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INDIA'S MAJOR TRADE AND COMMERCE DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD WITH ARABIAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract:-From times immemorial, the trade and commerce served as the primary linkage among different countries across the globe. However, before the evolution of currency, the trade among nations were largely carried on the basis of barter system. But, the trade was flourished in its peak during the medieval period. So far as India is concerned, it was having strong trade links with Arabian countries from ancient times till the Britishers maintained their supremacy over India. During the medieval period roughly from 12th to 16th century, it was also having cordial and harmonious relationship with other countries of the world. On the other hand, the Muslim rulers of that time had made political and economic development in India. The towns and cities were flourished by trade and industrial activities which leads towards the general welfare. Apart from this, the foreign travellers contain descriptions of the variety of goods that were sold in the markets. Also, the period witnessed India's fame for its textile production which it was earlier dependent on rest of the countries. The state of Gujarat evolved as the hub of Cotton production as well as an exporter to the Arabian as well as South East-Asian countries. Visualising such booming cotton potential of India especially in Gujarat and West Bengal in the 14th century, Ibn Battuta the Moorish traveller was greatly pleased and impressed. The paper will try to examine the major trade links between India and the Arabian countries during the medieval period. Also, it would explore the various reasons behind the compatibility between India and Arabian states during the medieval period. The paper will try to capture the various reasons for the declining nature of such relationship in the 17th century.

Keywords: Trade and Commerce, Barter System, Britishers, Muslim rulers, Textile, Cotton etc.

INTRODUCTION

From ancient times, people travelled from one continent to another mainly for the purpose of carrying trade and commerce. However, its full flourishing was difficult by that time due to the non-availability of modern facilities. The maritime route was the only way by which people used to travel from one side of the globe to the other side. In the context of India, it shares a long maritime history dating back to around 4,500 years, since the inception of Indus Valley Civilization. But, due to the monopoly of the Persians and later the Arabs over land-based caravan routes, the main activity through the maritime link was trade (primarily cotton, pepper and other spices). The later maritime journeys spread the influence of ancient and medieval Indian civilisation as far as the islands of Indonesia to the east; the islands of Japan to the north and the east coast of Africa to the west are concerned. Thus, the monopoly of maritime business was dominantly prevailing at that time.

Taking advantage of its long extended maritime boundary, Indians were using the sea endured trade of Europe, Asia and Africa enormously. They built ships, navigated the sea, and held in their hands all the threads of international commerce, whether carried on through overland or sea. Manu Smriti, the oldest law book in the world, lays down laws to govern commercial disputes having references to sea borne traffic as well as inland and overland commerce. From the earliest times, India has an enormous trade links with Asia and western countries. This glory of

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Indian overseas trade even continued in the medieval and modern period (Kivudanavar 2013).

Since ancient times, the Arabs and Indian's maintained a healthy trade links with the arrival of Islam and again with the foundation of Baghdad; it expanded and reached its peak in the ninth century. The Arabs bipartition was 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 homeland. But in the Abbasid period, Sind was gradually parcelled out among a number of Arab chieftains who were not appointed by the Caliphs (Hourani 1975).

However, 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, Ismaili propaganda and Arab trade developed side by side. The Fatimid conquest of Egypt and the translocation of the Mediterranean trade routes increased commercial traffic through the Red sea and at the same time Egypt's role in the Indian trade became more dominant. During this period, the Fatimid coinage received popularity and was widely used in the port towns of Western India. It has even been inferred that the Shia-Sunni rivalry between the Fatimid Caliphs of Cairo and Abbasid Caliphs of 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 Indian trade. Besides this, the 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. Thus, the Al Mansura and Multan served as the important cultural centres of Arabs of Sind (Ahmad 1969).

In Sind, Dayboy was the main port and trade centre where ships from China, Oman and Hindustan anchored for days and days. Tiz and Kiz, Qallari, Panjgur, Qandabil, Alor and Mansura were the other trade centre's operating during this period. In addition, Kambayat was a city having a naval station and merchandise of every country was found there and was sent to other countries. In this direction, Ibn Battuta argued that the majority of the inhabitants of Kambayat were foreign merchants who always remain busy in building fine mansions and magnificent mosques and at the same time remain in competition with one another in doing so. It was also a city with plenty of wealth and riches. The Sind region was also bestowed with a multiple of exports as a large varieties of Items of food stuffs were exported like 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 woollen clothes, 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 and therefore were not in a position to cross into the Kingdom. It is because of this reason that there exists a lack of Arab literature on North and Central India during the period. Thus, Arabs left unconquered and it included the Islands in the Bahr-al- Hind (Indian Ocean) (Reid 1988).

