Nature of trade in Eastern India: The scenario in the latter half of the early medieval period (9th century A.D.-12th century A.D.)

Kakoli Tah Dutta

Jagannath Kishore College, Sidho-Kanho-Birsa University Purulia, India
ORCID iD  http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2209-3327

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Abstract: This paper deals with trade, trade-routes and commerce of the eastern region of India in the latter half of the early medieval period i.e. 9th to 12th century A.D. The modern states of Bihar, Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Assam and modern Bangladesh have been incorporated in the thrust area. A brief literary review have been done, sources have been highlighted, the political scenario have been discussed and a thorough review of the different views of historians regarding trading activities in this period have been sought out, before entering into the main domain. The region in the period under review have received the least attention as a subject for research, may be due to paucity of primary sources and also may be due to the prevalent predominant theory of decline and feudalization of trade and commerce, which has hindered the progress of the study of the nature of trade in the concerned thrust area. In this paper, both literary and archaeological sources, specially epigraphical sources have contributed to the maximum, providing the paper the needed resources for an informative get up. Both internal and external, overland and overseas trading activities and interstate and international trade routes have also been taken into account. The main objective of this paper has been to deduce the existence of trade against a feudal backdrop.

Key words: eastern India, early medieval period, trade, commerce, cowries, dramma, purāṇa

Introduction

Since the dawn of civilization, trade, be it overseas or overland, has been a part and parcel of human existence. It has been a priority for proper existence and subsistence. More often, the economic stability of a state in a particular period depended on the volumes of trade carried on in that region. Historians have always found it an interesting topic to deal with, both periodwise and regionwise. In India, volumes have been written on the aspect of trade and its nature, down from ancient times to modern times. In this paper, the nature of trade in the latter half of early medieval period is dealt with, focusing on eastern India as the thrust area. Eastern India comprises of the modern states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam and Odisha. We have incorporated modern Bangladesh in our area of study as the region formed an essential part of eastern India till independence in 1947.
Controversy regarding trade in the concerned period:

The period under review suffers from the hypothesis of decline in trade, money and urban crafts and the proponent of this theory is R. S. Sharma, according to whom, due to urban decline, the position of urban based artisans and traders undermined; traders were unable to pay taxes, and the distinction between urban and rural became blurred. Urban contraction was followed by agrarian expansion.[1] Sharma has elsewhere cited epigraphic references to the transfer of rights over market to donees, merchants transferring part of their profits to temples and the transfer of custom dues from the state to temple. On this basis, he infers feudalization of trade and commerce.[2] John S. Deyell has forcefully argued against the theory of monetary scarcity in early medieval India. [3] According to him, there was a reduction of coin types and a decline in the aesthetic quality of coins, but not in the volume of coins in circulation. Deyell’s work focused on the post 1000 AD period, but the roots of that period lay in the preceding centuries. According to him, the debasement of coinage was not necessarily a signal of financial crisis of the state nor of a general economic crisis. This debasement may be due to an increasing demand for coins in a situation where the supply of precious metals was restricted. Shortage of silver, occurred in different parts of the world, from time to time for a variety of reasons. Afganistan was a major supplier of silver to the Indian sub-continent. Deyell argues that as north India experienced a sustained shortage of silver in 1000 AD (and in some places as early as 750 AD), this forced the rulers to dilute the silver content of their coins. The hypothesis of decline in trade has been seriously questioned in recent years by Historians of repute. One of them, Upinder Singh, [4] with the help of several available documents have proved the dominance of Arab traders in the Indian Ocean from 7th century onwards. According to Singh, they swiftly expanded their political dominion over northern Africa, the Mediterranean region, central Asia and Sindh. These territorial conquests over Egypt, Persia and Sindh gave them strategic control over Indian ocean trade. The political success of Arabs helped in the spread of Islam on one hand and/or the expansion of international trade on the other hand. The establishment of Ummayid and later, the Abbasid caliphates made it possible for Arab traders to play a lead role in the trade network that operated along the overland as well as the maritime routes that connected Europe with East Asia.[5] References of long maritime journeys made by Arab traders can be found in 9th century texts, such as *Ahbar as Sin-wal-Hind*. The text records journeys of Arab traders from ports in Oman to Quilon (Kollam) in Kerala and on to China, via the port of Kalah-bar (probably located north of Singapore) and the Malacca straits. K.N.Chaudhuri has brought to light the fact that the Indian ocean was divided into smaller segments by the 11th century – one of them being the stretch from the Red sea and Persian gulf to Gujarat and Malabar; the second one was from the Indian coast to the Indonesian Archipelago and the third one from south-east Asia to East Asia.[6] At the junction of these three segments, a great trade emporia emerged which provided merchants with cargo, shipping services and protection. Trade emporia included Aden, Hormuz, Cambay, Calicut, Satgaon, Malacca, Guangzhou and Quanzhou. Silk, Porcelain, Sandalwood and black pepper were important commodities in the Asian trade of medieval times. These items were exchanged for various commodities such as incense, horses, ivory,
cotton textiles, and metal products. India maintained maritime contacts with China and East Asia. Her trade networks were strongly east oriented.

