appearance in the Malay and Indonesian archipelago is recorded as a group of Alid refugees who arrived in the time of Caliph Uthaman¹²⁵. It was only after the Chinese rebellion which took place on 818 AD under the leadership of

¹²³ Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, (ed.) Gibb, *Op. cit.*, P.302

¹²⁴ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean*, Oxford (1993), P.111

¹²⁵ Andre Wink, *Al Hind*, *Op. cit.*, P.83

Huan-Cho that ended in the destruction of the foreign colonies in China, that Arab settlers began to flock in to Indonesia in large numbers¹²⁶. Soon Kalah became a centre of Muslim settlers hailing from China. Sribuza near modern Palembang and Lamuri on the north end of Sumatra were other regions of early Muslim settlements. Arabs called the kingdom of 'Srivijaya Zabij', and its ruler 'al-maharaj'. Later the term 'Zabij' was also used to denote the whole Indonesian regions.

Al-Idrisi narrates, "it is said that when China was thrown in to confusion by revolts and rebellions many of its inhabitants transferred their trading activities to Zabij: and other Islands subordinates to it. They fraternized freely with the local population owing to the excellent opportunities for trade. It is for this reason that this Island (Zabij) is so thickly populated and so frequently visited by foreigners¹²⁷.

Though Arab trade with Indonesia and Malay Peninsula was not as extensive as it was with China, it was most lucrative and most indispensable to the Arabs as many of the spices having universal demand were obtained from these Islands.

Arab travellers considered the Indonesian Islands as the Islands of al Hind. Sumatra was known to them as ar-Rami named

¹²⁶ G.R. Tibbets, '*Early Muslim Traders in South East Asia*', (Journl) (ed.) Royal Asiatic Society, Vol.XXX, pt.1 (1957),P.38

¹²⁷ Idrisi, Vol. I. *Op. cit.*, Pp.59-60

after the port of Lamuri¹²⁸. Next to spices, fine amber was obtained from this island which the inhabitants exchanged to merchants taking in return iron from them¹²⁹. In addition to spices and fine camphor, pearls, rice, silver, gold and tin were also exported from the Indonesia regions. Gold and Silver were obtained from the mines of Sribuza (Palembang) and Kalah (Kedah) and Tin was exported from Kalah (Kedah). Rhinoceros horns 'valued at its weight in gold' was another item of export from Sumatra¹³⁰. Though the Indonesian community was maritime in orientation, the lands of Shrivijaya produced 'all kinds of spices and aromatics and no other sovereign in the world extracted as much wealth from his country¹³¹.

Abu Zayd describes the length of Zabij (Shrivijaya) kingdom as it extended over a great number of islands including Sribuzah and ar-Rumi and narrates the importance of Kalah as "this city which lies half way between China and Arabia is the centre of all trading in spices and aromatic essences; it is here that the Omani ships come now a days, to traffic and it is from here that return to Oman"¹³².

¹²⁸ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, Op. cit.*, P.351

¹²⁹ Al Idrisi, (ed.) Maqbul Ahmed, *Op. cit.*, Pp. 31-32

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, P.32

¹³¹ Al-Masudi, *Muruj al Dhahab*, Cinro (1948), Vol.I, P.153

¹³² Rita Rose Di Meglio, *Arab Trade with Indonesia and The Malay Peninsula, in Islam and Trade of Asia* (ed.) D.S. Richards, London (1970), P.111

The port of Indonesian archipelago links two primary networks of maritime routes. To the West, the network of Indian Ocean routes extends to the shores of Africa and to the East lies the South China sea with a network of routes connecting East and South east Asia. During the medieval period sailing in each network depended on the regularity of its monsoon winds. Ships from one network had to wait in the parts of the Indonesian regions such as Malacca, for favourable winds. The ports of the region reaped benefits from this geographical advantage by offering shipping services, warehousing and accommodation. The re opening of Chinese ports to foreign traders in 979 AD by the Sung dynasty did not eclipse the Indonesian trade as they had by that time established important trade centres along the international maritime route.

Arab traders used either Malacca strait or the Sunda strait on their journey to the Far East stopping at Srivijaya for supplies. The kingdom of Srivijaya which extended over large areas of Sumatra, parts of Java, Malay Peninsula and many small islands in the archipelago began to decline by the beginning of thirteenth century. During this period, foreign traders calling at its ports were taxed heavily to overcome the economic crisis of the kingdom. The merchants who avoided Srivijaya's ports were forced to enter the ports. Many of its vassals, taking advantage of the opportunity

declared themselves independent. The Singasari kingdom of Java extended its rule over the northern Sumatra, Borneo, the Moluccas and the East Malacca. The kingdom of Majapahit which succeeded the Singhasari, extended its supremacy over most of the Malay Peninsula, the West Borneo, South Celebes and the Moluccas¹³³.

In the thirteenth century Indonesia witnessed Muslim rule when the ruler of Achiya, northern Sumatra was converted in to Islam by Maulana Burhanuddin. This dynasty was named after their capital "Samudra Paise".

The second closure of Chinese ports to foreign merchants by the Ming dynasty of China (1368-1644) which became effective in 1371 led to a second influx of Arab merchants to the Indonesian Islands. Gradually many small Muslim principalities arose along the coasts of Java at Chirebon, Demak, Japara, Gresik and Surabaya¹³⁴.

The fall of Majapahit dynasty brought Malacca under the rule of Muslims. During the reign of Mansur Shah, Malacca became the most important centre of commerce and religion.

The city of Malacca founded in 1403 AD, rapidly expanded and became the major centre of commerce pushing Java and Sumatra backward. Not only natives of various parts of the Malay

¹³³ *Ibid.*, P.115

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, P.117

Peninsula but also a great many foreigners from different centres congregated in the town; the Arabs came both from their homeland and from Indian ports. Its strategic position, pirate free coasts, merchant friendly policies of its rulers and benign relationship with other countries were the main reasons for the rapid expansion of Malacca. Malacca soon became a great emporium of trade. Hence the products of Java, the Moluccas, Banda, Celebes, Sumatra, Malay Peninsula and China were the staple items of trade of the region. Tome Pires gives a detailed list of merchants of Malacca which includes Moors from Cairo, Mecca, Aden and Abyssinia, Men of Kilwa, Malindi and Hormuz, Persians, Rumes, Turks, Turkomans, Christians, Armenians, Gujaratis, Men of Chaul, Dabhol, Goa, of the kingdom of Deccan, Malabar and Klings, merchants from Orissa, Ceylon, Bengal, China, Arakan, Pegu, Saymure, Men of Kedah, Malays, Brunei, Cambodia, Champa, Madura, Maldives etc. At that time, in the port of Malacca very often eighty four languages were found spoken every one distinct as the inhabitants of Malacca. He adds that resident Gujaratis were a thousand while Parsees, Bengalis and Arabs together amounted to more than four thousand¹³⁵. Malacca thrived with its international trade till the arrival of the Portuguese.

¹³⁵ Tome Pires, *The suma Oriental*, London, (1944), Vol. I, P.45, Vol. II Pp.254-55

Malacca had close trade contact with Gujarat, the main centre of India trade. Tome Pires wrote, “Malacca cannot live without Cambay nor Cambay without Malacca”¹³⁶.

From Malacca Arab traders carried their religion to Demak on the Island Java and then to the interior regions of the Island. It was mainly through the settlements of Arab traders in the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago that Islam peacefully but extensively, deeply and permanently penetrated to South East Asia. Marco Polo has pointed out the active role of Arabs in proselytizing the Indonesians by reporting that “in the kingdom of ‘Ferlec’ Saracen merchants who regularly come there with their ships have converted the inhabitants to the laws of Mohammed”¹³⁷.

As European demand for spices increased Islam penetrated Malaya-Indonesia because Muslims had the trade in cottons which were the only satisfactory clothing for ordinary men¹³⁸.

In Indonesia, Islam did not replace the popular culture but gave an additional dimension to it by making it an integral part of their identity and local culture. This resulted in the gradual adoption of the new faith by a vast majority of the population. The change that the new religion brought up in their physical

¹³⁶ C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, London, (1968), P.163

¹³⁷ H. Yule and H. Cordier, *The book of Marco Polo*, London, (1903), Vol.II P.284

¹³⁸ C.G.F. Simkin, *Op.cit*, P.254

environment was very little when compared to that of their spiritual change.

It was in to this smooth social and economic system that the Portuguese introduced violence and aggression. The arrival of Europeans in the Spice Islands resulted even in the destruction of spice plantation in their effort to monopolize the spice trade. Spice trees were destroyed and the villagers were forced to raise rice and sago in place of spice trees¹³⁹. The Portuguese completely excluded the native merchants from trade. They were often prevented from sailing from port to port island to island in their own region.

Arab Trade with China

Arab seamen are credited with the remarkable achievement of inaugurating and maintaining direct voyages from the Persian Gulf to the South China Sea¹⁴⁰. The name Sin or Chin (China) was derived from the Tsin dynasty of the period, 255 to 209 BC. Masudi locates as-sin (China) separated from Al-Hind by the kingdom of al-Zabaj (Indonesian Archipelago)¹⁴¹. The medieval maritime route between Persian Gulf and China had the great advantage that since it connected the biggest and most

¹³⁹ Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800, in Maritime India*, Oxford, (2004), P.52

¹⁴⁰ C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, London, (1968), P.81

¹⁴¹ Al Masudi, *Muruj al Dhahab*, Vol.I, Cairo (1948), P.82

prosperous empires of the period, the Arab and the Chinese, it was the most lively trade route of the medieval period through which luxury items such as silk, porcelain, spices and precious stones and metals were exchanged. This route was considered as the maritime counterpart of the famous overland 'Silk Road'. The Confucian belief of the ancient Chinese emperors that they, being the bearers of the 'mandate of Heaven' to reign the central land, China, should receive formal homage and tribute from other kingdoms in recognition of their supremacy, attracted so many tribute bearing envoys to the kingdom. Taking advantage of this opportunity unscrupulous merchants used to falsely represent themselves as tribute bearing envoys from the kings of remote countries in order to obtain commercial privileges granted to genuine tribute missions¹⁴². It is estimated that the volume of tribute articles that reached China was not less than that of the goods reached there by trade¹⁴³.

Chinese used the word Ta-Shish to denote Arabs. Ta-Shish is a term derived from Persian Ta-Zila meaning a man of the Tayy tribe¹⁴⁴. It is recorded that some Shia Muslims had settled on an island in one of the large rivers of China after escaping from

¹⁴² G.F. Hudson , *'The medieval Trade of china', in Islam and Trade of Asia*, (ed) D.S.

Richards, London, (1970), P. 164

¹⁴³ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, Op.cit.*, P.330

¹⁴⁴ G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring, Op.cit.*, P.14

persecution in Khurasan during the Umayyad period¹⁴⁵. Chinese called the amir-al-mu'minin (caliphs) as hami-mo-mo-in, the first Abbasid Caliph Abu Abbas was called "A-bo-lo-ba" and Caliph Harun, "A-lun"¹⁴⁶. At first muslims were called Ta-Shih, later Hui-Hui (Mohamedans).

Arab merchants had established settlements in the Chinese coastal cities of Quanzhou and Guangzhou during the seventh century. The Arabs were aware of the commercial importance of China from the very beginning of their commercial expansion to the East. As early as 713 AD commercial embassies were sent to Chinese court. In addition to Khanfu (canton), Arabs had frequent contact with Zayton which had commercial relations with Japan and Korea and therefore Arabs were very familiar with the products of those countries also. By the time of Ibn Battuta's visit, in every Chinese city 'there was a quarter for Muslims in which they lived by themselves and in which they had mosques both for the Friday services and for other religious purposes'¹⁴⁷.

The geographical obstacles between China and the Arab lands were great. The mountains of Himalaya, the high plateau of Tibet and the deserts of East Turkestan made overland journey formidable, maritime journey required a long voyage

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, P.63

¹⁴⁶ Philip K. Hitti, *History of Arabs, Op.cit.*, P.344

¹⁴⁷ Ibn Battuta, (ed.) Gibb, *Op. cit.*, P.283

circumnavigating the whole Indian peninsula and then close sailing through the narrow strait between Malaya and Indonesian Islands. The high demand for silk which was a monopoly of the Chinese made the long and tiresome journey lucrative. Though sericulture was introduced to Syria during the sixth century by smuggling silk moth eggs from China, the demand for certain specialized items of Chinese silk did not decline in the western markets. But by the mid medieval period porcelain became the popular item of Chinese overseas trade and remained as an item of Chinese monopoly for a long period there after. This product shift became possible due to the opening of a maritime silk route from China to Arabia through the Indian Ocean. Silk being low in volume with high value was suitable for caravan transport. Porcelain being brittle and bulk in quantity was very much unsuitable for caravan trading. The opening of the Silk Route of the sea connecting China, Indonesian archipelago and India with the Red sea and the Mediterranean regions integrated the commercial activities of the whole Indian Ocean world.

It was the Arab merchants who acquainted the West with the Chinese ceramic wares and made it an aristocratic item of medieval period. Ibn Battuta has stated that in China, porcelain wares were as cheap as earthen wares, and were widely used by

the common man. He has added that it was through foreign trade that it became a valuable item of trade¹⁴⁸.

The Chinese were late in navigating the Indian Ocean. In the early centuries of our era Chinese shipping was limited to the South China seas. During the Tang period (618-907 AD) the Chinese themselves seldom sailed in to the Indian Ocean and Malabar was the Western limit of such rare voyages. Though they had information about the coasting route from Malabar to the Persian Gulf, they were ignorant of the use of the monsoons for direct sailing between Malabar and Arabia¹⁴⁹. But in the period of the Sung dynasty (960-1280) there was a great increase in Chinese maritime enterprise and the Chinese sailors became familiar with the Indian Ocean regions as far as East Africa¹⁵⁰. Prior to the year 1000 AD, Arab literature was the only source of information on trade and travel in the Indian Ocean and the South China sea, after the date Chinese works dealing with the subject began to appear¹⁵¹. Ivory, frankincence and myrrh reached China from South Arabia and East Africa. Syrian glass ware, Mediterranean coral, Persian Gulf pearls and cotton textiles of Persia were other imports of China during the period. Arab merchants were so

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ G.F. Hudson, *The Medieval Trade of China, in Islam and Trade of Asia*, (ed.) D.S. Richards, London (1970), P.163

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid,*

¹⁵¹ Chaudhari, *Trade and civilizations in the Indian Ocean*, Cambridge, (1985), P.248

powerful in Canton that in 758, when there broke out a clash between them and the natives of Canton (Khanfu), they momentarily captured and sacked the city and later escaped by the sea¹⁵². Then, for a short period Arabs traded with China indirectly through the entrepots of Malaya and Sumatra. But by the beginning of the ninth century Arabs had again established major settlements in Canton that it is reported that when, in 879, a rebel army led by Huan Chao attacked the city, thousands of Arabs were massacred¹⁵³.

The Chinese imperial bureaucracy of the medieval period welcomed foreign merchants to the country not only for the sake of foreign luxury goods, but also to check the growth of native merchant community in to a predominant influential community so strong enough to challenge the authority of the bureaucracy itself. The imperial bureaucrats of the period were mainly recruited from the landowning elites. As the foreign merchants never posed a threat to the bureaucracy they encouraged settlement of South Asian and Middle Eastern merchants within the country as it was the safest and easiest way of ensuring a steady supply of foreign luxury goods¹⁵⁴. Chao-Ju-Kua author of *Chu-fan-chi* who an was inspector of foreign trade in the province of Fukien towards the end

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, P. 162

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁴ Kennethe Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean*, Oxford (1993), P.98

of the twelfth century, depended mainly on Arab traders for his information. He has described the Mediterranean as the “Western Sea of Tashih (Arabs)” and the sea between India and Arabia together with the Red sea and Persian Gulf is mentioned as the “Eastern Sea of the Arabs”¹⁵⁵.

Under the Sung dynasty China witnessed large scale urbanization and economic prosperity. This changed the pattern of China’s maritime trade. The volume of imports, such as cloth, pepper, sugar, timber etc. increased dramatically and to adjust the trade balance China exported silk and ceramics in great quantities. The Mangol Yuan dynasty (1276-1368) also followed a liberal foreign trade policy, and by the fourteenth century Chinese participation in South East Asian maritime trade had become significant¹⁵⁶. By the period of Ibn Battuta’s visit the Arab muslim community at Zaytun had become so wealthy that their Zakat (thithe) were given to the way farers (Ibn Sabeel) from other countries. The port of Zaytun had flourished so much that Ibn Battuta counted it as the largest port in the world. He had seen in the port about one hundred large junks and somany small junks that could not be counted for multitude¹⁵⁷. But when the first emperor of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) banned all private

¹⁵⁵ G.F. Hudson, *Op. cit.*, P.161

¹⁵⁶ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *Op. cit.*, P.99

¹⁵⁷ Ibn Battuta, (ed). Gibb. *Op.cit.*, P.288

overseas trade in 1371, which lasted for about 200 years, Chinese maritime trade began to decline and Malacca flourished. Many of the Arab merchants settled in China shifted their business to this port city.