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 to the extent that they were even allowed to have lands in their names as well as acquire and accumulate property. The Arabs always arrived in 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 antagonism. 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. Thus, the medieval period witnessed the entire Indian Coast from Konkan to Bengal coast very much busy with commercial activities. The main features of this trade were included in their accounts by almost all Arab travellers from Sulayman to AbdurRazak. As there were so many Arab settlements along these coasts, Arab travellers of the period like 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 (Kaplan 2009).

Unlike the European merchants of the later days, the Arab merchants did not try to acquire trading or capitulatory rights for themselves. They however, settled down in the host countries under peaceful conditions. In Indian context, 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, but the wide spread settlements of Arabs sprang up along the coasts of whole South India during the tenth century (Ptak 1993).

However, 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, Baniyas 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 'Bayasira'. The Konkani Muslims of the Konkan Coast, Navayats of Canara Coast, and Mappilas of the Malabar Coast, Chulias, Marikkayars and Ilappais (Labbaais) of the Coromandel Coast and Jonegans of Tanjore are examples of Bayasira communities of the South India (Francisco 1995).

The Arab traders were equally welcomed by both the Hindu as well as 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 that time as the availability of these war animals to the one or the other rival king influenced the whole course of war. As the medieval Indian kings wholly depended upon Arabs for the supply of war horses, they made every effort to attract the Arab horse traders into 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 located in the east. During this period Arabia and Central Asian regions, particularly Guzgan, Gharjistan, Tukharistan, Khuttal and Chaghman were the major suppliers of horses to India. Throughout the eighth and ninth centuries, the Persian Gulf remained predominant in maritime trade with India and China and the Mediterranean coast continued to diminish in relative importance (Wade 2009).

Though the Arabs had both overland and maritime contacts with the Sind, however, their relationship remained greatly maritime. The reason behind being is that 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. Moreover, the 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). But the Gujarat, Konkan and Malabar region were important trade centres of the period. Among them, 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 (Nainar 1942).

Right from ancient times till the establishment of the British Empire, India was famed for its fabulous wealth. Even during the medieval period, i.e. roughly from the 12th to the 16th centuries, the country was prosperous despite the frequent political upheavals. However, a notable feature of this period was the growth of towns in various parts of the country. This development of these towns was the result of the political and economic policies followed by the Muslim rulers. These towns grew into trade and industrial centres which in turn led to the general affluence on other socio-cultural aspects (Reid 1988).

During the Sultanate period, which lasted from the early 13th to the early 16th centuries, the economy of the towns flourished to a great extent. This was due to the establishment of a sound currency system based on the silver Tanka and the copper Dirham. Also, Ibn Batuta, the 14th century Moorish traveller had visited India during the Sultanate period which further popularised the India. He had described the teeming markets of the big cities in the Gangetic plains, Malwa, Gujarat and Southern India. In terms of trade and industry, the important centres were Delhi, Lahore, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Sonargaon and Jaunpur. The period also witnessed the development of Coastal towns into booming industrial centres with large populations (Wade 2009).

It was although during the two hundred years of Mughal rule i.e. from the 16th to the 18th centuries, the urbanisation of India received a further motivation. The Mughal era witnessed the establishment of a stable centre and a uniform provincial government. During this age of relative peace and security, trade and commerce received primacy as well as flourished to a great extent. The flourishing foreign trade led to the development of market places not only in the towns but also in the villages. At the same time, the small scale industries like the production of handicrafts increased in order to keep up with the demands for them in foreign countries (Reid 1988).

By the flourishing of trade and commerce, several urban centres and important cities evolved throughout Indian subcontinent. The prime urban centres during the Mughal era were Agra, Delhi, Lahore, Multan, Thatta and Srinagar in the North. The important cities in the west included Ahmedabad, Bombay (then known as Khambat), Surat, Ujjain and Patan (in Gujarat). The flourishing trade centres in the eastern part of the country were Dacca, Hoogli, Patna, Chitgaon and Murshidabad. However, most of these cities were boasted of sizeable populations.