Ranabir Chakravarti has discussed at length the importance of maṇḍapikās in the trade circuits of early medieval India. [7] These maṇḍapikās acted as local exchange centres that acted as an intermediate level between the small, periodical markets (haṭṭa, haṭṭikā) and larger trade centres (paṭṭana). The maṇḍapikās had a large rural hinterland which functioned as modes of exchange for various types of edible staples and cash crops. They also acted as centres for the collection of commercial tolls and duties. Maṇḍapikās were equivalent in status to the Peṇṭhās in the Deccan and the nagarams further south. Chakravarti also focuses on the tradition of Rāja-shreṣṭhīs (royal merchants) which finds frequent mention in the inscriptions of the early medieval period, especially in the Deccan and South India. Most probably, these merchants supplied luxury items and war animals for rulers.

After a proper analysis of the literary and epigraphic sources of Western India (c.1000-c.1300 A.D), V.K. Jain has concluded that traders of this region were carrying on business in luxury goods as well as in staples such as foodgrains, pulses, salt, oil, ghee, jaggery, cocunut, betel leaf, arecanut, spices, textiles, pottery, animals, fragrances (e.g. Sandalwood, camphor, musk, aloe and saffron), ivory and gold. [8]The West Indian traders confined their operation to coastal and internal trade. Items imported into western India included metals (both base and precious), silk, gems, spices, wine, frankincense, and horses. Items of exports which were limited to luxury goods before 11th century A.D changed significantly from the 11th century A.D onwards. The range of exported items came to include sugar, cotton and flax cloth, buckram, tanned leather, leather goods and weapons such as swords and spears. Hoards of gaḍahīya/gaḍhaiya coins of the 7th – 12th centuries have been discovered in various parts of western India, which signifies the importance of money as a medium of exchange. Inscriptions refer to hundikās or bill exchange which facilitated large scale transactions without the use of money. Shulka maṇḍapikās or toll houses often finds mention in the inscriptions of the period. [9] The merchants held important civic and military posts such as those of the mahāmātya and daṇḍādhīpati in the administrative organization of the Chālukyas. As many of the traders of western India were Jaina, ethical code for them were laid down in Jaina texts such as the Satsthānakapraṇaraṇa of Jiṇēṣvara Suri (11th century). [10] Merchants of Gujarat made their mark in the field of learning and excelled as writers of Kāvyā, poetics, philosophy and grammar. Hemchandra, who is well known as an important Jaina text writer and wrote on several subjects such as grammar, metrics and philosophy, was the son of a merchant hailing from Dhandhuka. Gujarat merchants are known to have contributed generously for the welfare of the state. The temples at Mount Abu and Girnar reflects the patronage of the merchants. Inscriptions from this region records the fact that tolls and taxes due from merchants were transferred to religious establishments for their proper up keeping and for the celebration of festivals.

India’s trade relations with south-east Asia and China aggravated in the early medieval period. The argument put forward by Tansen Sen is that between the 7th and the 15th centuries, [11]a major change occurred in the nature of Sino-Indian interactions, from Buddhist dominated to trade...
centred exchanges. As by this time, China merged as a major centre of Buddhism, therefore there was a reduction in the importance of cultural transmission from India to China. He has divided Sino-Indian trade links in early medieval India into three phases. The first phase belonged to 7th – 9th centuries where it is seen that the earlier demand for Buddhist rituals continued. The second phase, 9th – 10th centuries saw a decline in overland trade between India and China because of a politically unstable state in Myanmar and Central Asia. The third phase began in the late 10th century when both tributary and commercial relations revived. This revival gave spurt to overland and maritime trade. Other than silk and porcelain, (the latter overtook silk as a major item of import into India by the 11th century). Other Chinese items imported into India included hides, vermilion, fruits (such as pears and peaches), camphor, lacquer and mercury. Metals such as gold, silver and copper also finds mention as import items from China. Keeping at par with imports, India exported a wide range of items such as horse, frankincense, sandalwood, gharu wood, sapan wood, spices, sulphur, camphor, ivory, cinnabar, rose water, rhinoceros horn and putchuk.[12] Side by side, the expansion of trade between India and China, was accompanied by the re-orientation of trade routes. From the 8th century onwards, trade was carried on mainly through maritime routes rather than overland routes. One of such routes went through the Andaman and Nicobar islands, while another one passed by the Bay of Bengal ports on to Sumatra and the south China sea. Sea routes were being preferred due to improved maritime technology, especially from sewn ships to sturdier ones with nailed hulls. [13]The early medieval period saw a shift away of import commodities from luxury items to basic goods such as staples, yarn, textiles, dyes, processed iron, pepper and horse. Meera Abraham has arrived at the conclusion on the basis of the list of commodities mentioned in inscriptions of the Ayyahole guild. [14] She points out that inscriptions from the mid 12th century records the import of large quantity of goods into South India from West Asia, South-east Asia and China. The items of import were precious stones, pearls, perfumes, aromatics, myrobalans, honey, wax, textiles (silk), spices, horses and elephants. Export items included cotton textiles, spices (e.g., pepper), iron, dyes, ivory, areca and putchuk.