China was almost self sufficient in necessities during the medieval period. Ibn Battuta described China as the best cultivated in the world abounding in all sorts of good things. Its sugar was better than Egypt's and plums better than Syria's. Nowhere he had seen better wheat, melons, peas or beans. Porcelain, the finest of all pottery was as cheap as earthen ware and silk was in abundance that it was used even by poor monks and beggars. Moreover, the Chinese were most skilful in arts and possessed of greatest mastery of them¹⁵⁸. Ibn Battuta has noted the export of Chinese porcelain to the west even reaching as far as his own country, Morocco¹⁵⁹. Chinese porcelain was in high demand throughout the Arab empire that imitation Chinese porcelain were manufactured in Kulam and sold in the cities of Persia like those of China; but vessels of China were of better quality than those of Kulam¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, P. 285

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Pp. 282-83

¹⁶⁰ Elliot H.M. and Dowson J., *The History of India as told by its own Histotians*, Vol.II, Aligarh, (1952), P.96

Ibn Battuta described China as the safest and best regulated country for a traveller, stating that a man may go by himself a nine months journey carrying with him large sums of money without any fear on that account¹⁶¹. Merchants from Bukhara and Samarqand brought West Asian goods to China through the overland silk road taking back Chinese silk and manufactured goods.

China like Europe, was a great consumer of spices. Though China was self sufficient in certain spices such as cinnamon, great quantities of pepper were imported from Java and ginger, cloves and nutmegs from the Moluccas¹⁶².

All the gold and silver that came in to China was cast in to ingots and as medium of exchange they used paper money. Silk was so plenty in China that Ibn Battuta says that a single piece of cotton cloth was sold there for the price of many pieces of silk¹⁶³.

The Muslims living in China had a Qadi and a Shykh al Islam to decide legal cases and to act as an intermediary between the government and the Muslim community respectively. Muslim merchants coming to any town of China, was given the choice between staying with some specified merchant among the muslims

¹⁶¹ Ibn Battuta, (ed) Gibb, *Op.cit.*, P.287

¹⁶² G.F. Hudson, *Op. cit.*, P.162

¹⁶³ Ibn Battuta, (ed.) Gibb, *Op. cit.*, P.284

domiciled there or going to hostelry¹⁶⁴. From the thirteenth century to the Ming ban period Arab merchants appeared more regularly and in great number through out the South China due to the encouragement of Sung and Yuan dynasties.

Even the Ming ban of Chinese ports to foreign merchants, which lasted for about two centuries from 1371 AD, did not ouster the Arab merchants from the East Asian trade. Many of them shifted their trading activities to the South East Asia. It is recorded that many of the Chinese merchants instead of obeying the imperial ban had started supply of smuggled goods to the trade centres of South East Asia. The Arab merchants remained active in the East trade till they were driven out of the eastern seas by the Portuguese.

Trade with Africa

Though the Arabs had maritime contact with the East African coast long before the Greeks, Arab migration and mercantile activities increased enormously with the advent of Islam.

Muslims reached Africa during the very early years of Islam as a group of refugees migrated to Abyssinia on the advise of prophet to escape from the persecution of the pagan Qureishis.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, P.286

The king of Abyssinia of this period is referred to by the Arabs as “Najashi” (Negus). Later Omanis immigrated to East Africa in flight from the persecution of al Hajjaj in 690 AD.

Arab geographers classified the inhabitants of Africa in to two as ‘Habshi’ and ‘Zanj’. The Abyssinians or Ethiopians were called Habshi and the properly black negroes were called Zanj. West Africa was known to the Arabs as ‘bilad as Sudan’ or country of the blacks. The Zanj country, though it had kings known as “Wafilimi” by the Arabs had no specific capital¹⁶⁵. As Zanj country abounded in elephants ivory was an important item of export from the region. African ivory was considered superior to Asian ivory as regards to weight and colour and was brought to Oman for transshipment to India and China¹⁶⁶.

As Africa was the chief source of gold during the medieval period, Arabs called it ‘bilad al tibr’ or the land of gold. In the region of Ghana salt from the desert was exchanged for gold from the region further to the South. Sijilmasa founded in 757 was the main centre of gold trade, and in order to control this lucrative trade Sijilmasa was first conquered by the Fatimids in 951 AD and later by the Umayyads of Spain. By the tenth century gold began to flow to the Muslim Mediterranean in large quantities¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁵ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind*, Vol. I, Oxford (1999), P.27

¹⁶⁶ V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India*, Delhi, (1990), P.98

¹⁶⁷ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind*, *Op. cit.*, P.27

By the tenth century Arabs had established many settlements on the eastern regions of Africa. Important among them were Sofala, Manda, Kilwa, Zanzibar, Mombasa, Malindi, Mesca, Mogadishu, Berbera, Dahlak, Sawakin and Aydhab. The focal points of political power of these settlements were Mombasa and Kilwa, the emporia of gold trade of Sofala. The wealthier merchants of these ports adapted Middle Eastern Islamic culture to highlight their role as leaders of society. The Arabs of Oman were so influential on these coasts that Zanzibar was, for a long time, under the suzerainty of the Sultan of Oman¹⁶⁸. These settlements, by conversion and matrimonial contacts produced a hybrid Afro-Arabian civilization known as Swahili civilization. It was a society dominated by merchants who controlled the maritime trade of East Africa.

By the late seventh century, the Red Sea coast of Africa was studded with the settlements of Arab merchants and settlers. Trade and navigation in the Red Sea came under the control of Arabs. The ports of Alexandria, which had been in decline since the seventh century due to the trade shift to Basra, the Persian Gulf and the ports of Levant, began to recover its past glory as the greatest entrepot between the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean. Describing the port of Alexandria (AD.1326) Ibn Battuta says that

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, P.29

he had seen none to equal it except Kwalam (Quilon) and Calicut in India, the port of Sudaq in the land of Turks and the port of Zytun in China¹⁶⁹. The description of Ibn Battuta that there was an uninterrupted chain of bazaars from Alexandria to Cairo and from Cairo to Assuan in upper Egypt shows the magnitude of commercial activities of the region¹⁷⁰. When the Arabs gained control of the Red Sea ports the Christian state of Aksum created by the Ethiopians and its port Adulis declined and was cutoff from the rest of Christianity by the Islamic lands of the Sudan, Eritrea and the Horn of Africa. Thus the foreign trade of Ethiopia, the Black Byzantium, which became a Christian Island in a Muslim Sea shrank and became subordinate to Islamic trade¹⁷¹.

Penetration of Arab merchants in the coastal regions of East Africa led to the development of a variety of mercantile activities in the interior regions. Inhabitants of the pastoral and agricultural hinterlands began to collect ivory and gold to trade with the coastal cities. As the demand for Asian trade goods was very limited in the interior regions; Asian goods such as ceramics, glass ware, metal goods and carpets were imported mainly for the inhabitants settled in the coastal regions. The only Asian commodities to gain wide acceptance in the interior regions were

¹⁶⁹ Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, (ed.) Gibb, New Delhi, (1990), P.46

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, P.50

¹⁷¹ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, Op. cit.*, P.28

cowries and glass beads¹⁷². Cowries were regarded as a symbol of prosperity and wealth and were used as money in the Negro lands. Merchants from Middle East frequently travelled down the Somali and Kenyan coasts as far south as Kilwa. South of Kilwa, coastal traffic and commerce were controlled by African mariners and merchants.

The island of Madagascar called by the Arabs as al-Qumr or as WaqWaq was inhabited by primitive blacks and immigrant Sumatrans. As both Madagascar and Sumatra had a population of Sumatrans, Arabs used the term WaqWaq to denote Sumatra and Madagascar alike.

The Habshis (Abyssinians) were noted sailors and men at arms of merchant ships of medieval period. We are told that the ship belonging to Ibrahim of Kawa (Kavi) in which Ibn Battuta sailed to Calicut carried fifty rowers and fifty Abyssinian warriors who were the guarantors of safety on the Indian Ocean and that when ever one of them was on a ship pirates avoided such ships¹⁷³.

Main export items of Africa during the medieval period were natural products such as frankincense, tortoise shell, ivory, rhinoceros horn, coconut, rock crystal, mangrove poles¹⁷⁴, gold and

¹⁷² Kenneth MC Pherson, *The Indian Ocean*, Oxford (1993), P.105

¹⁷³ Ibn Battuta, (ed.) Gibb, *Op. cit.*, P.229

¹⁷⁴ Neville Chittik, '*East African Trade with the Orient*' in *Islamic History papers*, (ed.) D.S. Richards, London (1970) P. 102

slaves. Africa imported manufactured goods like cloths, beads, iron products, porcelain mainly Islamic glazed wares and glass. As iron working was little developed, Africa depended on imports for iron tools and arms. Iron products were imported to East Africa from India, while at the same time raw iron was exported from Sofala, the east African city which had the best and largest iron mines, to India¹⁷⁵.

Africa was the main source of slaves which the Arabs exported to various markets of East and West. Ibn Khaldun considered black Africans to be the only people who accepted slavery because of their low degree of humanity and their proximity to the animal stage¹⁷⁶. The Zanj (Negroslave) rebellion of the late ninth century in the Fertile Crescent which lasted for fourteen years (870-883) during the reign of al-Mu'tamid perishing half a million lives bears testimony to the presence of a very large number of black slaves in the region. African slaves of the medieval period were used by the Arabs for a great variety of tasks from domestic menial work to commandership of military expeditions. It is recorded that the princes of Bahryn had employed 30,000 Abyssinians slaves in agriculture and gardening¹⁷⁷. It is argued that slave trading was probably the

¹⁷⁵ Maqbul Ahmad, *Al-Idrisi, India and the neighbouring territories*, Leiden (1960), P.23

¹⁷⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *Maquaddimah*, Beirut, (1958) P.31

¹⁷⁷ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, Op. cit.*, P.31

single most important business in early medieval period that Europe had conducted with the Arabs¹⁷⁸. It is estimated that during the period 850-1000 AD the number of black slaves exported across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to Islamic Asia and to India was near to 10,000 per year¹⁷⁹.

During the medieval period Sijilmasa was the principal trading centre of the Negrolands. Ibn Battuta speaks of salt mines of a nearby village called Taghaza adding that salt was used as money by Negroes just as gold and silver was used elsewhere¹⁸⁰. He informs that the inhabitants of Iwalatan (Walata), the northern most province of the Negroes, were followers of matrilineal system of heir ship which he had seen nowhere else in the world except among the inhabitants of Malabar. Gold was brought from Ghana by the Arab merchants crossing the great desert Sahara. The Arab merchants and travellers from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco travelled several months journey through the interior regions of Africa reaching the trade centres of the regions of gold mines like Allaqi in the country of Buja, east Aswan and Ghana on the Niger¹⁸¹. By the ninth century there were straight caravan roads connecting the western regions with Egypt. For centuries, during

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, P.36

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, P.14

¹⁸⁰ Ibn Battuta, (ed.) Gibb, *Op. cit.*, P.318

¹⁸¹ Sir Thomas Arnold, *Legacy of Islam, Op.cit.*, P.110

the medieval period Africa was a domain of commercial and missionary zeal of Arabs. Europe had no information about the interior of the 'Dark continent' except that was available from Arab sources. The description of Africa by the Christianized Muslim Leo Africanns (1526 AD.) was almost the only source of European knowledge of Africa for a long time¹⁸².

It was the Arab traders who introduced and provided Africa with many of their goods. For the Arabs of East Africa, the discovery of the cape route was a calamitous disaster and at the close of the fifteenth century, the great age of Arab culture there was brought to a rude and abrupt end¹⁸³.

It is one of the mysteries of history that it was an Arab mariner who guided the Portuguese from the shores of East Africa through the Arabian Sea to bring about the end of Arab domination in the seas forever.

Trade with the West

Trade contacts of Medieval Arabs with the European countries were in sharp contrast to their deep rooted commercial connection with the East. Unlike the East and Africa, where Arabs had established permanent trade settlements facilitating direct

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Pp. 101-02

¹⁸³ R.B. Serjeant, *The Portuguese of the South Arabian Coast*, Oxford, (1963), P.11

trade relation with the native merchants, there were neither Arab settlements nor direct trade with the Christian Europe except with Byzantine frontier town of Trebizond. In 711 A.D. when Tariq Ibn Ziyad, with his Berber force landed at the base of a huge rock which later came to be known after his name as Jabal-i-Tariq (Tariq's mountain) or Gibraltar, Arab empire reached the West. Between 711 and 718 the Arabs conquered Spain as far as Pyreneese. When Arab empire extended to the west the political boundaries of the Mediterranean were reshaped. Byzantium lost control of its Middle Eastern and North African provinces and was subdued to the mountains of Anatolia. Before the advent of Islam most of the islands in the Mediterranean were under the control of Byzantine. When Muslims rose to power in Europe the mediterranean Islands such as Crete, Rhodes, Cypres, Sardinia, Malta, Corsica and Balearic Islands came under the control of Arabs. The Mediterranean itself was surrounded by muslim countries on three sides, namely Syria, Egypt, Africa and Spain and it had virtually become an Arab Lake. During this period trade and navigation in the mediterranean was controlled by the Arabs. The most important trade connection of early medieval Europe was via Muslim Spain and long before crusades Italian city states like Genoa, Amalfi and Venice had developed commercial contacts with Egypt and Syria¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸⁴ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, Op.cit.*, P.35.

The immediate result of the Arab conquest of Spain was that Spanish commerce was monopolized by Muslims and Jews creating an organized economic life. Christian Spain began to revolve around the economic orbit of the Islamic South. For about five centuries the Christian Kingdoms in Spain had no coinage except Arabic or French¹⁸⁵. Intermarriages between Arabs and Spanish Christians were very common even from the early days of Arab conquest of Spain. More over large numbers of fair complexioned native women enslaved by conquests were brought to the family set up of the Arabs as mothers of their children. But these relationship did not give rise to the formation of any hybrid community or civilization, such as Swahilis of Africa, Konkani Muslims of Konkan Coast, Navayats of Kanara Coast, Mappilas of Malabar or Maraikkayar of Coromandel Coast, as happened in the Indian ocean coastal regions of Arab settlements.

Though the Arabs had established political power in Spain by early eighth century extensive commercial contacts between them and the rest of Europe came into existence only during the eleventh century. During this period Jews, who were almost exclusively a commercial community of the time, acted as intermediaries between the two civilizations. These Jewish merchants known as radhaniya merchants brought eunuchs,

¹⁸⁵ J.H. Kramers, '*Geography and Commerce*', in *Legacy of Islam* (ed.) Sir Thomas Arnold, Delhi, (1995) , P.5

slaves, fur, wool, armour, swords, honey, wax, falcons, maple wood, amber and prepared horse hides to Islamic countries from Europe¹⁸⁶. The same traders brought to Europe, musk, aloes, camphor, cinnamon and similar products. From the eleventh century, Arabs maintained lively commercial contacts with the Christian Europe though with some interruption during the period of first crusades¹⁸⁷. Later for about five centuries, European markets were well supplied with the natural and industrial products of China, India, Africa as well as Islamic empires by the globe trotting Arab merchants. Products of aesthetic and artistic value such as fine fabrics, elite robes canopies and rugs produced in the Islamic countries were in great demand throughout Europe. Many of the fabrics were known in medieval Europe on the basis of place of production or procurement. The stuffs known as “damasks” came from Damascus and “fustian” from Fustat, the first capital of muslim Egypt. ‘Muslin’ was brought from Mosul and ‘baldachino’ the rich silk fabric as well as the silk canopy suspended over the altar of many churches was brought from Baghdad known to the Italians as Baldaco. Dress materials brought from Granada were called ‘grenadines’. Taffeta was the Persian Taftah and attabi silk imitated in Spain was the original product of Attabiyah quarter of Baghdad. It is said that the state robes of medieval German

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, P.101

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, P.103

emperors, with Arabic inscriptions were ordered and executed in Sicily where Islamic art and industry continued to flourish for a long time even after its reconquest by the Christians¹⁸⁸. Just like the European markets stocked Arab goods, European languages also began to stock Arab words in their commercial vocabulary. The large number of commercial terms of Arabic origin still used in the European languages bear testimony to the deep influence of Arab trade on the development of trade and trade practices of European countries.