India's Indigenous Production and Manufactures

The accounts of foreign travellers contain descriptions of the wide variety of exquisite goods sold in the markets of those days. India was famous for its textiles, which constituted as one of its chief items of export. Among the Indian states, Gujarat as described by Duarte Barbosa - a Portuguese official in Cochin in the early 16th century was a leading cotton trade centre in the western region. Moreover, Textiles from Gujarat were exported to the Arab countries and to South-East Asia. In addition, Patola, which is a kind of silk, dyed in natural colours, was highly popular in South-east Asia. It was very much in demand among the wealthy classes in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Phillipines (Elvin 1996).

In the east Bengal, there was another important region known for a wide variety of textiles. Ibn Batuta the 14th century Moorish traveller mentioned the presence of many cotton trade centres during his sojourn in Bengal. The Bengal was also the major manufacturer of Silk and later became its importer. The textile industry reached to its zenith during this period which also included covers of embroidered tussar, or munga on a cotton or jute, silk and brocade

bordered handkerchiefs. Among all the textile products, Dhaka muslin was renowned for its fineness. However, the most important centre of trade for cotton and silk goods was 'Kasimbazaar' in Bengal. Also, a special type of cloth used for tying turbans called Sirbund was manufactured in Bengal. It was highly popular and renowned all over the world particularly in Europe (Kaplan 2009).

Foreign Trade and its Impact

In medieval times, the people from across the globe interacted with Indian people for the purpose of carrying trade and commerce. The reason is that India maintained strong trade relations with Arabian and European countries during the said period. It witnessed India's exports to the extent that it far exceeded her imports both in the number of numbers as well as in volume. The chief articles of import were horses, dry fruits and precious stones mainly from Kabul and Arabia. India also imported glassware from Europe, high grade textiles like satin from West Asia, while China supplied raw silk and porcelain. Here, it is noteworthy to mention that foreign luxury goods were highly popular among the aristocratic and elite class of the people. These included wines, dry fruits, precious stones, corals, scented oils, perfumes and velvets.

During the Sultanate period articles of daily use as well as luxury articles were exported to Syria, Arabia and Persia from Bengal and Cambay. These included silk, gold-embroidered cloth caps, beautifully designed clay pots and pans, guns, knives and scissors. There were also other articles, which were exported such as sugar, indigo, oils, ivory sandalwood, spices, diamond and other precious gems and coconuts (Wade 2009).

On the other hand, Arab traders shipped Indian goods to European countries through the Red Sea and the Mediterranean ports. Indian products were also sent to East Africa, Malaya, China and the Far East. In China, Indian textiles were valued more than silk. Trade was also conducted through overland routes with Afghanistan, Central Asia and Persia. The route through which overland trade was conducted consisted of Kashmir, Quetta and the Khyber Pass. In addition, Iraq and Bukhara were the other countries with which India conducted trade relationship through the land routes during the medieval period (Ptak 1993).

However, foreign trade was in the hands of both local and foreign merchants. Many European travellers had settled in the coastal regions. Limbodar in Gujarat was a major exporting centre. Horses imported from Arabia were sent from the port of Bhatkal in Goa to the southern kingdoms. Imports like bronze, iron, wax, gold and wool were brought in through Goa, Calicut, Cochin and Quilon. The traders of Malabar, Gujarat and foreign settlers controlled business in the port cities of Calicut, Khambat, and Mangalore. The Chinese ships docked at Quilon and Calicut, while in Khambat, the volume of trade was such that 3000 ships visited this port annually. This fact gives an idea of the magnitude of India's foreign trade during the medieval period (Kaplan 2009).

Trade with China and Southeast Asia was mainly carried on through the port of Sonargaon now known as Dacca. Vijaynagar, which was the richest and most extensive state in the 15th and 16th centuries, enjoyed the most voluminous maritime trade with many countries such as Persia, Arabia, Africa, the Malayan Archipelago, Burma, China and the numerous islands in the Indian Ocean. The magnitude of trade can be inferred from the fact that there were 300 ports to facilitate the movement of goods. Moreover, the shipbuilding industry also flourished in the coastal towns.