Though it seems that the early medieval maritime trade was dominated by the ports of Gujarat and South India, the ports of Bay of Bengal was not far behind. The activity here was not so intense as that of the Malabar, Coromandal or Gujarat coasts. The Hudud-e Alam (982-983 A.D) informs us that in the tenth century, Arabia imported gold from Assam, conch shell and ivory from Orissa and many more from many other parts of India and adjoining countries.[15] Samandar was another port of prominence in Bengal (located near modern Chittagong) which flourished in the post 8th century AD. This port finds frequent mention in the Arab accounts. Excavation at ports such as Khalakapattā (on the left bank of the Kushabhadra river in Puri district) and Māṇikpaṭā (on the channel connecting Chilka lake with the Bay of Bengal) on the Oḍišā coast has provided ample evidence of active interaction between the said coast and Sri Lanka, south east Asia and East Asia. Khalakapattā, which has yielded Chinese celadon ware and porcelain, two Chinese copper coins, and some glazed pottery from West Asia was an important port of Oḍišā between 11th and 14th centuries. The site of Māṇikpaṭā has revealed a cultural sequence from the early historical period.
The repeated invasion of the Gaṅgās, Nāgas, and the Kalachurīs.

A brief literary review:

Before entering into the core of the study area, we take a quick look on some of the specific volumes written on trade and trade routes of the region in the particular time bracket.

B.N. Mukherjee (1982) published an article entitled “Commerce and Money in the Western and Central Sectors of Eastern India” (C.A.D. 750-1200) in the Indian Museum Bulletin. This work was a deep insight into the nature of trade and commerce of the region prevailing in the given period. K.N.Chaudhuri’s (1985) commendable output on Trade and civilization in the Indian Ocean: An economic History from the rise of Islam to 1750 has proved to be immensely helpful for the study of trade in the period concerned. Pratap Chandra Choudhury’s (1988) Assam-Bengal Relations (From the earliest time to the twelfth century AD) is a volume of discussion on economic, social, religious and cultural relation between these two regions since pre-Christian era. An extensive volume on External trade of Early North-Eastern India was published by B.N. Mukherjee in 1992. This book incorporates a detailed discussion on articles of import and export, trade routes, mechanism of trade prevalent in early north-eastern India. A year after the same author published an extensive work on Coins and Currency systems of Post-Gupta Bengal (c.AD 550-700). In the year 1996, Himangshu Prabha Ray and Jean-Francois Salles jointly edited a very informative volume on Tradition and Archaeology: Early maritime contacts in the Indian Ocean. Himangshu Prabha Ray contributed another volume to this aspect of study entitled The Archaeology of Seafaring in Ancient South Asia in...
the year 2003. A very informative volume was published by Sila Tripati (2000) on the ancient Kalingan sea-farers entitled *Maritime Archaeology: Historical Descriptions of the Sea-faring of the Kalingas*. An extensive work was done by Ranabir Chakravarti (2002) on *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society*. This volume is a compilation of his own papers on different aspects of trade. Anil Kumar’s output in 2001 entitled ‘Trade in Early Medieval Eastern India’ (c.600 AD – c.1200 AD) is directly relevant to the subject concerned. One of his papers published in the sixty-seventh proceedings of the Indian History Congress is very relevant to the theme of the present work and it was published under the heading ‘Market centres in Early Medieval Bihar’ (2006-07). In the year 2010, Manoj Gupta published an extensive volume on *Indian Ocean Region: Maritime Regimes for Regional Cooperation*. In the same year Pius Malekandathil published *Maritime India: Trade religion and polity in the Indian Ocean*. Satish Chandra and Himangshu Prabha Ray edited a volume titled ‘The Sea, Identity and History: From the Bay of Bengal to the South China Sea’ in 2013. The focus of the book was on the sea-ways connecting the coasts of Bengal and Sri-Lanka to the coast of Vietnam.