Tenth century was the golden period of Muslim Spain. Under Abdul Rahman III (912-961 AD) Spain developed as a world power and enjoyed a spell of economic growth and prosperity. Both agriculture and industry flourished during this period. Spanish Arabs introduced to their country not only many agricultural items but also the advanced agricultural methods practiced in West Asia and more and more land was brought under cultivation providing irrigation. Many of the Spanish words related to agriculture are loan words from Arabic. Acequia, the Spanish word for canal is derived from Arabic equivalent 'al-saqiyah'. Arabic word 'al-aruzz' for rice became 'arroz' in Spanish. Apricot of Arabs, 'al-barquq', is the 'albaricoque' of the Spanish. 'Rumman', the pomegranate of Arabs is used to make Spanish pomegranate juice 'romania'.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, P.104

Al-'qutn', the cotton of Arabs appears as 'algodon' to the Spanish. Saffron of the Arabs, 'al-zafaran' is called 'azafran' in Spain.

Industries such as textiles, tannery, pottery, tilery and weaponry developed through out the caliphate. Sericulture, which was a Chinese monopoly was introduced to Spain by the Arabs where it flourished¹⁸⁹. Tanneries of Cordova produced fine leather products which were known as Cordovan or Cordwain and were in great demand through out the medieval Europe. It was from Spain that the art of tanning and embossing leather was brought to England and France through Morocco¹⁹⁰. Potters of Calatayad, Malaya and Valencia produced luster pottery which were ranked second only to Chinese porcelain¹⁹¹. Through Alexandria and Constantinople Spanish product such as cotton, olive oil, figs, saffron, marble and sugar were exported to India and Central Asia¹⁹².

Cordova in the tenth century was the most civilized city in Europe with seventy libraries and 900 public baths¹⁹³. It is reported that the medieval Spain was literate where "nearly everyone could

¹⁸⁹ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London (1940), P.528

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, P.527

¹⁹¹ J.B. Trend, '*Spain and Portugal*', in *Legacy of Islam* (ed.) Sir. Thomas Arnold, Delhi (1995), P.14

¹⁹² Philip K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P.529

¹⁹³ J.B. Trend, *Op.cit.*, P.9

read and write;”¹⁹⁴ when most of the Europeans were in a state of chaos and superstition known to historians as the Dark Ages.

All these economic and cultural activities of Arabs flourished till the fragmentation of Umayyad Spain in to numerous principalities which happened in 1031 AD when the Caliph Hisham III was dethroned in the revolt by the people of Cordova. By the end of the eleventh century Muslims had lost control of the region except Southern Spain and North Africa.

The crusades which began in 1095 AD and lasted till 1247 AD opened the opportunity for more direct contact between the West and East¹⁹⁵. Many of the crusaders were not actuated by spiritual motives alone. The merchants of Pisa, Venice and Genoa had commercial interests¹⁹⁶. The primary and the most fruitful element in the crusades was the entry of the West in to the East¹⁹⁷. Crusades fostered development of trade and commerce and stimulated the growth of towns. They enhanced the demand for oriental agricultural products and industrial commodities and the West became familiar with the more developed industrial life of the East. It was during the period of crusades that the Venetians minted the first gold coins, Byzantini Saracentai, in the Holy Land

¹⁹⁴ Philip K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P.531

¹⁹⁵ Masudul Hassan, *History of Islam*, Delhi (1998) P.468

¹⁹⁶ Philip K. Hitti, *Op.cit.*, P.636

¹⁹⁷ Earnest Barker, *'The Crusades'*, in *Legacy of Islam*, (ed.) Sir. Thomas Arnold, Delhi (1995) P.43

for the purpose of trade with the Arabs. These gold coins bore Arabic inscriptions, a brief text from the Quran, a reference to the Prophet and a date based on Hijra calendar. New plants and crops like rice, maize, sesame, lemons, melon and apricots were disseminated in to the west during this period. Returning crusaders brought with them the rugs, carpets and tapestries of the orient and Europe began to produce rugs, wares and cloths imitating the oriental products¹⁹⁸. Christian reconquest of Spain which had started as early as the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in the eleventh century was practically completed with the exception of Granada by the middle of the thirteenth century. On the tower of Granada the crescent was supplanted by the cross¹⁹⁹ in 1492 when the last Sultan of Spain, abu-Abdulla was forced by Ferdinand to bid farewell to his empire taking a last sight with a deep sigh from the height of a rock which later came to be known as El Ultimo and Suspiro del Moro, meaning 'the last sigh of the moor'²⁰⁰. Thus while Tariq Mountain (Jabal-i-Tariq or Gibraltar) acted as the entrance of the Arabs to Spain, another hill El Ultimo Suspiro del Moro served as their exit from Spain. By the early seventeenth century, when all the Muslims were expelled from the Spanish soil by the orders of Philip III, "Spain became the conspicuous

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, P.62

¹⁹⁹ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs, Op.cit.*, P.555

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, P.554

exception to the rule that wherever Arab civilization was planted there it was permanently fixed”²⁰¹

Decline of Arab Trade

By the beginning of the eighth century Arab Empire had reached the zenith of its territorial expansion and economic prosperity. The Abbasids were in possession of the biggest empire of the middle ages. The Abbasids who were of Arab lineage came to power with the help of Khurasanian forces. Later conflicts between the pro-Arab and pro-Persian parties became common at the Abbasid court. When the Barmakids controlled the Abbasid bureaucracy there existed a clear domination of the Persians. After the fall of the Barmakids the politics of the state was controlled by the pro-Arabs. The conflicts between the pro-Arabs and pro-Persians led to a civil war between Amin and Mámun²⁰². With the victory of Mámun Persian ascendancy was established and large number of Turks were inducted in the army with a view to maintaining a proper balance between the Arabs and Persians. But when Turks grew in power, this policy boomeranged and five successive caliphs Mutawakkil, Muntasir, Mustain, Mu'tazz and Muhtadi were either killed or deposed by the Turks during the period between 862 and 870 AD.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, P.556

²⁰² Masudul Hasan, History of Islam, Vol.-I, Delhi, (1998), P.265.

Fragmentation of the Abbasid Empire considerably weakened the economic prosperity of the state. During the five hundred years of the Abbasid rule numerous petty states rose and fell that towards the end of the Abbasid rule the empire did not extend beyond Iraq²⁰³.

In Egypt the Bedouin incursion of the fourteenth century during the reign of weak Mamluk Sulthans led to the deterioration of agricultural production. In the Middle East where cultivation was dependent on irrigation, the invasion of the Mongols and destruction of irrigation system had reduced the export of agricultural products from the region and resulted in the withering of such formerly great ports as Basara²⁰⁴. It is estimated that the population of lower Diyala in Iraq reached a peak of 8 lakh around 800 AD, which fell to below 4 lakh by 1100 AD and then to sixty thousand after the destruction of irrigation works by the Mongols²⁰⁵. It is assessed that about one-third of the population of Egypt was destroyed by the Plagues.

The scorched earth policy of the Mamluks against raids from Cyprus and Rhodes also resulted in the subsequent decline of production within the Arab empire. Industrial production within the Arab empire during its palmy days was labour centric and was

²⁰³ *Ibid*, P. 381

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, P. 145

²⁰⁵ Robert M. Adams, *Land Behind Baghdad*, Chicago, (1965), P.115

controlled by craftsmen organised in guilds. Though such a set up led to the development of artistic skill of the craftsmen to an unequalled height, they were not in a position to sustain the same when later in the west, capital intensive and technology driven industries began to produce the same articles much economically. Transfer of technology like paper and glass making, sericulture and sugar refining to Europe and the later technological superiority of the continent reduced the demand for such goods exported from the Arab empire. Europe imported paper from the Middle East till it was being produced in Spain. By the fourteenth century Europe became the largest centre of paper manufacture and soon there began a reverse traffic of paper from Europe to Middle East. During the Middle Ages Syria was a major exporter of high quality glass to Europe but by the end of the Middle Ages, the Middle East became an importer of glassware from Europe while its own production went on deteriorating in quality²⁰⁶. By the fifteenth century Venetian glass-workers had mastered the Oriental process of enamelling glass that it soon ceased to be a Muslim monopoly²⁰⁷. The monopoly enjoyed by the Arabs in the export of fine silk fabrics from the Middle East to Europe was broken by the fifteenth century when Italian silk fabrics appeared in the European markets. The

²⁰⁶ Charles Issawi, '*Decline of Middle Eastern Trade, Islam and Trade of Asia*', (ed) D.S. Richards, London, (1970), P.254

²⁰⁷ A.H. Christie, 'Islamic Minor Arts and their Influence upon European Work', in the *Legacy of Islam* (ed.), Sir. Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume, Delhi, (1995), P.130

decrease in the Middle East's exports reciprocally decreased their internal production and the economic activities of the region continued to decline in pace with the weakness and fragmentation of the regional empires. It is recorded that the number of weavers in Alexandria had fallen from 14,000 in 1394 to 800 in 1434 and that of sugar mills in Fustat from 66 in 1325 to only 19 in working order around 1400.

Another reason for the decline of economic prosperity of late medieval Arabs was that the control of the governments²⁰⁸ whether it be Mamluks, Ottomans or Safavids, vested in the hands of military who showed benign neglect towards the needs and interests of merchants and manufacturers. The governments taxed the merchants according to their need for money especially to meet the huge expenses of military expeditions. The taxation policy of the governments were centred not on the economic prosperity of the nation but on extracting provision for the government. They paid no attention to promote local production but were interested in getting the capital city and principal towns adequately supplied with goods irrespective of their source and economic interests of the empire.

It can be seen that early Islam was highly receptive to novelties and favoured the transmission not only of goods and men

²⁰⁸ Charles Issawi, *Op.cit.*,P.250

but also technology, information and ideas²⁰⁹. The doctrines and practices of early Muslims, especially the objective criteria of orthodox reasoning and rational and scientific thought were favourable to economic and material growth and development²¹⁰. Later ascendancy of Sufism led a major portion of the vibrant community to cling to Sufi speculations and conjecture disregarding or contempting material and worldly benefits. This resulted in the deceleration of former rapid economic growth of the Arab empire.

The pre-modern ports and coasts enjoyed a high degree of liberalism and freedom. Foreigners could come and set up their own enterprises and institutions beneath the suzerainty of its rulers. During this period commercial traffic was in the hands of highly professionalised merchants with little support from the rulers. Political changes of a region had only little influence on the commercial activities of these independent merchants. By the end of the Abbasid period Arab trade had developed in to a well organized international system that neither the fragmentation of the empire nor its economic decline affected seriously the smooth functioning of the independent system. Moreover, before the arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean in 1498 neither the native kings nor any of the commercial powers of the time had

²⁰⁹ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, the making of India*, Vol..I, Leiden, (1990), P.

²¹⁰ Charles Issawi, *Op.cit.*,P.252

attempted to control the sea routes or sea ports of the Indian Ocean region. Up to the appearance of Portuguese, Arabs were the leading traders and sailors of this region. Hence, even though the late medieval Arab empires swung between economic prosperity and economic decline, the Arab trade continued to flourish showing a greater inelasticity to the economic conditions within the empire. The main factor which facilitated this commercial resilience was the wide spread settlement of the Arab merchants along the Indian Ocean trade routes. But the coming of the Portuguese to the Indian Ocean, though guided by an Arab pilot, marked the end of the long established maritime supremacy of the Arabs.

The Portuguese introduced military and naval power in support of trade. The joint stock company system developed by the Europeans provided them with enough capital to build a network of factories and forts along the trade routes, keep a huge naval force in support of trade and to adopt a unified business strategy on markets stretching over Africa and Asia. The immediate effect of the Portuguese interruption was the ouster of Arab ships from the Indian Ocean. It is assessed that ouster of Arab traders from Indian Ocean by the Portuguese was by brute force, not by peaceful business competition²¹¹.

²¹¹ Immanuel Weller Stein, *The modern World System*, London (1974), P.329. It was to incite Muslims to fight argument such cruelties that

The Portuguese merchants who succeeded the Arab merchants were fundamentally different from their predecessors. Unlike the Arabs, the Portuguese traders were not individual merchants but were a well organized formidable naval power acting on behalf of a foreign state. The naval technology of the Portuguese was superior to those of the Indian Ocean countries. The Portuguese ship builders, before the discovery of the cape route had adapted the refined maritime technology of Mediterranean Muslims to their own ships and had armed their ships with cannon²¹². None of the coastal Kingdoms of Indian Ocean region had maintained any significant fortification for the protection of ports or had any workshops with considerable military facilities. Moreover the advent of the Portuguese to the Indian Ocean region was with a strong will to monopolize its routes and goods even by using force and aggression. They fulfilled their will by capturing many strategically situated ports along the coasts of the Indian Ocean from Sofala in East Africa to Malacca in the Indonesian archipelago. In fact introduction of naval power in support of trade was something new in the Indian Ocean. It has been established that the ports were not chosen at random²¹³. Sofala was captured for monopolizing the traffic of African gold, Hormuz for the control

Tuhfat al-Mujahiddeen was written in 1583

²¹² Maritime India, III, P.159

²¹³ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean*, London (1984) P.162

of the markets of central Asia and the Persian Gulf, Diu for the domination of export of cotton and silk textiles from Gujarat, Goa for establishing the viceroy's seat of power to regulate the maritime trade between Indian kingdoms and the Middle East, Cochin for procuring Malabar pepper, Colombo not only to get cinnamon but also to control the Western and Eastern sectors of Indian Ocean and Malacca to monopolize the routes to the spices Islands²¹⁴. It is estimated that the Portuguese utilized half of the money they sent to the East for fortifications and military ventures and the other half only for the purchase of pepper²¹⁵. By using this chain of forts along the India Ocean sea routes the Portuguese were able to control the trade and traffic in the Indian Ocean overstretching their resources both in men and capital. Very soon the Portuguese declared their monopoly over certain commodities. Spices, especially pepper was made a Portuguese monopoly. All Asian traders and sailors were required to get licences, 'cartazes', from the Portuguese for sailing and trading on the seas²¹⁶. Unlicensed vessels were captured, plundered and burnt. Treaties were imposed by the Portuguese on local rulers for supplying products on prices below market rates²¹⁷. Within fifteen years after

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* P.162

²¹⁵ Dietmar Routhermund, *Asian trade and European Expansion of the Age of Mercantilism*, New Delhi (1981), P.18

²¹⁶ C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, New York, (1968) P.181

²¹⁷ Immanuel Wellerstein, *Op. cit.*, P.340

their first arrival in the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese had completely destroyed the naval and commercial power of the Arabs and the way was opened for the Portuguese for the plunder of Asia²¹⁸.

The opening transaction of the Eastern trade of the Portuguese itself was a grand economic success. It is estimated that the cargo brought by Vasco Da Gama during his first voyage had given him sixty times the cost of the expedition²¹⁹.

Colonisation of the Asia regions by the European powers in the seventeenth century and the technological advancement of Europeans during the period of Industrial Revolution and the succeeding centuries completely reoriented the modes of production and navigation. When steamships began to appear in the seas, the oar powered and sail driven Arab ships were compelled to retreat to oblivion forever. It is assessed that by any economic criteria, the Middle East stood far lower in the eighteenth century than in the tenth or eleventh²²⁰. This economic deterioration of the Arabs was accompanied by corresponding decline in the intellectual and cultural contributions of the Middle East.

²¹⁸ M.G.S. Narayanan, Calicut, *The city of Truth Revisited*, Calicut, (2006), P.201

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, P.201

²²⁰ Charles Issawi, *Op.cit.*,P.245

CHAPTER V

IMPACTS OF ARAB TRADE

The intensity of economic, political, social and cultural interactions between different peoples of a period is closely connected with the transport and communication system of the age. Before the invention of modern communication systems trade across the seas and land was the major means of communication and contact between peoples of different regions.

The trade routes were the only communication highways of the medieval period and social customs, life styles, artistic styles, religious beliefs and new inventions were transmitted through these routes in addition to the goods of trade.

Peoples living on the shores of Indian Ocean were linked during the middle ages mainly by the Arab traders. When Arab trade flourished during the eighth and ninth centuries, previously isolated peoples of Asia, Africa and Europe were brought in to closer contact leading to intensive interaction between them.

Long distance trade of Arabs has played a major role in facilitating the exchange of cultural, religious and social values between major civilizations of Europe, Africa and Asia.

Social Impact of Arab Trade

The most important social impact of medieval Arab trade was the peaceful spread of Islam along trade routes. The success of the medieval Arabs in spreading their new religion is directly associated with the expansion of their trade of the period.