The city of Vijaynagar was a teeming marketplace for both exports as well as imports. In addition, the fabulous wealth of the Empire left the foreigners astonished. The people, irrespective of which sections of society they belonged to, possessed vast quantities of gold, diamonds and material wealth. Domingo Paes described the citizens as being heavily decorated. AbdurRazzak, the Khurasani ambassador to the court of Vijaynagar, refers to the treasury, which had chambers filled with molten gold (Wade 2009).

The merchant community in the other parts of the country was also prosperous to a great extent. The Gujarati and Marwari businessmen who controlled the trade between the coastal towns and North India were extremely wealthy and spent large sums for the construction of temples. The 'Multanis' who were Hindus and the 'Khurasanis' who were Muslim foreigners controlled the trade with Central and West Asia. Many of these Multanis and Khurasanis settled in Delhi where they lived luxurious lives. In addition, Cambay was also home to an affluent mercantile community (Elvin 1996).

Thus, India had always enjoyed a favourable balance in its trade relations with other countries. Her earnings from the export of textiles, sugar, spices and indigo alone went up to crores of rupees. The state coffers were amply stocked with gold and silver to feed the entire population as well as carry the day-to-day affairs (Francisco 1995).

Decline in Trade and Commerce during the Arrival of Britishers

In the 18th century, the political condition in India witnessed a marvellous change in the socio-political status of the country. This period was marked by the decline of Mughal empire and the rise of the Maratha power. After Aurangzeb, who was the last of the great Mughal Emperors, the state crushed and it could not protect the mercantile community as they used to be before. Though the regional powers did extend support to the artisans and manufacturers but the presence of inadequacy in their economic and military means, they failed to sustain it.

Consequently, the trade which has occupied a central place in the relations with outside world as well as within the subcontinent started to decline during this period. Moreover, the Maratha invasions in northern India also adversely affected trade and commerce due to their wrongful tactics.

The period was followed by the rise of the British East India Company in the 17th century which also gave a fatal blow to the prosperity of India. The victory of the English over the Nawab of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 marked a turning point in the fortunes of the country. In order to disrupt the trade relations between the Indian mercantile community and the foreigners, the Company imposed heavy taxes on both the imports and exports. After the Company had established its supremacy in Bengal, it prevented merchants from Asian countries from coming to the eastern provinces for trading purposes. Also, the export of Indian textiles to England was totally banned. The motive behind was to create the dependence in order to sustain and justify their rule over India. They also tried to impose their language and culture on the Indian people as they consider it to be a superior culture and by which Indian's could be civilized (Kaplan 2009).

After some time, the Company started increasingly monopolise the foreign trade in India and thereby reducing the commercial community to economic failure. Not only did it cripple the indigenous manufactures, but also it started importing various items such as clothes, utensils, horses, etc. from England. It had adversely affected the Indian traders in a way that they turned to other professions for their livelihood. The great trading community, which had flourished during the Mughal rule, had diminished to non-existence by the end of the eighteenth century. Thus, the once glorious art and crafts of India had reached its lowest phase and lost its glory. The East India Company made the conditions of Indian's miserable. They even stopped all the trading relations between India and Arabian people vis-a-vis imposed severe restrictions such as heavy tax, which strongly discouraged the merchant class (Elvin 1996).

Domestic Trade

During medieval times, the India's internal trade was flourishing and people from different parts of the globe were actively participating. At the same time, the foreign travellers gave widespread accounts about domestic trade in medieval India. In this context, Ibn Batuta-the great trader of Europe had described Delhi as a major trade centre prevailing during those days. Accordingly, the most superior quality rice and sugar from Kannauj, wheat from Punjab and betel leaves from Dhar in Madhya Pradesh established their way to the markets of Delhi.

Moreover, well-maintained road linking to various parts of the country facilitated domestic trade. The threat from robbers did not in any way affect the flow of goods as merchants travelled in well-armed groups to ensure their security. According to Barbosa's account, trade between Gujarat and Malwa was possible owing to the routes established in this area. The road facilitated the exchange of goods between the different parts of the country. Limbodar in Gujarat and Dabhol in Maharashtra were major trade centres, which linked the northern and southern halves of the country. Accounts of foreign travellers give occurrences of the trade between Vijaynagar and Bhatkal in Goa with 5000-6000 bullocks carrying goods between the two places. Vijaynagar traded in diamonds with other southern cities. In addition, the maritime routes were also facilitated trade between different parts of the country. Also, boats carrying goods used to practice on the Indus and the Ganges. Some of the merchants had their own large boats (Francisco 1995).