**Nature of Trade in eastern India between the period 9th century A.D-12th century A.D Sources:**

To reconstruct the trade scenario of eastern India during the period under review, both Archaeology and Literature have proved helpful. Both foreign and indigenous sources are replete with evidences of trade during the period concerned. Indigenous sources include Danḍin’s *Daśakumārakacita*, Vākpati’s *Gauḍavāho*, Rājasekhara’s *Kāvyamāṇśā* and *Karpūramañjarī* and Somadeva’s *Kathāsaritsāgar*. From these works we catch a glimpse of the political and economic condition of the period concerned.

Foreign sources include the Arab and Persian travel accounts of 9th and 10th centuries A.D. The account left by Sulaiman, the Arab merchant (*Ahbar as Sin Wal Hind*), Ibn-Khurdābdāh, Āl-Masudi, Ibn-Rusta, Yaqubi have proved helpful for us. The Arab descriptions range from fantastic tales (e.g. *Kitab Ajaib ul Hind* by Buzurg ibn Shahriyar) to geographical treatises (e.g. *Hudud e Alam* by an anonymous author AD 982). Other significant sources include *Tabāqat-i-Nasirī* by Minhaj ud-din, *Rihāla* by Ibn Battutā, Chu-fan Chi by Chau-ju-Kuā (an officer supervising foreign trade under the Sung dynasty, A.D 1225) and also the account left by the celebrated Venetian traveller Marco Polo (late thirteenth century). The *Yuktikalpataru*, attributed to Bhoja Narapati and the Jagannāth temple chronicle (*Madala Pañjī*) have also served our purpose to some extent. Both these texts have highlighted on the maritime history of Kālīṅga. Some information have also been accumulated from *Pavandāta* of Ḍhoyi and *Karatoyā-māhātmya* by an anonymous author.

**Trade and trade routes of Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand**

The account left by the muslim geographers are a source of information of the trading activities of the period. They have mentioned the kingdom of Rūhmī, Rāhmī, Rāhmā, Dāhum, Dhmi and Rhmī, which has been identified with the Pāla empire, especially of the time of Dharmapāla. [17]Sulaiman, Ibn Khurdābdāh, Yaqubi, Āl Māsudi etc have all sung the praise of Rūhmī or the Pāla empire. Ibn Khurdābdah recorded that the country Rūhmī produced cotton clothes and aloeswood. [18]According to Yaqubi, Rūhmī was a vast country situated on the sea and producing gold.
[19] Al-Māsudi noted that the inhabitants of Rahmā had possession of elephants, camels and horses. [20] Hudud-e-Alam states that “in no place of Hindustan are fresh aloes found as in the possessions of the king of Kāmarūpa and of Dāhum”. These countries produced in large quantities good cotton, which (grows) on trees yielding their produce for many years. The product of this country is the white conch, which is blown like a trumpet and is called shank. In this country there are numerous elephants. [21] Horses of the Pala cavalry were imported from outside, as the Tabāqat-i-Nasirī records that foreign merchants used to bring horses for sale at Nudiah during the reign of Lakhmaniā or Lakshmanasena. [22] The horses were brought to Lakhnaawi from Karambatan or Karam-pattan, (located somewhere at the foot of the eastern Himalayas) a place where daily about fifteen hundred horses were transacted. [23] Some of the articles fetched high price outside the region concerned. The finest quality of aloes wood (which must have been exported through the port of Samandar) [24] was worth 200 dinars per man. [25] Girdles made out of horn of rhinoceros were exported from Rāhmā to China, where they fetched 2000 to 4000 dinars each. [26] There are references in inscriptions to restrictions and taxes imposed by governments on trading articles. In the Hudud-e-Alam, reference is made to trade in aloes-wood in a manner that indicates the control of the king of Kāmarūpa and Dharmapāla over it. [27] The Pālas controlled the port of Samandar, which was most probably located in the Chittagong area of modern Bangladesh (ancient Harikela region). [28] This port rose into international prominence sometimes in or before the early Pāla age, most probably after the decline of Tāmralipti. The Sian inscription attests the early Pala rule over Samataṭa (Comilla and Noakhali-areas). Therefore the authority of their extension to the nearby Chittagong region is quite feasible. [29] This port helped largely the Pālas to conduct their international trade even when the effective control over it was lost due to the rise of the Candras and other factors. [30] Samandar has been recorded by Al-Idrisi in the 11th – 12th century as ‘a large town, commercial and rich, where there are good profits to be made’. [31] He has indicated it to be a big hinterland. [32] In his accounts, an island is mentioned which was according to him “one days sail from this city” (i.e. Samandar) and which was “frequented by merchants of all countries”. [33] This island may be identified with Sandwip situated near Chittagong. The thriving trade in the region made some of the merchants so rich, that sometimes the king asked for huge amounts of loan from them (The Ballālcharita of Ānandabhaṭṭa relays an incident of King Vallālsena asking for a huge amount of loan from a merchant). [34]