In areas where Islam was introduced by Arab traders, the indigenous social order was not replaced all on a sudden, but was blended with the new practices in a gradual transition giving rise to new cultures such as Swahili of East Africa, Navayats of Kanara Coast, Mappilas of Malabar Coast and Marikkayar of Coromandel coast. Since the native rulers and leaders were not replaced in this gradual process, there were no societal disruptions and the spread of the new faith was peaceful and permanent. Arab traders tried to modify the spiritual environment of the converts than their physical one. Some of the social systems and practices of the native communities were not replaced even after their conversion to the new religion. For example, in contrast to the Arab practice of patrilineal system of inheritance, some of the Mappilas of Calicut and Ponnani, especially who had marriage connection with or were converted from matrilineal communities¹ followed the matrilineal joint family system of the land called 'marumakkathayam'². The deep rooted spread of Islam along the trade routes and trade

¹ A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, *Mappila Muslims or Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, (1989), P.6

centres of medieval Arabs shows that the strategy adopted by the Arab merchants for the propagation of their religion was a great success.

Arab trade was based on the policy of mutual benefit and co-operation, Arab merchants always co-operated with other trading communities of the period and never used restrictive trade practices against business rivals. During the Abbasid days Jews rose to prominence in finance, banking and trade and great finance and banking institutions arose in Baghdad and Isfahan with important and even pivotal Jewish connection³. During the tenth century Jewish bankers got control of Abbasid money market and became instrumental in the development of sophisticated financial techniques such as the use of bills of exchange (suftajah) and cheques (sakk)⁴. In Egypt Jews and Christians held prominent position in the economic and administrative spheres which were in greater proportion to their numbers⁵. It has been assessed that the prosperity of the Jewish communities in India and their success in trade was due to the influence and prominent position they had in the Islamic Middle East⁶. In the Middle East, the prolonged

² M.G.S. Narayanan, Calicut, *The city of Truth, Revisited*, Calicut, (2006), P.127

³ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, The making of India*, Vol.I., Leiden, (1990), P.89

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid*, P.90

⁶ *Ibid*, Pp. 103-104

interaction between the Jews and Muslims had led to the emergence of Judaeo- Islamic traditions. Though there were Jews in India and China during the period, no Hindu-Judaeic or Chinese-Judaeic traditions had developed in these countries. Moreover in China the Jewish diaspora was gradually dissolved in to the mainstream⁷. Just like the Jews, the Parsi Merchants were also greatly benefited by the Arab trade. It is recorded that the migration of Parsis to the west coast of India was not a flight but a readjustment according to the new business opportunities in the transit trade between the Islamic world⁸.

Large numbers of Arab traders had settled in the coastal towns along the Indian Ocean regions. This led to the formation of Arab settlements and their matrimonial connection with the native women resulted in the emergence of distinct hybrid societies in the regions. It was these Arab diasporas of the Indian Ocean region that provided the indigenous people the mechanism to join together to resist the intrusion of the later colonial powers. During the period of European colonization of the East, these Arab diasporas were the epicentres of anti-colonialisation movements. The Mappila merchants and mariners of Calicut were the organizers⁹ of the prolonged combat of the Zamorins with the

⁷ *Ibid*, P.93

⁸ *Ibid*, Pp. 105-106

⁹ Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford, (1994), P.43

Portuguese. It was to motivate Muslims for a 'Jihad' against the invading Portuguese that Shaykh Zainuddin Makhdum wrote the anti-colonial manifesto, *Tuhfat-al-Mujahidin* in 1583¹⁰. It can be seen that Zainuddin had tried to create a confederacy against the Portuguese incorporating the Zamorin, Sultans of Bijapur and Gujarat and the Ottoman Caliph of Egypt. In Malacca when the Portuguese fleet under Lopes do Sequeira intruded to Malacca in 1509 AD, it was the foreign merchants settled in the port who persuaded Sultan Mohammed to attack them. Later at the time of Albuquerque's attack on the port, these merchants and the crew of their vessels joined with the natives and fought valiantly against the Portuguese. Albuquerque in reprisal set fire to many of the ships of the merchants¹¹. In the Coromandel the Tamil Hindu rulers had given every support to the Muslim clients in their resistance against the Portuguese onslaught in the same way as the Hindu Zamorins of Calicut supported the Mappilas¹². In contrast to the Arab policy of commercial cordiality and co-operation the Portuguese who succeeded the Arabs, followed a method of aggression and arrogance in their commercial activities. It is said that the grand title of Portuguese King as the Lord of conquest, Navigation and Commerce in Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India was

¹⁰ Shaykh, Zainuddin, *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*, (Tr.), S.M.H. Nainar, Madras, (1942)

¹¹ Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Op.cit.*, P.39

¹² Andre Wink, *Op.cit.*, P.80

evidently an expression of ambition and arrogance than a descriptive title¹³. During the period of Portuguese intervention, the natural sympathies of the native people of South India lay with the Muslim traders whom they had known for centuries and not with the Portuguese interlopers¹⁴.

The Indian Ocean which had been free for navigation and maritime trade for all was closed for others with the arrival of the Portuguese. Speaking of the brazen justification of the Portuguese in having denied free navigation to all others, on the basis of their own concept of sovereignty of the seas, M.G.S. Narayanan adds, "We are able to see how concepts of Law and Theology were twisted shamelessly to justify a Eurocentric world view that considered non-Christian, non-European people as less than human beings. This is a good instance of the devil quoting scripture!"¹⁵. The entry of the Portuguese in to the Indian Ocean with a will to put an end to Arab maritime trade resulted in the prolonged life and death struggles between them and the later ouster of Arabs from maritime trade. These struggles had many social and political repercussions and on the whole sixteenth and seventeenth century was a period great turbulence in the Indian

¹³ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Calicut the city of truth*, Revisited, Calicut, (2006), P.200

¹⁴ R.B. Serjeant, *The Portuguese of the South Arabian Coast*, Oxford, (1963), P.12

¹⁵ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Calicut, the city of Truth Revisited*, Op.cit.. P. 208

Ocean region. The Arab lands were commercially by-passed and the Arab merchants were substituted by the European East India companies.

Cultural Impacts

When the Roman Empire was conquered in the seventh century, the Arabs began to establish their dominion over world trade. On almost every shore of the Mediterranean sea and the Indian Ocean they either established their rule or founded their settlements. It was not an empire that the Arabs built but a culture as well¹⁶. Formation of the Arab merchant settlements and the later emergence of Arab- hybrid societies all along the Indian Ocean coasts resulted in the exchange of cultural values between these regions. During the period of their economic prosperity the Arabs kept alive higher intellectual life and study of science, assimilating knowledge from every source. During this period the west was fighting desperately with barbarism. The zenith of the cultural activities of Arabs was in the ninth and tenth centuries but was continued up to the fifteenth¹⁷. It was a period of universal cultural revolution which the west later embraced inheriting from the Arabs. Speaking of the cultural supremacy of the Arabs during the Middle Ages P.K. Hitti says, “the ninth century opened with two

¹⁶ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London (1974), P.14

¹⁷ Baron Carra De Vaux, *Astronomy and Mathematics, in the Legacy of Islam*, (ed.) Sir Thomas Arnold, Delhi, (1995), P.377

imperial names standing supreme in world affairs; Charlemagne in the West and Harun al Rashid in the East. Of the two, Harun was undoubtedly the more powerful and represented the higher culture"¹⁸. As the subjects of the most powerful and wealthy king of the period, Arab merchants and travellers were cordially welcomed by many of the medieval rulers. They were provided with full facilities for trade and travel and were even allowed to establish their own settlements with the right of self government in many marts and port cities.

The House of Wisdom (Baith al Hikma) founded by Caliph Al-Mamun (in AD 830) which undertook the task of translating in to Arabic all of what had survived of the philosophical and scientific tradition of the ancient world has played an important role in the later Renaissance of Europe¹⁹. The translation of the works of Hippocrates, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Euclid, Ptolemy, Galen, Brahmagupta, Susruta, Charaka and many others was a significant event in the history of knowledge²⁰.

During the period of economic prosperity of Arab empires, Arabs were the leaders of the intellectual world. They not only preserved all the learning of ancient world in Arabic translation but also made their own contribution in various fields of knowledge

¹⁸ Philip K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, P.298

¹⁹ C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, New York, (1968), P.75

²⁰ K.K. Usman, *This is Islam*, Cochin, (!998), P.151

and learning. As the greatest scientists, the greatest physicians, the greatest philosophers the greatest geographers and the greatest historians of the Middle Ages, were all Arabs, Arab lands were the greatest centres of knowledge and learning of the period²¹. During this period of cultural and intellectual supremacy of Arabs, many Indian Scholars, Scientists and Physicians had settled in the Arab lands and become naturalized citizens. These arabicized Indians were known as al-Zutt and were considered as part of Banu Tamim tribe²². Many Universities were established in the Arab lands during this period and were attended by students from various countries. It is said that from the twelfth century everyone in the west who had any taste for science, some desire for light turned to the East or to the Moorish west²³. In the eleventh and later centuries, many of the Arabic works were translated in to European languages by western scholars. Just as the Caliph al Mamun founded Baithul Hikma in Baghdad, so the Archbishop Raymond established three centuries later, a school of translation in Toledo²⁴. More than ninety Arabic works including Al-Qanun of Ibn Sina were translated by Gerard of Cremona who was designated as the real father of 'Arabism' in Europe²⁵. Ali bn

²¹ Masudul Hasan, *History of Islam*, Vol. I, Delhi, (1993), P.596

²² Maqbul Ahmed, *Indi-Arab Relations*, New Delhi, (1969), P.9

²³ Baron Carra De Vaux, *Op. cit.*, P.377

²⁴ Thomas Arnold, *The Legacy of Islam*, Delhi, (1996), P.347

²⁵ *Ibid.*,

Abba's Medical treatise *Al-Kitab al Maliki* was translated by Constantine an African Monk. Robert Chester and Leonardo Fibonacci produced two translations of Al-Khawarzimi's Algebra. The Medical and philosophical works of Al Farghani, Abu Mahasar Al-Kindi and Al-Gazzali were translated by John of Seville. Later many of the translated works of Arabs were taught in European universities for ages before western scholars could produce text books of their own²⁶. It is assessed that up to the fifteenth century, whatever scientific activity existed in Europe was confined to assimilating Arabic learning without adding to it and it was from the Arabs that the west learnt the experimental method in science²⁷.

In the eighth and ninth centuries the Arabs accumulated many arts, skills and techniques of China, India, Persia and the East Roman Empire and those of the early civilization of Greece, Egypt and Mesopotamia synthesis of these know how gave rise to the development of magnificent products which were regarded as marvels of the ages. It was the steady exchange of this know how to the West that resulted in the growth of similar technology in Europe²⁸. Paper an invention of the Chinese, was introduced to the West by Arab traders. Establishment of paper mills in the Middle

²⁶ Masudul Hasan, *Op. cit.*, P.597

²⁷ Masudul Hasan, *Op. cit.*, Pp.597-98

²⁸ S.N. Fisher, *The Middle East - A History*, London, (1959), P.90

East and Muslim Spain and the later transmission of this technology to Europe was a significant event in the history of ideas.

It is assessed that during the period of Renaissance, it was able to work, to produce and to invent because the Arabs had perfected and preserved many branches of knowledge maintaining them alive and ready for future discoveries. Thus the Arabs were the connecting link between ancient culture and modern civilization²⁹. Arab civilization remained vigorous for about seven centuries spreading human knowledge when most of the Western Europe was in a state of Chaos and superstition known to historians as the Dark Ages. No people in the Middle Ages contributed to human progress so much as did the Arabians and the Arabic speaking people³⁰. Arab traders and travellers had a significant role in transmitting the great riches of intellectual and material culture, which the Arab world had gathered from China, India and Africa for centuries, to the West. Spice trade of the Arabs had a significant role in boosting the enterprising spirit of the Europeans in the Middle Ages. It was the quest of the Europeans to control the spice trade which led to the exploration of the Indian Ocean and the later colonization of the region by them. Up to the Renaissance, Europe had no other significant information about the

²⁹ Baron Curra De Vaux, *Op. cit.*, P.377

³⁰ Philip K. Hitti, *Op. cit.*, P.4

interior of Africa, the Dark Continent, except that produced by the Arab travellers³¹. It was the quest of the Europeans to control the spice trade which led to the exploration of the Indian Ocean and the later colonization of the region by them.

It was the Arab merchants who widened the geographical knowledge of China. During the medieval period Chinese geographers collected information about foreign countries largely from Arab overseas traders. Chau Ju Kua who wrote *Chu-fan-Chih* i.e., the Record of Foreign Countries in AD 1225 depended for his information chiefly on Arab maritime traders with whom he had contact during his tenure as the superintendent of a Chinese port³². The frequent contacts of Arab traders and missionaries along the Indian Ocean coasts had resulted in the emergence of a distinct cultural identity all along the region. It is said that a traveller in these regions during the Middle Ages, would have suffered less of a cultural shock than some one travelling from Africa across the Atlantic in the seventeenth century³³. As many of the Arab traders were active in the propagation of their religion they were as much missionaries as merchants. The Arab trade activities in coastal towns led to peaceful spread of Islam and its progress was marked by goodwill and active co-operation from the indigenous rulers and

³¹ J.H. Kramers, *Geography and Commerce, in Legacy of Islam*, (ed.) Sir. Thomas Arnold, Delhi, (1995), P.102

³² V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India*, Delhi, (1990), P.71

³³ Andre Wink, *Al Hind, The making of India*, Leiden (1990), P.32

the prominent people³⁴. The cordial relation between these merchants and natives provided them with a greater opportunity for cultural exchange and intellectual communication. Emergence of Arab- hybrid languages is the most significant impacts of such continuous cultural exchange. Gujarati language of the Ismaili community of Gujarat and Arab-Tamil and Arabi-Malayalam languages developed in the south India are the best examples of such hybrid languages. Sindhi language adopted the Arabic script in the medieval period giving up its old form and continued to be written in Arabic scripts until recent times³⁵.

Formation of trade guilds had a direct impact on the cultural exchange between regions. Arab merchant guilds were active in extending financial help for social, religious and cultural activities. Merchant guilds of both Middle East and South Asia had sponsored social and religious activities ranging from feeding of the poor to the establishment of religious institutions³⁶. Tuhfat testifies that in the early days Muslim traders had raised funds collectively, for helping new converts to Islam³⁷. Many Sufi Khanqahs were established in port cities and were attended by members of each

³⁴ K.G. Vasantha Madhava,!

³⁵ Maqbul Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations*, New Delhi, (1969), P.45

³⁶ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean*, Oxford, (1993), P.66

³⁷ Shaykh Zainuddin Makhdum, *Tuhfat al Mujahidin*, (Tr.) S.M.H. Nair, Calicut, (2007), P.46

Sufi order to offer their special prayers³⁸ and Dikhr³⁹. These Khanqahs were prominent social organizations of the period that Spencer Trimmingham described them as 'pious night clubs'⁴⁰. As a result of the long process of intermixture and cultural exchange, Arab customs and habits in food and dress were assimilated by the natives, especially by the new converts in to their religion. As Arab trade was based on the assumption of mutual benefit of the buyer and seller the impact of such contacts on cultural values were also beneficial and constructive.

The mercantilist thought of the European merchants that the sum total of all resources is more or less constant and every country's economic aim is to grab the maximum share possible, led them to the belief that international trade is a kind of war, with different means, in which military power should be used to increase the economic potential of the participating countries⁴¹. Hence the merchant corporations like the Dutch and English East India Companies formed by the Europeans were fundamentally

³⁸ Kunhali, V., *Organization of Trade in Medieval times, in Keral Society Historicat Perspection*, P.41

³⁹ Dikhr is the special prayer advised by the Sheikh of the order which the Murid (desciple) should always recite.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, P.40

⁴¹ Dietmar Rother Mund, *Asian Trade and European Expansion in the Age of Merchantalism*, New Delhi, (1981), Pp.3-4

different from the Arab merchant guilds of the medieval period in terms of their objects, operations and organizational structure⁴².

Economic Impact

The most important economic impact of medieval Arab trade was the growth and development of a world economy in and around the Indian Ocean⁴³. This economic organization was the most extensive and highly developed in history before the establishment of the world economy by Europeans and remained expanding until the sixteenth century. When the Europeans intruded in to the Indian Ocean trade, they settled within this already existing economic structure, at times modifying it but never making any fundamental change to its basic structure. The Indian Ocean region was later incorporated in to the European world economy of modern period without changing the economic structure and commercial techniques of the medieval period⁴⁴. It was not the Europeans who made a world economy of the Indian Ocean in any sense⁴⁵. This economic system was based primary on commercial welfare of its participants and unlike the modern world economic system warfare of classes or nations had little role in shaping this system.