Different communities dominated trade in various parts of the country. Multani and Punjabi merchants handled the business in the north, while in Gujarat and Rajasthan; it was controlled by the Bhats. Foreign traders from Central Asia, known as Khorasanis engaged in this profession all over India. Members of the aristocracy and the royal families also took an active interest in trading activities. They set up their own manufacturing centres wherein the local artisans were employed and used to work (Elvin 1996).

However, the internal trade mainly flourished due to the organised system setup by the government. The 14th century Sultan Alaaddin Khilji for instance, used to strictly supervise the market places. Shopkeepers, who were caught violating the rules, were severely punished. But, at the same time, the trading community used to face unfair treatment from the government officials. Sometimes they were forced by these officials to sell their products at reduced rates or on credit, thus experiencing heavy losses in the process. In addition, the price list fixed by the government brought in low returns for the traders (Kaplan 2009).

Moreover, during the period of the later Mughals in the 18th century, the royalty and the nobility either purchased luxury goods at very low prices or did not pay at all. Such circumstances forced the trader to store his wealth and lead a thrifty existence. It is within this context that resulted in the ruined period for trade and commerce; the traders were discouraged by these aristocratic people, which ultimately led to the decline of trade during this period.

Trade and Cultural Impacts

In the seventh century, the Roman Empire was conquered and 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 the culture as well. Thus, the 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 as well as 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 which continued up to the fifteenth century (Ptak 1993).

Moreover, 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 argued the ninth century opened with two 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". 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 ports and port cities. The House of Wisdom (Baith al Hikma) founded by Caliph Al-Mamun (in AD 830), which undertook the task of translating into 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 Europe (Francisco 1995).

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 knowledge. 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 and learning (Wade 2009).

As the greatest scientists, the greatest physicians, the greatest philosophers the greatest geographers and the greatest historians of the Middle Ages, were all of Arabian origin. Thus, the Arabian lands served as the greatest centres of knowledge and learning of the medieval period. 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 tribe. Apart from this, many Universities were established in the Arab lands during this period and were attended by students from across the globe. It is said that from the twelfth century, everyone in the west who had any taste for science or some who desire for light turned to the East or to the Moorish West. In the eleventh and later centuries, many of the Arabic works were translated into 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 Toledo. 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 Europe. Ali bn Abba's Medical treatise Al-Kitab al Maliki was translated by Constantine an African Monk. Moreover, Robert Chester and Leonardo Fibonacci produced two translations of Al-Khawarizmi's Algebra (Elvin 1996).

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 own. 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 methods in science. In the eighth and ninth centuries the Arabs accumulated many art, 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 'knows' how the West that resulted in the growth of similar technology in Europe. The Paper invention of the Chinese was introduced to the West by Arab traders. Establishment of paper mills in the Middle 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 civilization. Arab civilization remained vigorous for about seven centuries spreading human knowledge when most of the Western Europe was in a state of chaos and confusion and the embedded superstitions, the period is 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 people (Kaplan 2009).

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 Chinese culture. It was the Arab merchants who widened the geographical knowledge of China (Ptak 1993).

During the medieval period Chinese geographers collected information about foreign countries largely from Arab oversea traders. Chau Ju Kua who wrote Chu-fan-Chihi.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 port. 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 someone travelling from Africa across the Atlantic in the seventeenth century. 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 the prominent people. 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 was 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 times. 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 institutions. In this context, Tuhfat testifies that in the early days, Muslim traders had raised funds collectively, for helping new converts to Islam (Wade 2009).

CONCLUSION

During the medieval times, the relationship between the India and the Arabs mostly centred on the trade ties and also flourished to a great extent. Both the sides witnessed very cordial relationships so far as the trade terms and conditions were concerned, which made them comfortable to travel and exchange mutual cultural relationship. In this period, the trade and cultural relationship reached its zenith. However, after the Britishers came through the East India Company in the 18th century, they created the severe terms and conditions on the merchants and also imposed heavy tax on them, which impeded the relationship between Indian and Arab traders in that period. The oppression and subjugation of the Britishers on the Indian's affected the trade culture largely and thereby leads towards declining the relations between the two countries.

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