Trade and trade routes of Assam:

The Tabāqat-i- Nasirī of Minhāj-ud-din, a text of the 13th century states that, from the territory of Kāmrud (Kāmarūpa) to that of Tibet, there are thirty five mountain passes by which they bring Tanghan horses into the territory of Lakhnavati, [35](i.e. the area of the erstwhile kingdom of the Senas of Bengal and Bihar, having parts of its north- eastern limits contiguous to those of the western limits of the territory of Kāmarūpa). [36] These horses were brought to the market of Karpattan, from where about fifteen hundred horses were sold daily. [37] A few epigraphs attests to the use of horses in the region of Kāmarūpa, the supply of which could have been from Karpattan. [38] Apart from horses, camel was also brought to Kāmarūpa from the west. They find mention in a
few epigraphs and were obviously used for transporting men and material. [39]Items of import included copper, pearls, silver and cowries. [40]According to the testimony of Ibn Batutā, cowries were imported from Maldives islands. Sulaiman, the Arab merchant too indicates the export of cowries from Maldives to Vāṅgāla in the 9th century A.D. Al-Idrisi has recorded that aloes wood was brought to Samandar (Chittagong) “from the country of Kāmrut (Kāmarūpa), (which is) fifteen days distance, by a river”. [42] The river has been identified with Brahmaputra. [43] From the port of Samandar, aloes wood was exported to the coasts of other parts of India and also to South-East Asia. Ibn Khurdādbāh referred to the import of aloes wood from Kāmul (Kāmarūpa) into Kurā, Kīlābān, Luar and Kaṅja. [44] Abu Za'id has noted in the early 10th century A.D that Kalah (i.e. Kala Bar in Malay Peninsula) “is the centre of commerce for aloes wood, camphor, sandal wood, ivory, ebony .... spices of all kinds, and host of objects too numerous to count”. [45] Aloes wood from Kāmarūpa became an important commodity in the international trade as noted by a few authors. The horn of rhinoceros was another precious article of commerce which fetched huge profits in the international market. Girdles made out of horns of Rhino were priced at 2000 to 4000 dinārs in the markets of China. [46] During the early medieval period, Harikela (which from c. 10th century A.D incorporated the territory in extreme eastern and south eastern portion of Bangladesh and also parts of Tripura) commanded a very important position in the international commerce. This place of Harikela became a bone of contention between different political powers of the period in the region. The north-east conducted its trade through this region.

**Trade and trade routes of Oḍiṣha:**

Regarding the trade situation of Odishā, the Nāgari plates of the Gaṅgā king Ananāgabhūma III (A.D 1230) contributes important information. [47] The inscription is of a later date than our period, but acts as an important epigraphical source to understand the preceding period. The plates mention the grant of a township situated in Purānagrāma and Jayanagaragrāma (represented by the present village of Nāgari, literally meaning a township, about 11 miles from Cuttack). [48] The township mentioned in the inscription was inhabited by number of artisans and merchants, such as perfumers (Gandhika), workers or dealers in conch shells (Sankhika), splitters of wood (pāṭakāra), goldsmiths (Svārṇakāra), braziers (Kānsyikaḥ), sellers of betel leaf (tāmbulika), dealers in sugar (gudīka), weavers (tantuvāya), potters (Kumbhakāra) and the fisherman (Kaivarttah). From the above occupation, we can infer that fragrant substances, conch shells, wood, ornaments, bronze goods, betel leaves, sugar, cloth, earthen vessels and fish were some of the articles of internal trade. Commodities of everyday use such as food grain, vegetable, milk, oil, fruits, etc were chiefly sold in village markets for local consumption. [49] The Chinese pilgrim has recorded the export of wild elephants from Kaliṅga, which was much praised by neighbouring provinces. [50] Valuable commodity such as diamond were also sold in Oḍiṣha. Kaliṅga maintained trade relations with the neighbouring states of the Pālas, Senas, Tummanas, Kalachuris, Cholas, Eastern Chālukyas etc. For the sake of conveyance, bullocks, buffaloes andasses were used, which is attested by an inscription of the Gaṅgā king Anantavarman of 11th century AD. [51] The large dark coloured elephants of Odiṣha were engaged in carrying good timber of...
the forests of that country. [52] Pack horses were used for transport in the hilly areas. Apart from internal trade, there are references to foreign trade. Elephants and diamonds, especially formed the articles of long distance trade. The period under review saw Japanese contact with Bengal, as is suggested by the discovery of a Bengali Buddhist manuscript of the 11th century A.D. discovered in the Horiuzi temple of Japan. [53] The items of exchange with China was Rhinoceros horns, elephant tusks, tortoise shells, pearls and jades, copper, fruits and cloths. [54] There is insufficient data to furnish information about the articles of import. But it is assumed that Odisha imported cloves, spikenard from Java and Sumatra, silk and woolen cloth from China, and cardamom, chilly, clove and betel nut from South-East Asia. [55]