⁴² *Ibid.*, P.5

⁴³ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, The Making of India*, Vol.I, Leiden (1990), P.4

⁴⁴ Sanjay Subramanyan, *The career and legal of Vasco da Gama*, Cambridge University, (1997), P.95

⁴⁵ Andre Wink, *Op. cit.*, P.4

During the early medieval period when Europe was thinly populated, primarily rural and backward it was the Arab empire which dominated the economic activities of the period. By the 8th century, the Arab empire had achieved an unquestioned economic supremacy in the world. Arab caliphate was the central empire of the period and not China though it was called the middle kingdom⁴⁶.

By the middle of the eighth century trading activities of the Arabs had attained the status of a trading net work as defined by Evers⁴⁷, connecting the three continents of the then known world. The great expansion of Arab maritime trade of the period 'pushed the merchant to the forefront of the history of the Indian Ocean world'⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ Bertold Supuler, *Trade in the Eastern Islamic countries in the Early centuries, in Islam and Trade of Asia* (ed) D.S. Richards, London, (1970), P.19

⁴⁷ Hans Dieter Evers, *Traditional Trading Networks of South East Asia, in Asian Trade Routes* (ed) Karl Reinhold Haclquist, London (1991), Pp.142-152.

The nature of Arab trade network in the Indian Ocean has been examined by using the following criteria suggested by Evers.

- 1) Ethnic or religious homogeneity of traders but diversity of partners
- 2) Regular interaction between trading partners along definite trade routes.
- 3) Evolution of the network over time
- 4) Typical inventory of trading goods.
- 5) Development of distinct trading practices, customs and types of exchange (including typical ways of traveling and typical means of transport).
- 6) Utilisation of market-place system.

⁴⁸ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the sea*, Oxford, (1993), P.129

The economic power of many agriculture based kingdoms began to weaken as maritime trade created new wealth among urban and coastal groups. During this period economic power began to shift from kings and palaces to merchants and market places. It is this economic shift which gradually led to the emergence of an independent economic system in the Indian Ocean regions. Many agrarian economies of the medieval period gradually turned in to trade and commerce due to the perpetual commercial contacts of the Arabs. The native fishing and agricultural communities of Africa turned to trading activities during the tenth century when the East coast of Africa witnessed settlement of Arab merchants and sailors. According to Andre Wink, the paramount overlordship of India as a whole remained in the hands of the Rashtrakutas throughout most of the ninth and tenth centuries because the Rashtrakutas were 'friends of Arabs' and their dominion was closely integrated in the Islamic maritime trading system⁴⁹.

Arab traders brought prosperity to many local economies by integrating them in to a wider trading network. It was the long distance trade of the medieval Arabs that stimulated the growth of manufacture of silk items and porcelain in China, cotton textiles, iron and steel products, copperware, bronzeware in India, leather

⁴⁹ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, The Making of India*, Vol.I, Leiden, (1990), P.7

goods, glass and paper products in the Middle East. It gave rise to considerable trade in raw materials and agricultural products such as raw cotton from India, raw silk from China and later from the Middle East, dyestuffs from Gujarat, hides from central Asia, tin from Malaya, gems and precious stones from a number of Asian countries and spices from the Indonesian archipelago.

The native rulers of Indian Ocean region encouraged Arab trade as they were aware of the economic advantages of it. As it was a vital source of income to many royal treasuries, many dynasties took great interest in the promotion and protection of Arab trade.

Another important economic impact of Arab trade was the rapid urbanization of the trade centres and growth of numerous cosmopolitan ports and cities. Formation of settlements of Arab merchants along the trade centres catalysed the economic growth of such centres. As the Arabs extended their trade and commerce, existing cities were enlarged and embellished and many new cities were founded. Medieval Arabia was the conflux of East-West trade. From Mocha on the north of Red sea to al Mirbat in the East there were 33 Sea ports and 11 riverine ports on River Masilah and a number of marts located very near to the sea⁵⁰. The cities of

⁵⁰ V. Kunhali, *Organisation of Trade in Medieval Times, in Kerala Society historical Perceptions*, (ed) V. Kunhali, Calicut University, (2002), Pp. 36-37

Kufa and Basara were founded during the period of the 'rightly guided' caliphs. The new city of Wasit was founded by the Umayyads. The Abbasids founded their capital city of Baghdad and other cities like Samarra and Jafariya. In Egypt the city of Cairo was built by the Fatimids. In Spain the magnificent city of Al-Zahra was built by the Arabs. The cities of Mansura and Muhfuza in Sind were also established by the Arabs during the medieval period. Many ports had sprung up all along the East Coast of Africa. By fifteenth century there were 37 trading towns between Mogadishu and Kilwa⁵¹. Shaik Zainnudden reports that the Hindu rulers of Malabar had great respect and regard for the Muslims because 'the increase in number of cities was due to them'⁵². When Vasco da Gama requested the Zamorin to drive out all the Muslims from Calicut, Zamorin asserted that it was impossible to expel them, who lived in the city not like foreigners but as natives and from whom his kingdom received much profit⁵³.

When we look in to the reason for the rapid growth of many medieval economies we will find that it was because of the dynamic commercial contact of the Arabs-Sinnappah Arasaratnam observes,

⁵¹ Andre Wink, *Op. cit*, P.29

⁵² Shaikh Zainuden, *Tuhfat - al - Mujahidin* (Eng. Trans) S.M.H. Nainar, University of Madras, (1947), P.51

⁵³ Gaspar Correa, *The Three voyages of Vasco da Gama*, (Trans.) E.J. Stanely, London, (1919), P.328

“Among the several elements of dynamism and growth brought about by the expansion of Islam was a commercial ethic and commercial practice which spread through the Islamic lands like wild fire generating economic growth in these and neighbouring lands which sustained itself for centuries”⁵⁴.

It was the Arab traders who established direct trade contact between China and the West. It is assessed that the rapid growth of China during the Sung dynasty (960-1279 AD) was due to the adoption of mercantile principles of Middle East to China⁵⁵.

The commercial growth of Italy during the tenth and succeeding centuries was due to the long distance re-export trade of luxury goods and fabrics from the Middle East and the South East.

The immediate result of Arab conquest of the Roman provinces in the seventh century and Spain in the eight century was that Europe was completely cut off from world trade. When international trade passed effectively in to the hands of Arabs, Arab empires entered the arena of commercialism and industrialization, and Europe remained an agrarian economy and clung to feudalism.

⁵⁴ Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford, (1994), P.33

⁵⁵ Andrew Wink, *Op. cit.*, P.328

It was the economic activities of the Arabs that 'created an organized economic life and a splendid civilization in Spain while rest of the continent was in misery and decay both materially and spiritually'⁵⁶. It can be seen that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when all the Muslims were expelled from Spain, the country was suddenly deprived of all its skilled workmen and agricultural labourers resulting in its economic decline'⁵⁷.

Development of a highly advanced monetary economy with a standardized system of taxation controlled by a well established bureaucracy was another important economic impact of Arab trade. Arab monopolization of medieval trade led to the emergence of a unified international currency system based on the gold dinar and the silver dirham. Large quantities of gold and silver were dethesaurized and brought in to circulation. Arab dinar and dirham became the dominant currencies in all parts of Arab trade. According to Philip K. Hitti, "Arab money was in use in the Christian kingdoms of the north Spain which for nearly 400 years had no coinage other than Arabic or French"⁵⁸. In the ninth and tenth centuries, western India had ceased to produce indigenous coinage and was incorporated in the dinar domain of Islam.

⁵⁶ J.B. Trend, *Spain and Portugal in the Legacy of Islam* (ed.) Sir. Thomas Arnold, Delhi, (1995), P.5

⁵⁷ Ernest Barker, *The Crusades, in The Legacy of Islam*, (ed.) Sir. Thomas Arnold, Delhi, (1995), P.45

⁵⁸ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London, (1974), P.529

Fatimid coinage was widely used in the port towns of western India, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf regions⁵⁹.

European commercial institutions like limited partnership, jointstock system and certain technicalities of European commercial law were acquired from Arab trade practices and customs⁶⁰.

The mercantilist view of the European merchants that the sum total of the prosperity in the world is more or less constant and every country's economic aim is to grab the biggest-possible share, led them to the belief that international trade is a kind of war, with different means, in which military power should be used to increase the economic potential of the participating countries⁶¹. Hence the mode of operation of the European merchants was fundamentally different from that of the Arab merchants.

Unlike the Europeans the Arab merchants never tried to control the agricultural or industrial production of any foreign country. The Europeans, especially the Portuguese and the Dutch ruthlessly controlled the farming and production of spices in the Spices Islands to adjust the supply according to European demand.

⁵⁹ Andre Wink, *Op. cit.*, Pp.126, 331

⁶⁰ D. De Santillan, *Law and Society, in The Legacy of Islam*, (ed.) Sir. Thomas Arnold, Delhi, (1995), P.310

⁶¹ Dietmar Rothermund, *Asian trade and European Expansion in the: Age of Mercantalism*, New Delhi, (1981), Pp.3-4

Spice plantations were destroyed and the natives were compelled to grow other crops. This led to the destruction of agricultural production and economic deterioration of the region. When new patterns of economic activity suitable for the Europeans were introduced in the region by force, the long maintained economic equilibrium of the region was destroyed.

Trade and commercial activities in medieval India were reserved for certain castes, it was Arab merchants who encouraged other castes and communities in to trade and commerce. As the Arab merchants were very active in the propagation of their religion, there were many converts in Arab trade centres. Arab merchants encouraged these converts in pursuing trading and sailing activities. Many of the Muslims who participated in the collective monopoly of India sea trade were converts from lower castes of Hinduism⁶². Islam, with its inbuilt potential for expansion, concepts of universality and linkages to the vast Arab trade network was very attractive to emerging mercantile groups. The great Karimi Muslim merchants flourished during the eleventh and twelfth centuries by utilizing the services of their co-religionists scattered in ports from southern Europe to Sri Lanka⁶³.

⁶² C.G.F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, New York, (1968), P.169

⁶³ Kenneth Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea*, Oxford, (1993), P.129

During the medieval period many of the foreign ports were active centres of Arab social life and part of the Arab intellectual and cultural world. By the beginning of the tenth century a vast new Arab commercial and cultural network had been established in the Indian Ocean regions maintaining active interaction with the major civilizations of the regions. Though the political boundaries of the Arab empire were in a state of flux, economic interactions of Arab merchants remained expanding through out the medieval period.

Arab traders were the main agents of dispersal of botanical and animal domesticates and technologies and inventions of the medieval period. It was the Arabs who brought the major food plant sorghum to Yuan China and taught it how to refine Sugar⁶⁴. It was through Arabs that citrus fruit reached Spain and sugarcane reached Syria⁶⁵. Both the West and the East got Arabian horses through Arab merchants. The great products of Asian civilizations, spices, silks, cotton textiles, porcelain, paper, glass and precious stones were supplied to the west by the Arabs.

Arab trade has played a significant role in stimulating European expansion too. Though the spice trade was not the sole economic motive for the activities of the Europeans, it was the

⁶⁴ C.G.F. Simkin, *Op. cit.*, P.140

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, P.77

most universal one⁶⁶. Post medieval Europe's economic ascendancy is the result of the Industrial revolution. As medieval Europe had a little export to the East in exchange for the spices and luxury items it sought from Asia, there was a heavy adverse balance of trade which had to be settled in gold or silver. Throughout history, until the industrial revolution Europe always remained on the adverse side of balance of payment. Pliny's complaint about the drain of gold and silver to the East, Roman emperor Tiberius's decree prohibiting silk dress in his empire to stop the drain of the empire's reserve of gold and silver to the East and Defoe's statement that the East India Company carried away the treasures of Europe to enrich the heathen⁶⁷ show the concern of European rulers of various times in the drain of their wealth to the East. Europe witnessed a reverse flow of wealth only after the industrial revolution. But it can be seen that the age of Industrial revolution was preceded by a long period of commercial revolution which was initiated mainly by the Arab traders.

Political Impacts

Establishment of Arab merchant settlements during the medieval period along the trade routes was systematic and

⁶⁶ Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol.I, London, (1965), P.50

⁶⁷ C.G.F. Simkin, *Op. cit.*, P.252

spontaneous with out political motives. The Arab traders never tried to get fiscal or political control of the regions of their settlements, but accepted the existing political authority. Unlike the European expansion, commercial infiltration of Arabs to various countries never led to the political colonization of the regions. The result was that areas where Islam was introduced by Arab traders never witnessed any political turmoil. Instead Arab traders had assisted many native rulers to strengthen their political power and even helped to achieve their political ambitions. It was the Arab traders who had commercial connections with the rulers of Egypt, Persia and other Muslim countries who kept the Zamorin in political contact with such powerful world Empires during the days of Portuguese assault. It was the Arab merchants settled in Malacca who assisted Sultan Mohammed to attack the Portuguese when they intruded to his territory in 1509 AD.

Though the Arab Merchants settled in foreign countries kept aloof from the political affairs of the countries, they had maintained intimate contacts with the native rulers. In Malabar, Mappilas and their predecessors were indispensable in the maritime trade due to the religious restriction on maritime travel for high caste Hindus. In 1500 AD when the Portuguese kept some Hindu notables as hostages on board of their ship, the Zamorin released them immediately since they could neither eat nor drink

on board, by replacing them with Muslim merchants⁶⁸. In order to man their navies, the Zamorins had ordered that one or more male members of the families of Hindu fishermen should be brought up as Muslims⁶⁹. Hence fishermen boys who were born on Fridays were mostly brought up as Muslims⁷⁰. Shayk Zainuddin has stated that the Mappilas who had no Amir amongst them were highly patronized by the Zamorins⁷¹.

During the period of Arab naval supremacy, ports and coasts all over the Indian Ocean region enjoyed a high degree of liberalism. Travellers and merchants could come and go freely and even make settlement of their own, governed by themselves under the suzerainty of the native rulers. They could trade with any port of their choice in any commodity they liked. None of the kings along the coast had cared for the defence of the ports or tried to restrict traffic in its waters. It was the Portuguese who introduced the system of passes for the first time to restrict maritime traffic in the Indian Ocean. They built forts along the sea routes to dominate the native rulers and force them to acknowledge Portuguese suzerainty⁷².

⁶⁸ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind,, The Marketing of India*, Vol.I., Leiden, (1990), P.73

⁶⁹ William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. I., Madras, (1989), P.197

⁷⁰ C. Gopalan Nair, *Malayalathile Mappilamar*, Mangalore, P.99

⁷¹ Shykh Zainuddin, *Tuhfat ul Mujahidin*, (Tr.) S.M.H. Nainar, Calicut, (2007), Pp.12,17

The Indian Ocean, which remained a sea of trade and tranquility during the period of Arab naval supremacy became an Ocean of war and conflict during the period of European occupation of the region. It is argued that the principal export of pre-industrial Europe to the rest of the world was violence⁷³. It is estimated that the first four great fleets sent to the East by the united Netherland chartered East India Company had stocked guns and ammunition as large as merchandise⁷⁴.

It was the Medieval Arabs who gave a collective identity to the inhabitants of the peninsular India by giving them a geographical address. There was no geographical term in Indian languages to denote 'Indians' collectively until the coining of the term 'al-Hind' by the Arabs adopting a pre-existing Persian term⁷⁵. The term Al-Hind was used by the Arabs, in a wider sense referring to a geographical entity which included both south Asia and Indianized South East Asia.

Arab merchant community had played an active role in the political expansion of the Arab empire. When Sind was conquered by the Arabs, 'it was usually through the intervention of the heads

⁷² R.B. Serjeant, *The Portuguese of The South Arabian Coast*, Oxford, (1963), P.12

⁷³ Kenneth Mc. Pherson, *The Indian Ocean, A History of People and the Sea*, Oxford, (1993), P.207

⁷⁴ Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in The Orient, 1600-1800, in Maritime India*, Oxford, (2004), P.33

⁷⁵ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, The Making of India*, Vol.I.

of mercantile houses that the Arabs gained access to many cities after a siege of some weeks or months and through them treaties and agreements were concluded'⁷⁶.

As Sind had come under the political influence of the Arabs by conquest, their immediate neighbours of the east, the powerful Gurjara - Partihara dynasty were in enmity and often at war with them. Hence the Arabs were not able to get access to the north and central India. This is the reason for the absence of Arab literature of the times on north India. Up to the eighth century North India had been the centre of Hindu religious activities. But due to the later political decline and the descent of Buddhism, South India became the most important centre of Hindu religious reforms and revival. South India, during the period, was studded with many colonies of Arabs who had settled there as merchants and missionaries. There existed a cordial and friendly relationship between the Arabs and natives, facilitating direct cultural exchange between the two. Tarachand has opined that the great Hindu religious thinkers of the medieval south had a 'closer parallelism' to Islam in their speculations and religious tone⁷⁷.