**Prevalent inter-state and inter-national trade-routes in the eastern region:**

There were trade routes for inter-state as well as inter-national dealings. Many of the routes prevalent in those days have been discussed in the previous chapter. It is most possible that those routes were in vogue in our period of discussion too. The route between Bengal and Assam was the one which passed over Karatoy river and connected the cities of Puṣḍravardhana and Prāgiyotiṣa. This route was further connected with Tibet. The *Tabāqat-i-Nāṣirī* of Minhāj-ud-din has noted that Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khlīji made his ill-fated expedition to Tibet by taking the route from Lakṣhaṇaṭva through Kāmrūd (i.e. Kāmarūpa). [56] Minhāj further mentions that horses were imported by the mountainous passes through Kāmrūd and Tirhut and sold in Lakṣhaṇaṭva. [57] The interaction between Bengal and Oḍisha was facilitated by the pass along the coast line of the present Baleswar district. This route was used by the kings of Orissa e.g. the Eastern Gaṅgās of Kaliṅga, [58] and even by the kings of south India of the fame of Rājendra Cola and Vikramādiṭya VI of the western Chālukyas for their military expedition to Bengal. [59] Close economic relation between Bengal and Burma is attested by a series of small silver coins with high purity found in south eastern Bengal, which circulated mainly in Harikela and Samataṭa region from the seventh to the thirteenth century. [60] These two regions were connected by several routes passing through mountainous ranges which further lead to the south-eastern frontier of China. [61] Apart from the mentioned, the coast line of Chittagong had also its own share in the interaction. Bengal and Bihar had their intimate connection through many routes, the main route passing along Gaṅgā and Rajmahal hill. This route was used not only by Fa-hien, and Huien Tsang, [62] but also by traders and royal personalities of the like of Śaśāṅka and Dharmapāla and Vijaysena. [63] The Deopara inscription of Vijaysena attests the fact that he led his naval expedition along the course of the Gaṅgā. [64] Another road came out of Tāmraliptī and by way of Karṇa Suvarṇa ran
directly to the south, thus connecting Bengal with South India. Hsuang-tsang used this route from Karṣa Suvarṇa and by way of Oḍra, Koṅgoḍa, Kaliṅga, south Kośala and Andhra, and reached the Dravidian, Chola and Maharashtra regions. The Pāla and Sena kings used this road when invading the south, while the western Chālukya king Vikramādityya, the Chola king Rajendra Chōḷa and the kings of the eastern Gaṅgā dynasty travelled in this road along with their armies in the course of their invasions of Bengal. [65]From Tāmralipti, a route went in a south-easterly direction past the coast of Arakan to Burma and beyond. In the eleventh century, there was a close communication by means of this route between Chaṭṭāgrāma and Ārakān. [66]Purushottama or Puri finds reference in inscriptions from Bihar (e.g. the Govindapur inscription) and Madhya Pradesh (e.g. the Maihar inscription) which suggests the existence of pilgrim routes to Puri. Many Oḍiša inscriptions furnish the fact that Brāhmaṇas migrated to Orissa from different regions of Madhya Pradesh, Śrāvastī, Tirabhukti, Rāḍha, Vārendra etc.[67]thereby suggesting internal and inter-regional trade. Oḍiša was also connected from the right bank of the Gaṅgā through Gaṛh-Mandārān, Midnapur, Raibania and Ramuna.[68] From the inscription of Anantavarman Choḍāgaṅgā datable to 12th century A.D, found on the temples at Nirmaljar of Gaṇjam district, Puri, Alagum, Khilore, Bhuvaneshwar and Jajpur, we can surmise the existence of a route which passed through these places. In Oḍiša, the rivers Baitarani, Brāhmaṇi, Mahānadī, Godāvari, Rishikulya, Vaṃśadharā and their tributaries served as arteries of commerce. [69]Port towns of this period were Puri, Kaṭāka (Cuttack town), Tājpur, Suvarṇapattaṇa and Kāliṅganagar.

Commerce of the day:

There were exchange of goods, internal trade and foreign trade, exports and imports of various necessary commodities and numerous trade routes for proper conveyance of the traders. There were as well first-rate ports, markets for goods transaction, so there must have been as well a convenient medium of exchange to carry on such a vast volume of trade. Sulaiman, the Arab merchant has clearly stated in about the middle of the ninth century, that in the kingdom of Rūmhī (i.e. the Pāla empire) “trade is carried on by means of kauṛī, which are the current money of the country”. [70]This fact is further corroborated by other literary sources. The Rāmacharita in the 12th century A.D. notes that Madanapāla maintained his large army ‘by cowries (as wages) and daily bread’ (Kapardda-karoṭi-bhṛitaṁ mahāvāhinīṁ).[71] About Rae Lakhmaniah, Minhaij-ud-din Abu Umar observed in the thirteenth century A.D that ‘as in that country the Kauṛī (shell) is the current money in place of silver, the least gift he used to bestow was a lac of Kauṛī’. [72] That cowries were used as money currency is corroborated by the accounts of foreign travellers of the like of Ibn Batutā and Ma-huān,
who visited Bengal in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries respectively. The main medium of exchange during the Pāla and Sena period was cowries, which were imported in large number from Maldives.[73] Cowries were discovered in a hoard in the ruins of a monument at Pāharpur (Rajshahi district) assigned to the Pāla period and also at a Pāla site at Colgong (Bhagalpur region).[74] These discoveries are clear archaeological testimonies to the use of Kapardakas in the Pāla empire. In the Deopara inscription of Vijayasena, big cowries are compared with pearls.[75] It is noteworthy that the Pāla and Sena dominions were familiar with coin names along with Kapardakas, as their records testify. In the Bodhgayā stone inscription of Dharmapāla (regnal year 26), the currency term dramma appears for the purpose of excavation of a tank. [76] The Bhaturiyā epigraph of Rajyapāla (c. AD 917-952) mentions a currency term called purāṇa while recording the concessional tax on a village. [77] In the Gaya record of Govindapāla, dated 1232 V.S. (AD 1174-75), the creation of an endowment of 50 Kārshāpasas yielding 16 Kārshāpana annually, is mentioned. Along the border, an inscribed line in the left margin refers to the payment of ‘these Kapardakas’ in front of the image of a deity in the presence of two witnesses. [78] Utpala’s commentary (10th century AD) on Varāhamihir’s Brihat-Sarīhitā furnishes the figures that 1280 cowries were equal in value to one Kārshāpana, also called Purāṇa. [79] Therefore we can surmise that the money endowed, calculated in terms of Kārshāpana, was paid in equal number of Kapardaka. [80] The above mentioned evidence clearly supports the theory that the term Kapardaka Purāṇa, appearing in some records of the Senas, e.g. the Barrackpur plate of Vallālsena (c.A.D 1159-1179), the Anulā and Tarbandighi grants of Lakshmaṇasena (c.AD 1179-1206) and other contemporary dynasties denoted a theoretical unit of account representing the value of a purāṇa, [81] counted in Kapardakas or cowrie-shells.[82]

We are in a state of confusion to determine the exact value of these purāṇas or drammas (mentioned in inscriptions as actual coins). However none of the Pāla kings issued coins bearing their names, and therefore these drammas and purāṇas were brought from outside.[83] Some coins of Śrīvigrahā type (debased silver coins, based on Indo-Sassanian ‘bust’ and alter with attendants’ devices) have been found at a few sites like Paharpur in the Rajshahi district of Bangladesh and Ghosrawa, Buxar, Hajipur and a locality of the Purnea district of Bihar. [84] These coins should have been in circulation in the U.P. region, before the 10th century AD. But the territory of Bengal does not appear to have been a regular area of circulation of Śri-Vigrahā dramma, though a number of them might have been brought there by way of commerce.[85] They might not have formed a regular currency in the Pala empire because of their poor silver content which must have converted them as pieces of much lower value than a purāṇa or dhāraṇa of 32 Krishṇalas or ratis.[86]

Another portable form of money having high intrinsic value was churṇī. In the Madanapāḍā inscription of Viśvarūpasena (first half of the 13th century AD), a plot of land yielding an annual income of ‘hundred churṇas together with thirty two purāṇas-132’ and of another piece of land yielded an ‘annual’ income of ‘six hundred churṇīs together with twenty seven purāṇas.[87] D.C. Sircar holds the view that the term Churṇī apparently has the same meaning as the term purāṇa. [88] The terms Purāṇa and Churṇī, mentioned in the Mehar plate of Dāmodara deva of