From the very beginning of the political Expansion of Arab empire its rulers took great interest in the economic and

⁷⁶ Andre Wink, *Op. cit.*, P.205

⁷⁷ Tarachand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, II Edition, Allahabad, (1963), P.111

commercial prosperity of the lands under their sway. Even during the period of conquests, merchants and traders were allowed to conduct commercial activities uninterrupted. When Arab imperial capital was shifted to Baghdad from Damascus in the late eighth century, Persian Gulf trade reached its zenith. Later, political decline of Baghdad enabled the Fatimid dynasty (909-1171 AD) to divert the Persian Gulf trade to the Red Sea and make Egypt a flourishing centre of Islamic culture and commerce. It is assessed that trade competition between the Fatimid Egypt and Abbasid Middle East had deepened the ideological conflict between the Shia and Sunni Sects. Andre Wink is of the opinion that the Shia-Sunni rivalry between the Fatimid Caliphs at Cairo and Abbasid Caliphs at Baghdad was an ideological translation of the commercial rivalry between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf as both began to compete more intensely for India trade⁷⁸.

The religio-political influence of the Arab Caliphs were so deep on the non-Arab Muslim rulers of India that the Indian Muslim rulers always tried to get legal sanction for their rule from the Arab Caliphs in the form of Manshurs and Sanads. This legal sanction gave them entry in to the political set up of the Islamic world of the time⁷⁹.

⁷⁸ Andre Wink, *Op. cit.*, P.216

⁷⁹ Maqbul Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations*, New Delhi, (1969), P.71

When the Arab political power reached Sind, the Indian sub continent and the Islands of the eastern sea were integrated in to the Arab trading network. The middle East became the core-region of the world embracing trade network providing a unified monetary system. When the Arab empire reached the zenith of its political expansion many rival dominions from the Mediterranean to Indian Ocean were brought under a single political power.

The Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean had not been linked politically by a single power for about a millennium after the time of Alexander the Great. During the period of Arab political expansion these two major economic zones were re-linked after the Hellenistic times, and the Arab merchants were able to establish a commercial net work which extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific through Eurasia.

As European demand for spices increased Islam penetrated to the interior regions of South East Asia through the settlements of Arab traders. In these regions Islam did not replace the popular native culture but provided an additional expression of it making it an integral part of folk culture and identity. This resulted in the gradual adoption of the new religion by vast majorities of the population including native rulers.

Large scale migration of Arab traders to East Africa and the rapid growth of Arab hybrid communities in the coastal region had

resulted in the political domination of the Arabs in the region. Zanzibar was for a long time under the suzerainty of the Sultan of Oman⁸⁰. One of the important political impacts of slave trade of the Arabs was the emergence of slave armies, slave aristocracies and slave dynasties. In the Arab lands slaves got the opportunity to become high officials, military commanders and rulers. The systematic use of slaves had an important role in the expansion of both Arab empire and Arab trade. Slave dynasties came in to existence in the Middle East, Egypt and India. Though African slaves were present in the armies and governing bodies of the Arab empire, the main source of military and aristocratic slaves were the Turks of the Central Asia. This Turkish factor was the main force behind the overland expansion of Arab empire to the East and Islam was established in North India by the Turks.

⁸⁰ S.S. Nadvi, *Arab Navigation, in Islamic Culture*, Vol.XVI, Hyderabad, (1942), P.81

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Due to the strategical location, the Middle East was the converging ground of trade and commerce from the beginning of recorded history. Many intermediaries of East-West trade had passed through this middle land at different times exploring wealth and civilization. The medieval period was the golden days of Arab political and commercial expansion. From the seventh century to the time of European exploration of the Indian Ocean, Arabs were the masters of world trade and navigation. When Arab political expansion reached Spain and Sind the entire ancient centres of trade and commerce from Europe to India came under the direct control of Arabs. By this period commercial expansion of Arabs had reached as far east as China resulting in the establishment of many Arab settlements all along the Indian Ocean region. Arabs had the widest network of Arab trade settlements in foreign countries. During this period extensive travel were undertaken by them observing closely the social, economic, political and commercial status of different peoples of different regions. The frequent and deep contacts of Arab merchants, many of whom were missionaries as much, along the Indian Ocean coasts had resulted in the emergence of a distinct cultural identity all along

the region. The universality of their religion, Islam, provided them a cosmopolitan outlook and the support of their co-religionists scattered over a vast region, in their maritime activities. The accounts of Arab travellers like Sulaiman, Ibn Rusta and Ibn Battuta show that Arab merchants and travellers had not experienced any alienation while travelling in the different ports of the Indian Ocean world. During this period, Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean had become well chartered maritime thoroughfares and the centres of sophisticated commercial and maritime activities.

Arab merchants who kept cordial commercial contact with almost all the coastal kingdoms of Indian Ocean region were able to pursue the practice of segmented trading journeys all over the region. This not only enhanced their profit but also resulted in the growth and development of many port cities. As the Europeans who followed the Arabs, were in enmity with many coastal kingdoms they were not able to engage in segmented trading voyages. The Portuguese introduced the drive for super profits and they elaborated a technique of oppressing the primary producer in order to keep down prices. In many ports of the Indian Ocean they used the threat of their superior naval power and imposed forced treaties with the native rulers. Frequent attacks were made on ports to protect their commercial interests. History

shows that this hostile commercial policy of the Portuguese and the Dutch culminated in the decline of both the trade empires.

Expansion of Arab trade encouraged many agrarian communities to pursue commercial activities like trade and navigation. This resulted in the growth and development of many urban centres and the emergence of new occupational groups such as sailors, traders and many artisan groups. Though China had maritime trade contact with South East Asia from the early days of the present era it expanded and reached its zenith during the period of Arab domination of the maritime routes.

As early as the thirteenth century the Europeans were enticed by the fantastic wealth of the East from the narration of European travellers like Marco Polo. Struggles between the great power of Arab empires and small and weak Western Christendom, that lasted for centuries had instilled in the European mind a burning desire to overreach the Arab predominance and break the almost complete monopoly of the East West trade held by the Arabs. The crusading zeal of the Portuguese had prompted them to seek the help of the mysterious legendary Christian priest king of the East, Prester John to fight against the Muslims. Hence the Portuguese were desperately longing to reach the 'Indies'. The discovery of the cape route to the East was the fulfillment of the prolonged quest of the Portuguese.

Economic prosperity of the Arabs was matched by a corresponding cultural and intellectual efflorescence. During the medieval period, Darul Islam (Abode of Islam) was the greatest centre of intellectual and cultural activities. The cultural legacy of medieval Arabs had an important role in shaping the modern Europe. Many historians are of opinion that it was the medieval Arab knowledge that motivated the later European Renaissance.

The Arab commercial activities of the medieval period led to the creation of a well organized economic system in and around the Indian Ocean region. None of the kingdoms of the Indian Ocean region was able to isolate its economy from the increasing embrace of the new economic system. Arab trade also provided a trade net work which was a necessary adjunct of Industrial revolution. As the Arab merchants had neither used restrictive trade practices nor tried to control the commercial activities of others, there was an inter continental 'free-trade' in its true sense. A deep analysis of the economic system of the period shows that, about a millennium before the formulation of the theory of 'laissez faire', the medieval Arabs had demonstrated before the then known world an almost working model of what is now known as 'free market economy'. When the Europeans appeared in the Indian Ocean maritime trade, they also depended on the already existing trade networks and commercial techniques in practice.

But the later foundation of European colonial empires in the region led to the gradual merger of the Indian Ocean economy into the global capitalist dominated economic system. This shift of the Indian Ocean economy limited the range of economic opportunities available to indigenous merchants and the indigenous economic system was dissolved into the global capitalist economic system created by the Europeans. It was after this economic and political domination of the rest of world by the Westerners that the duality of world economy as 'developed economy' and 'developing economy' came into existence. The universal concept of the Europeans that the wealth of their colonies in the East were their own national wealth led to the further widening of the gap between the developed and developing economies.

GLOSSARY

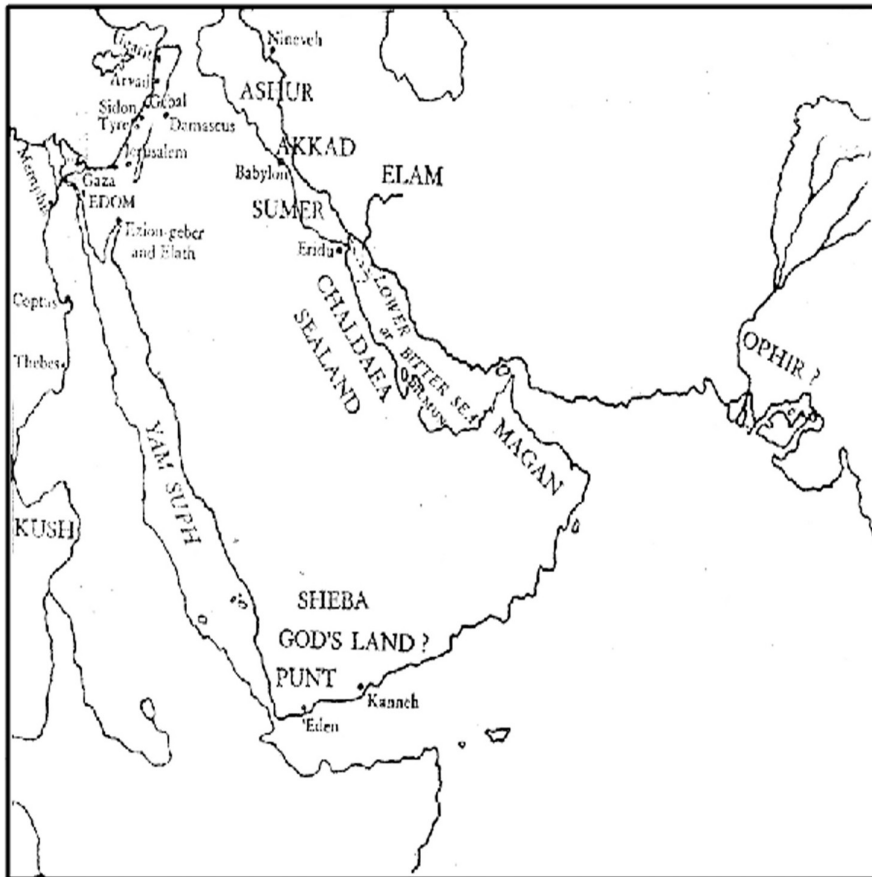
Al-hawala	: Transfer of debt.
Al-Mudrabah	: An arrangement whereby an investor or group of investors entrusts capital or Merchandise to an agent manager also known as al Muqaradah
Al-Sharikah	: Mercantile partnership.
Al-Suftaja	: Letter of credit.
Ameer	: Leader, commander or head of a community.
Dikr	: Remember or recollect a spiritual exercise designed to render God's presence throughout one's being.
Dinar	: Gold Coin.
Dirham	: Silver Coin.
Hadith	: The Traditions of the Prophet.
Hajj	: A pilgrimage to Mecca.
Hajjathul-widá	: Farewell pilgrimage.
Hajj Wa-hadjah	: Pilgrimage and business.
Hanafi	: School of law founded by Abu Hanifa.
Hanbali	: School of law founded by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.
Ilm	: Knowledge
Imam	: Leader
Jahiliyyah	: The "time of ignorance" or period of Arab paganism preceding the revelation of Islam.

Jama'at	: Congregation.
Jihad	: Striving spiritually or physically in the way of God.
Jinn	: Unseen being created by God referred in Quran.
Jumá	: Friday prayer, Day of reunion or gathering.
Khalifa	: Successor, lieutenant, deputy, vicegerent, its Anglicized form, caliph or the rulers of Islamic empire after Prophet Muhammad.
Khilafat	: Anglicized version caliphate, office of the Khalifa.
Khutbah	: The sermon delivered on Friday before the prayer, Eid prayers, Nikah etc.
Madhab	: School of Islamic Jurisprudence or Fiqh.
Madrasah	: A traditional school for religious education.
Marumakkatayam	: Matrilineal system of inheritance.
Masjid	: Place of Muslims worship, mosque.
Murid	: Disciple of a Sufi Saint.
Qadi	: Judge
Sahib al barid	: Chief of the Postal department.
Shafi	: School of law founded by Muhammed Ibn Idris ash-Shafi
Sharikat-al-Inan	: Limited investment partnership, Literary al-sharikah means a sharing, participating or co-partnership.

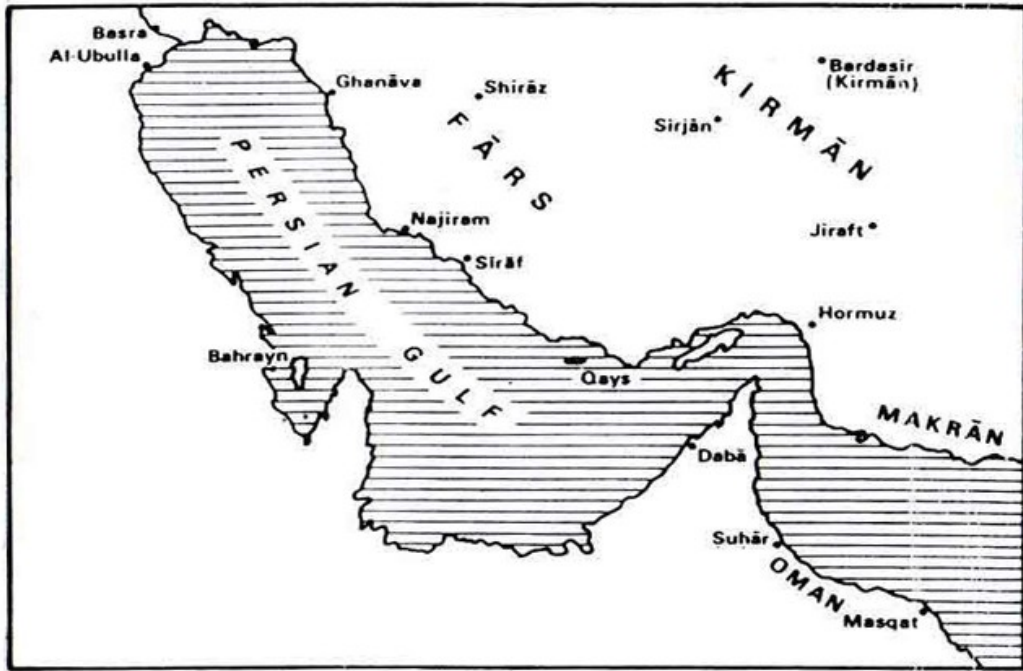
Sharikat al Mufawadah	:	Universal partnership or unlimited investment partnership.
Shia	:	Doctrine of the legitimacy which holds that Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the fourth Caliph, was the true spiritual and political heir of the prophet Muhammed.
Shi'ite	:	One who follows the Shia doctrine.
Sufi	:	One who gives up all worldly things to seek the pleasure or nearness of God.
Sufism	:	Islamic mysticism or esotericism.
Sunnah	:	All the traditions and practices of prophet Mohammed that have become models to be followed by muslims.
Sunni	:	Short for Ahl-al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaát, the people of sunnah and community: the majority of Muslims belongs to this section.
Tangal	:	Descendant of the Prophet Muhammed also called Sayyid.
Ulema	:	Religious Scholars.
Zakat	:	The legal alms in Islam.