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Šaka 1156 (A.D 1234), supports this hypothesis.[89] The Alágum inscription of Anantavarman Choḍagangā (c.A.D 1141) records a deposit expressed in words as pañcha-purāṇa-ādhika, churṇī-śat-aika and in figures as pu (i.e. purāṇa). [90]Churṇī and purāṇa were same as Kārhāpaṇa, equal in value to 1280 cowrie shells. [91]The term churṇī means made or mixed up with anything powdered or pounded. The term in that case, should have primarily meant ‘dust money’ in the context of denoting a unit of currency.[92] Sulaiman, the Arab merchant notes that in the territory of the king of Jurz i.e. Gurjara Pratihāra empire, exchanges were carried on in silver dust, and there may have been mines of these metals.[93]

Ibn Khurdaōdbāh has recorded that plenty of gold was available in the region under review. The Tabāqat-i-Nasirī corroborates the same fact.[94] A Tibetan account furnishes information about gold being a medium of exchange in our zone. As the account narrates, Nag-Shao was sent in the second quarter of the 11th century A.D to Vikramāši monastery to request for Atiśa’s visit to Tibet. For that purpose he was given ‘seven ounces of gold’ for personal expenses and also some additional quantities of that metal for various other purpose.[95] Putting the ‘gold dust in a small bag, he presented it to Atiśa.[96] The same account alludes to the use of cowries in the monastery and at Bodhgayā. [97] There are also other evidences to show that gold was used as a medium of currency. An inscription from Silimpur (Bogra district) refers to “nine hundred hemas”, for the purpose of a grant to a brāhmaṇa by king Jayapāla-deva of Kāmarūpa.[98] Each hema (gold) denoted a piece of (gold), metal weighing 80 ratis,[99] which was the standard weight of Suvarṇa coins. [100] The table furnished in the Lilāvatī presumes 16 silver units (drāmma, purāṇa or churṇī) to one unit of gold (called suvarṇa, hema, nishka, purāṇa or churṇī) weighing about 80 ratis. [101] A unit of gold was equal to 20480 cowries.

Apart from cowries, the inscriptions of Odīshā in the period under review suggest the prevalence of metallic currency, some of them being aripiṇḍaka churṇika paṇa, purāṇa, nishka, diṅāra, ṛūpya, śobhana ṛūpya, ruāke, Śaśukaṇī tankā etc. The inscriptions of Choḍagangā and his successors frequently mention the mada or madha,102 which was an important medium of exchange. The inscriptions furnishes varieties of madas, such as gaṇḍa mada, gaṇḍaniśka, mallamada, matsya mada, Chāmāra mada, gaṇḍa hastī mada, Kullitāṅga mada, Surabhī mada, etc.103 The phrase Suvarṇa mada pañchaikam suggests mada to probably denote a coin. The existence of gold coins is suggested by words like gaṇḍa niṣka. The annual rent of a village is understood by the term aripiṇḍaka churṇika sataṁ ākānī. Rūpya denoted a silver coin. The revenue of a village in an inscription is mentioned as ṛūpya kha-chatur viṇīṣat. The Gaṅgā fanam gold coins were very thin and small in size and were found in different parts of Orissa.[104]

Conclusive remarks:

A thorough discussion on the nature of trade in eastern India between the period 9th century A.D to 12th century A.D have left us to deduce that there was no dearth of trade, trading communities and commerce in the period concerned. In this paper, we have mostly tried to establish the existence of trade, both intra-regional and inter-regional, external and internal, in the thrust area between the concerned time bracket. To fulfill our purpose, we have sought the evidence of literary and epigraphical sources. Historians of repute, through
extensive study on this field, have vehemently argued against the pre-dominant theory of decline of trade and commerce in this period, thereby complimenting the existence and continuation of brisk trade instead of decline of the same. Trade existed, according to them, though with a diversion from the earlier times. Eastern India had affinities with China and South-East Asia. We have incorporated a map showing the probable trade routes in vogue in the concerned time bracket, between Eastern India and South-East Asia, and between Eastern India and China, used by the trading community to meet their commercial ends. Trade being an integral part of human civilization, have always been granted the required importance in all period and all regions of the world, and India in general and eastern India in particular has been no exception. Trade have survived down the ages, as a prerequisite means of subsistence in a civilized world. Therefore we can draw the inference that trade and commerce survived against a feudal backdrop.

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