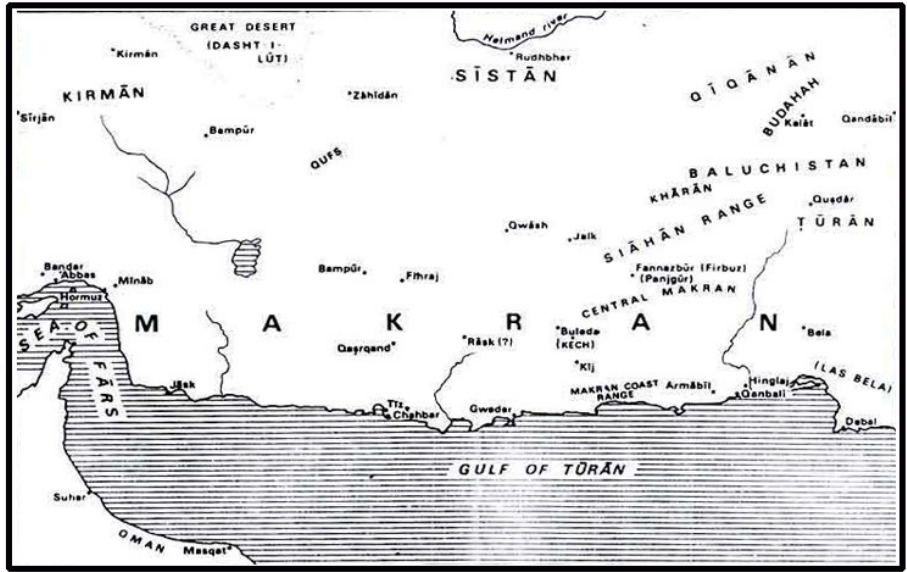
ARABIA, THE LAND OF ARABS



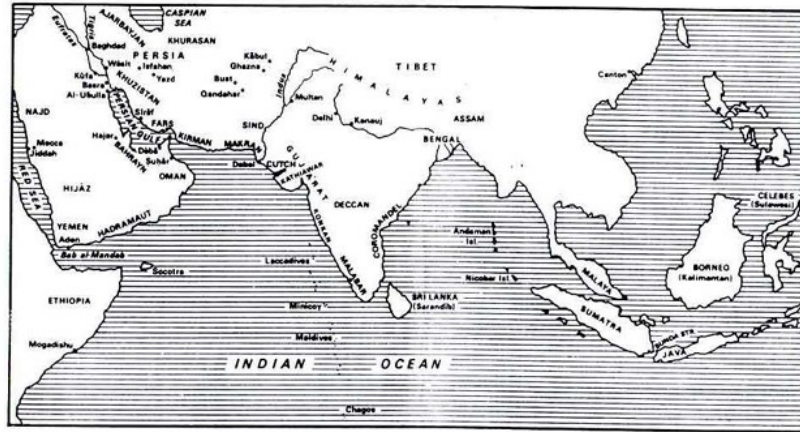
ARABIA DURING THE ANCIENT PERIOD



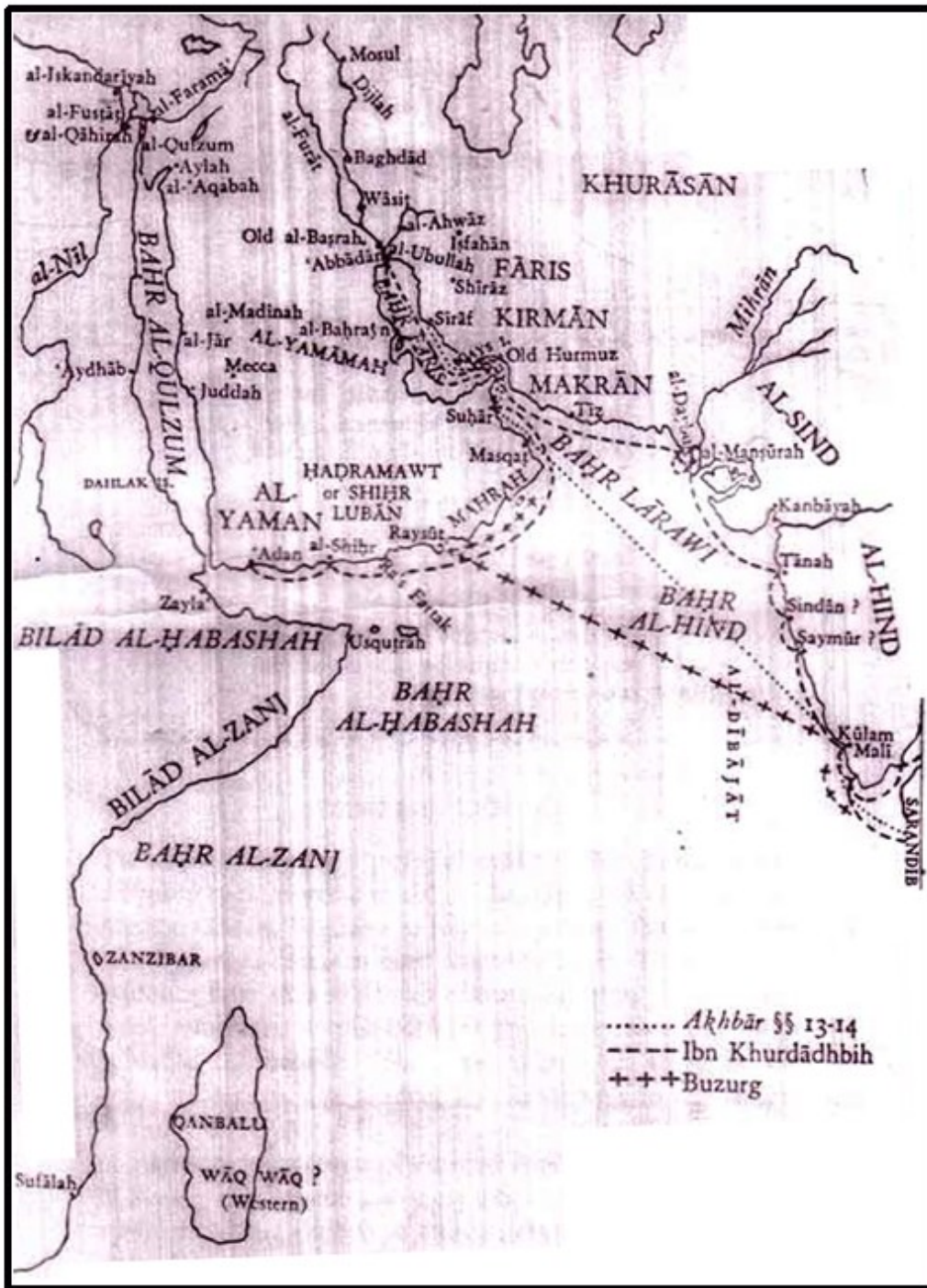
IMPORTANT PORTS IN THE PERSIAN GULF AREA



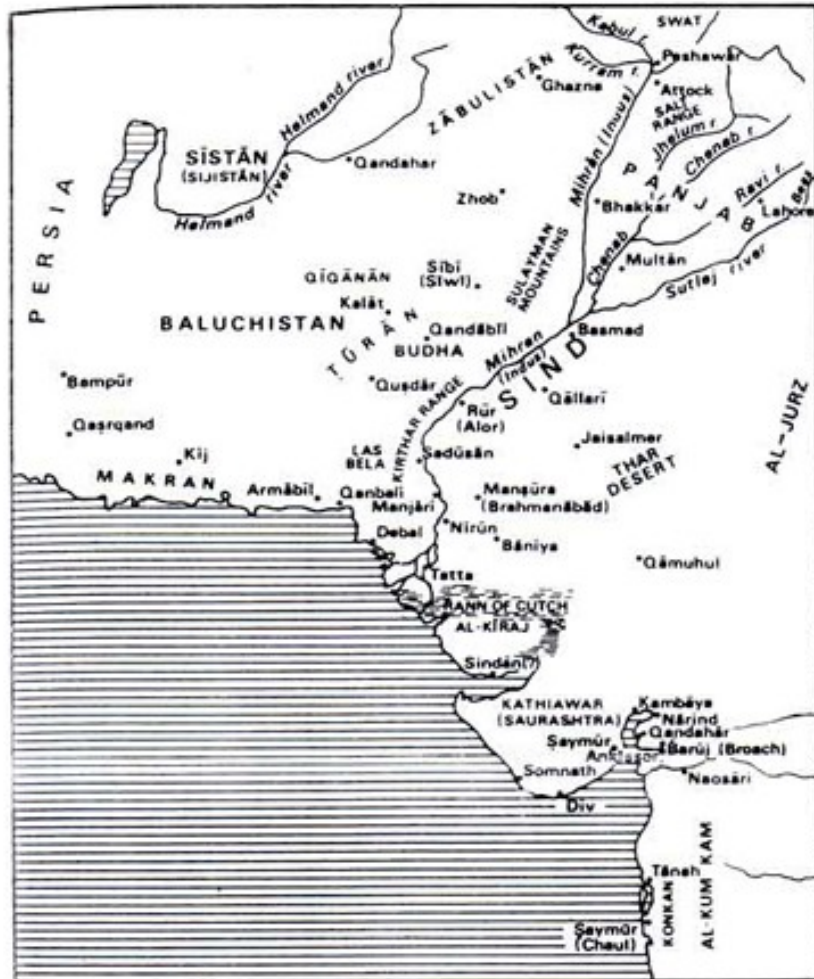
MAKRAN COAST



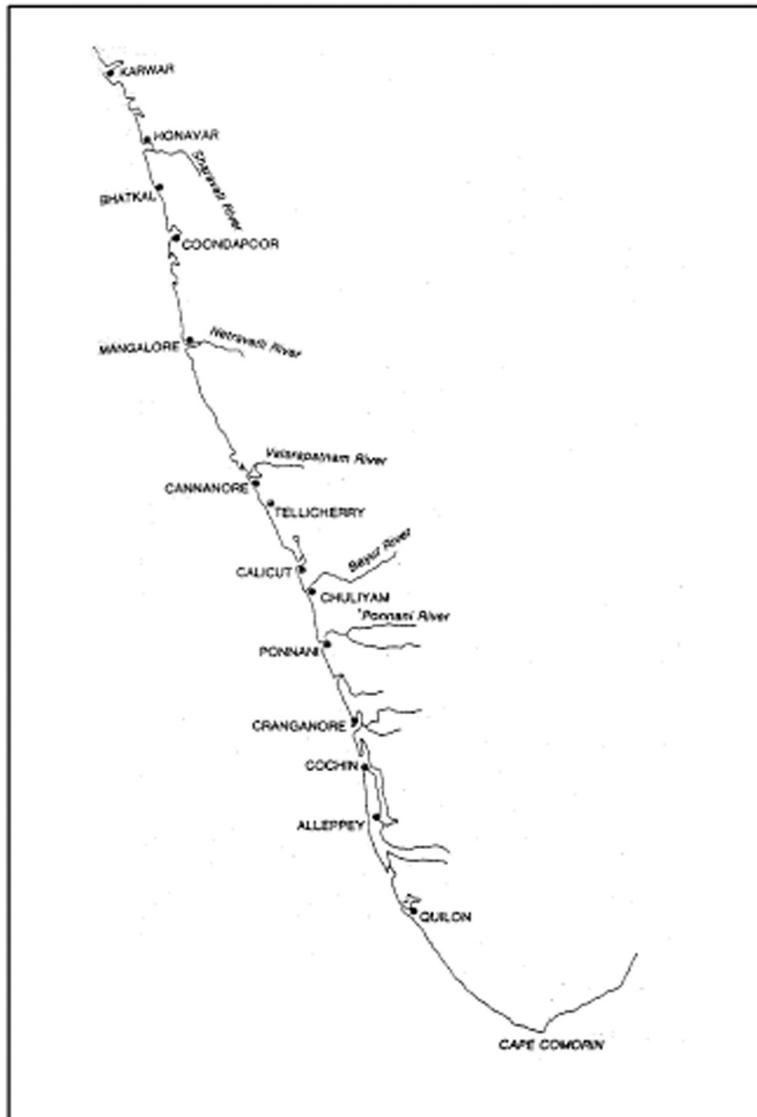
ARABIA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD



ARAB TRADE ROUTES TO SIND AND HIND



SIND AND THE IMPORTANT MEDIEVAL TRADE CENTRES



IMPORTANT PORTS IN THE MALABAR COAST



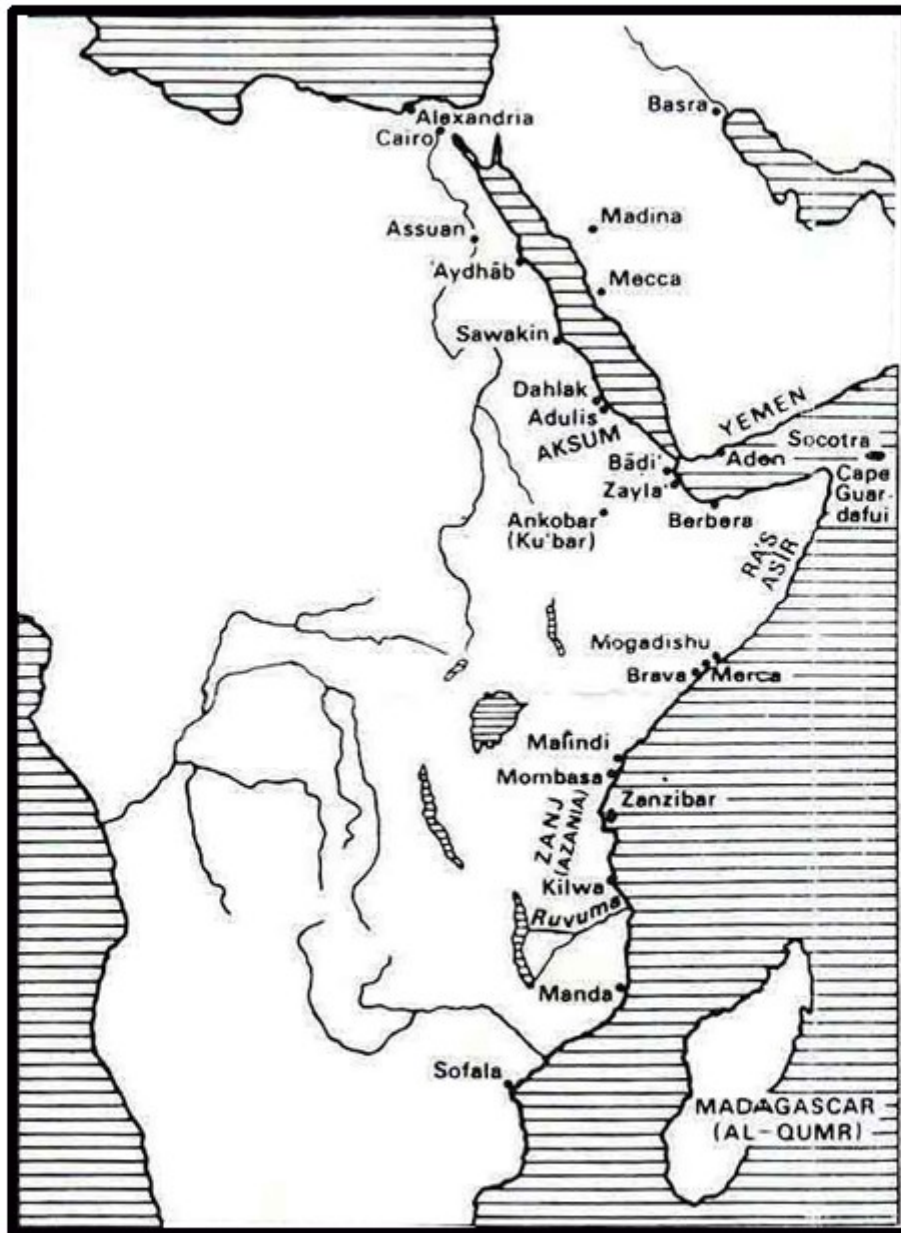
COROMANDAL COAST



SOUTH COROMANDAL AND SRI LANKA



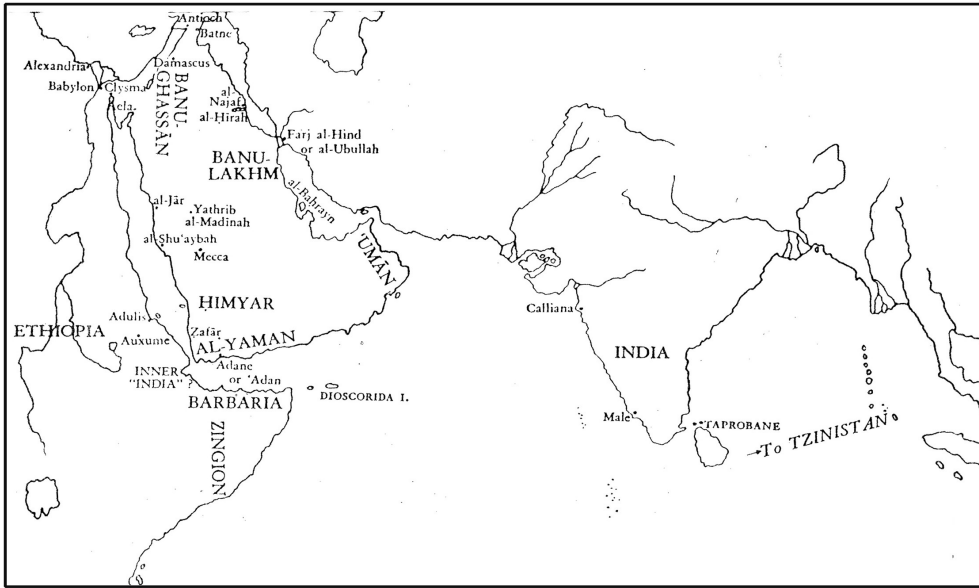
INDONESIA 8th TO 14th CENTURY AD



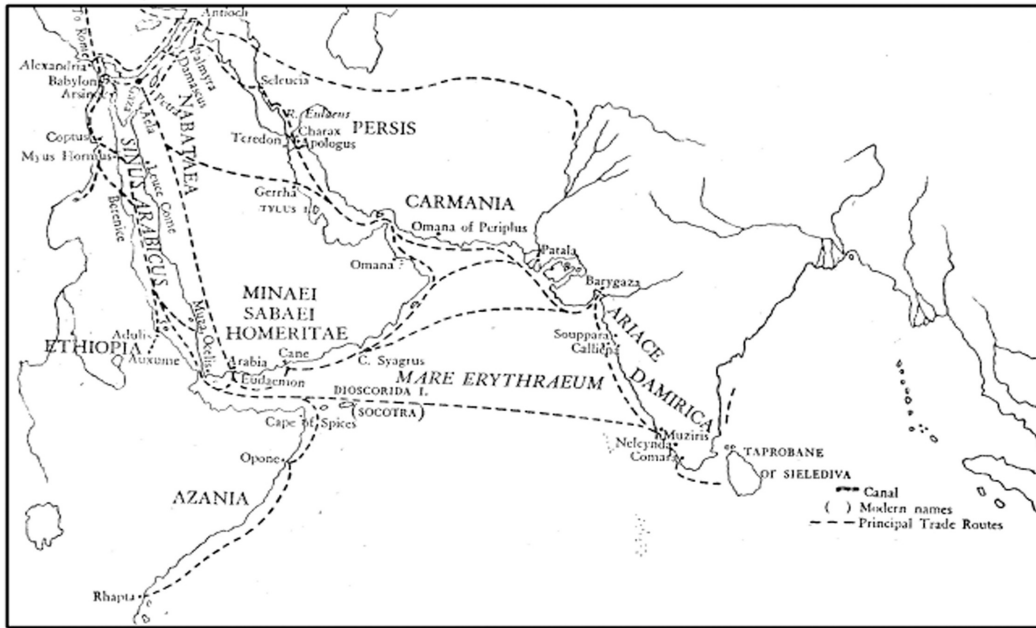
IMPORTANT PORTS IN THE COAST OF EAST AFRICA



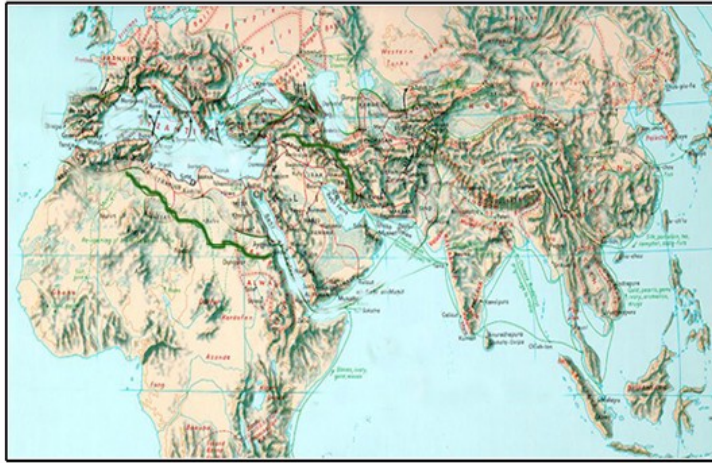
THE ARAB AND THE BYZANTINE EMPIRES DURING 750 AD.



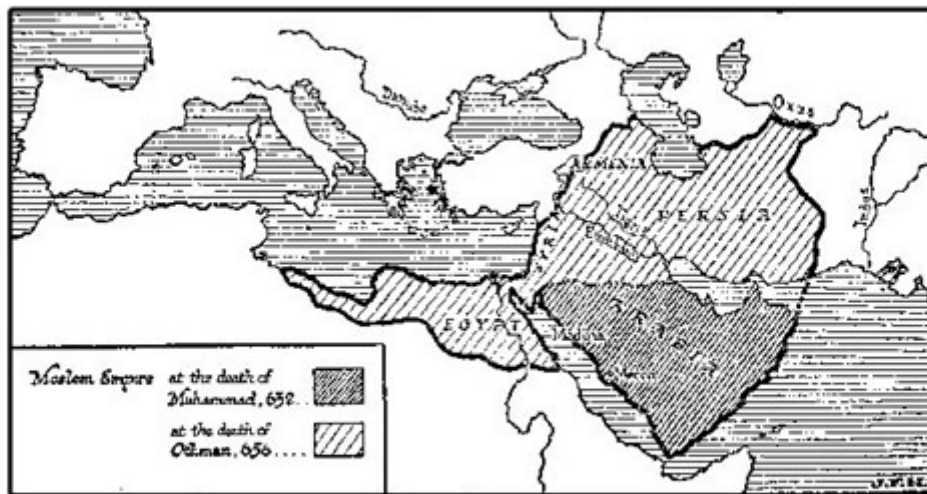
ARABIA AND THE EAST IN THE 6th CENTURY AD



ARAB TRADE ROUTES IN THE EARLY TIMES



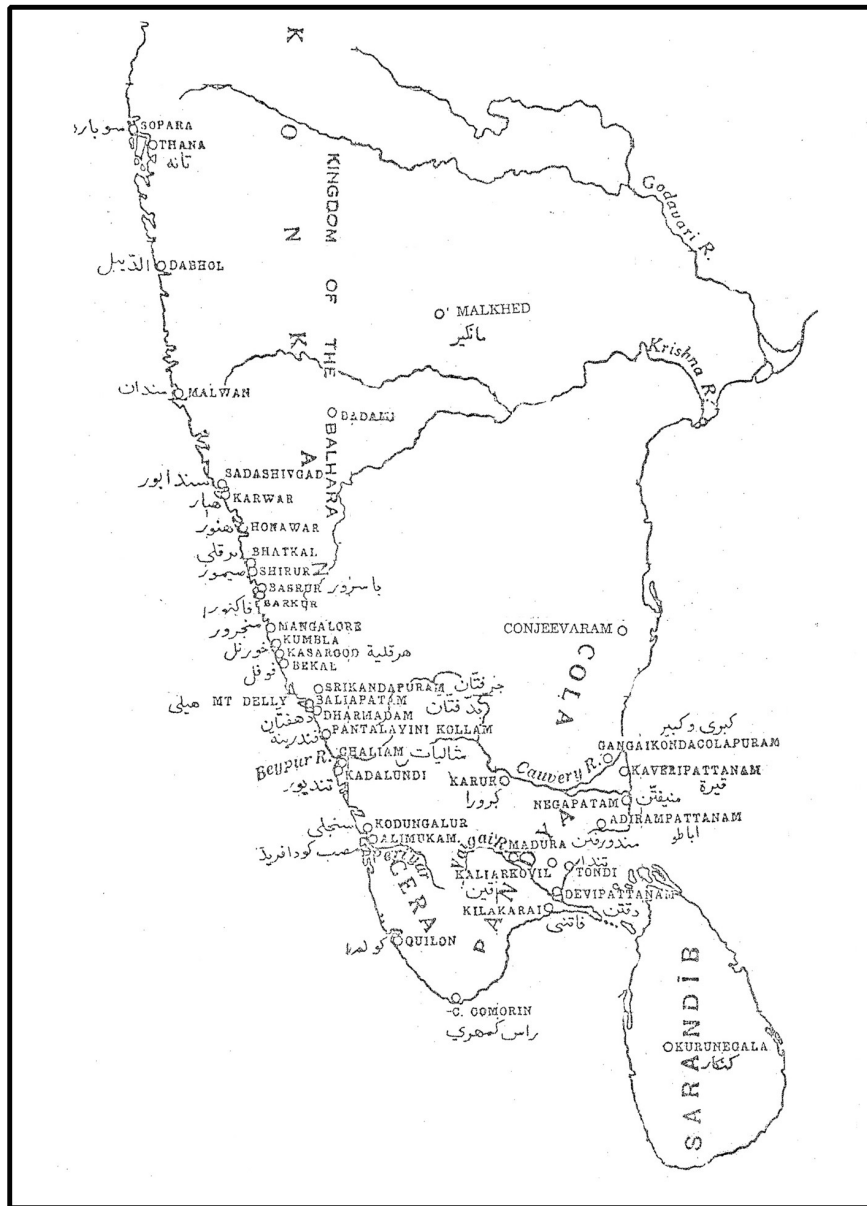
ARAB EXPANSION AND TRADE NETWORK DURING THE EARLY CALIPHATE PERIOD



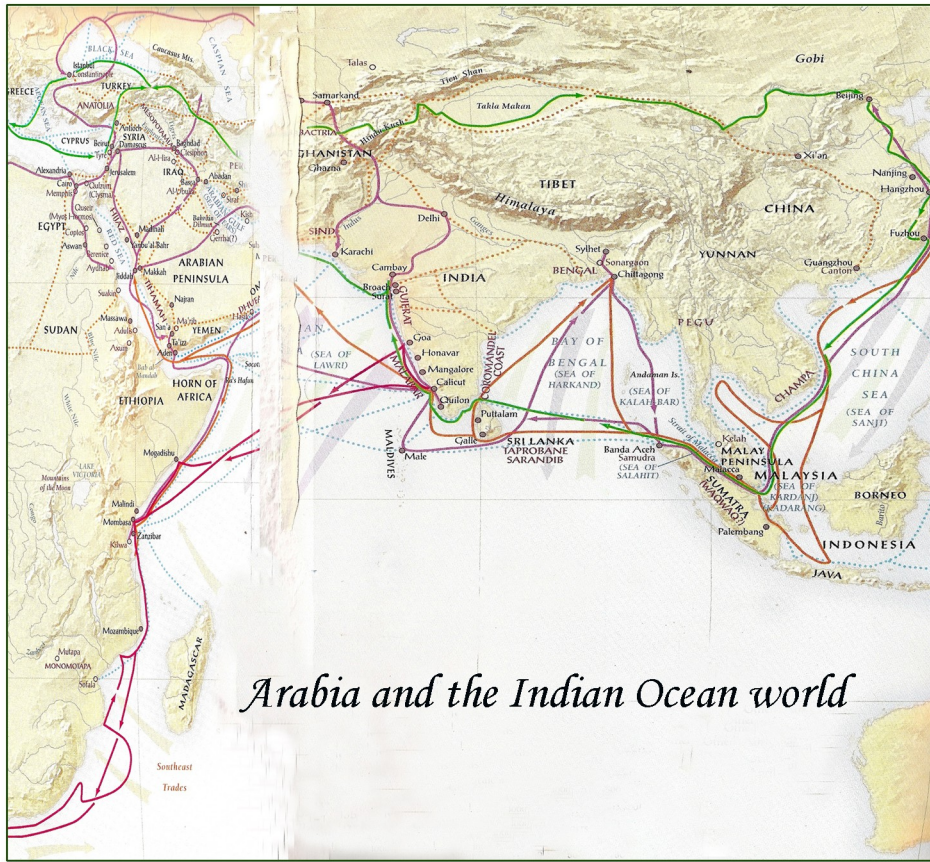
Growth of Arab power in early 25 Years



TRADE NETWORK DURING UMAYYAD PERIOD



SOUTH INDIA AS KNOWN TO THE ARABS IN ABBASID TIMES



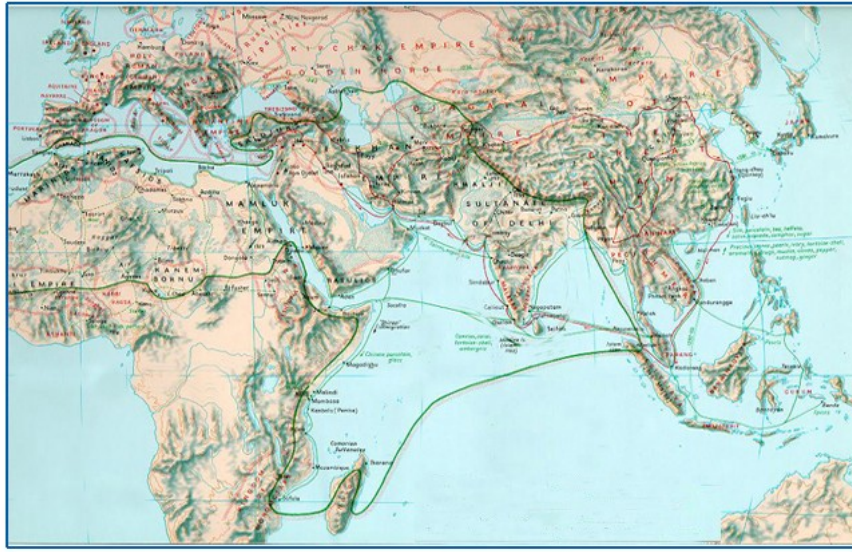
Arabia and the Indian Ocean world



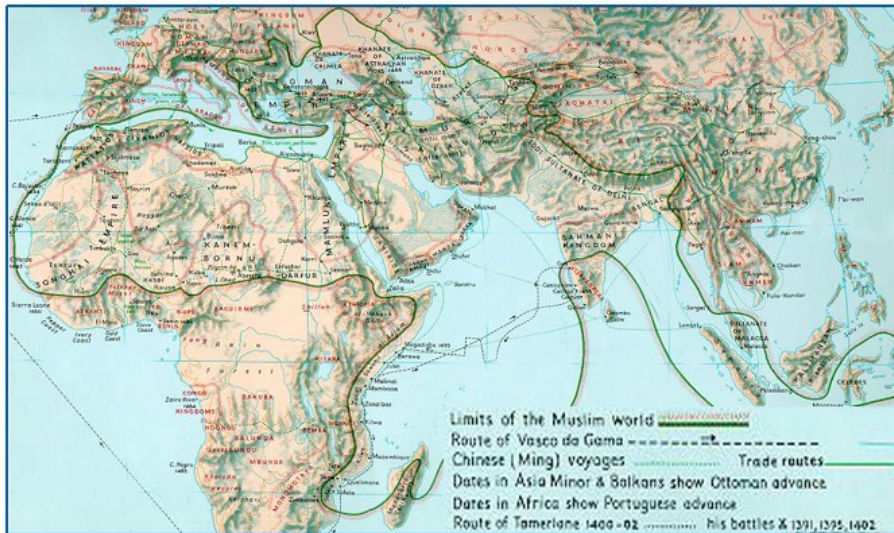
Trade network during the Abbasid period



Route of Mongol advance (1219-1259 AD.)



Trade network during the 13th and 14th centuries



Trade network in the 15th century

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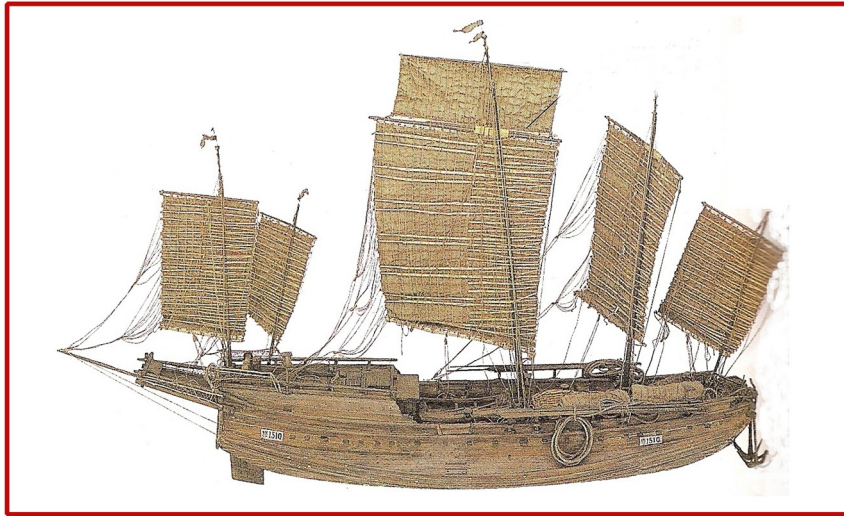
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APPENDIX I



ARAB SHIP

APPENDIX II



CHINESE JUNK

APPENDIX III



PORTUGUESE SHIP

APPENDIX IV



BRITISH SHIP