This study undertaken on “Development of Maritime Trade in Coastal Canara Region with Special Reference to Ports of Honnavar and Basrur” based on traveller’s accounts, epigraphs, and field trips that were conducted, enabled to answer the question raised in the Introduction as to what caused Basrur and Honnavar ports to lose their eminence in the maritime trading. The attempt to examine the role which Portuguese merchants played in Indian maritime trade is made by highlighting the features of existing trading scenario along with prevailing patterns of trades. The extent to which coastal trade facilitated the export and import of rice and pepper via various trading communities and routes is analysed by reviewing its geographical background and various trading components. The complex interaction noticed between communities and its surrounding have provided a deep understanding of the nature of coastal geographical features (like the natural harbour, entrance channels, seasonal winds and waves) and trading networks.

Commercial growth of a city has borrowed much from the climatic conditions, natural positioning and its enterprising settlements. Among all, the surplus production of agrarian commodities in and around the port cities contributed significantly to the rise or decline of the city. The topography of the region helps in the production of specific quality of goods. Western Ghat region ensures regular rainfall which is needed for the cultivation of rice and pepper. Moreover, ghat ranges also provided dense forest wealth that added to its commercial prosperity too. Even the rich pepper grown in the hinterland that Honnavar and Basrur enjoyed attracted foreign merchants and private traders to conduct trade from ports. Hence geographical factors have a deep impact on its agrarian system. Due to its excellent natural harbours, these ports participated in the trans-oceanic exchange network. The Vijayanagara Kingdom conducted most of its trade through these ports, which fulfilled most of their requirements.

Even before the arrival of Europeans, Canara had already proven itself as a major trade destination in the maritime commerce. Trade related activities like ship building, surplus
production of agrarian produce, markets and fairs along with the existence of several coin minting factories show that Canara had unprecedented urban phenomena. The Urban process also accelerated when traders from various parts of the world came and resided in the coastal cities that gave a cosmopolitan outlook to this region where various cultures and customs got assimilated.

A new phase of commercial history started with the arrival of Portuguese in the Canara region. The general pattern of trade before sixteenth century was not very organized. The role of contractor and supplier was negligible as compared to later centuries when demand for spices and rice increased unprecedentedly. Traditional arrangements and methods of supply networks were not supportive enough to fulfill the demands. However, it seems that uniform systems of trade were introduced soon after the establishment of Portuguese maritime trade in the Indian water. Hinterland trade received further boost as the supply of rice and pepper were solely relied on these areas. Policies were introduced by the Portuguese mainly to extract maximum profit. Use of Cartazes like a license for transhipping of goods destined to overseas ports was more a symbol that those making voyages should accept the political hegemony of Portuguese than any economic significance. Native merchants who earlier did not use to pay any money while entering into the sea resisted against the high rate of Cartaz, but later they too accepted it as an important way to conduct trade within the system of license. Fixing of commodities prices also brought stability to the market which was needed to control the price rise and smuggling of goods. Despite Portuguese’s vested interest in the Indian Asian markets, initially, such measures supported the growth and helped to bring uniformity in the market. To some extent centralisation of trade in the western coast was made possible by these control system which made ports Honnavar and Basrur great distributive centres for the Asian commodities.

Rise and development of a town depended heavily on its interior domains to feed her requirements as no town can rise independently. Hence ups and downs of a city depend primarily on its hinterlands. Most of its commodities transacted in these ports were actually brought from the interior land through water channels and various land routes. Several traditional navigational lines were also responsible for bringing in commodities from different parts of the world to converge in these two ports. This shows that entire commercial balance
was dependent heavily on the pattern of trade and control measures adopted by native rulers. Hence river system and strategic location of the ports played a significant role in providing anchorage to the ships engaged in the long distance trade. In addition to this, several deep water passages also made coastal trade more convenient and suitable for the exchange of commodities.

The extent to which neighbouring trade centres like Cochin and Goa were connected to these ports as surplus-extracting centres is analysed by reviewing the corresponding movement of the commodities. Regular commercial contact with these neighbouring prominent ports ensured a constant supply chain network with these places.

Muslim merchants played a considerable role in the redistribution of the production in the canara region. They provided an attractive exchange and commercial links with the Ormuz and Persian Gulf. Their frequent direct trade trips to the ports of Persian Gulf got them Horses. Import of horses from the Arabia and their marketing gave them huge and attractive trade prospects to the Indian subcontinent. Most of the rice ships loaded with rice were bound to the Arabian markets owned by the Muslim merchants.

While reviewing at the value of a self-governing unit as a cohesive force in integrating diverse and complex social patterns into the common fold, indicates that the temple Nakareshwara and forts at Basrur and Mirjan played a significant role in socio-economic and political life. A well-defined system of operation directed towards the port life included commodities procurement facilities and also as an institution to govern and control the production as well. Temple being a place of worship also contributed in binding different sections of people together. Their role in organizing agriculture by controlling land and supervising day to day functioning accelerated not only the agrarian produce but also stimulated the urban process.

An analysis of Basrur and its socio-religious life, throws light on its internal administration. A republican form of setup can be seen in the overall pattern of governance that owed much from the temple as a governing unit that dominated not only socio-religious life but also controlled political and economic life as well. Power in the city was rested in the hands of a group of important people who usually appointed agents from the merchant communities to head the assignment that was conferred on them. The area in and around the forts and temples
experienced unparalleled growth and development and as a result very soon achieved the status of an organized urban unit. The fort built on the specific portion of the port area usually opted the land adjacent to it and was strategically planned and designed so that it could control and fight against the local combats. Forts were usually fortified to provide protection against any upsurge and war. Hence both fort and temples acted as coordinating and controlling agencies and supported the trade and commerce of the ports.

In the later period, the intervention of Portuguese trade disrupted their trading design which even having the support of local Ikkeri chiefs to conduct the trade in their territories never regained much due to the growing hostility between local rulers and Portuguese merchants. The reaction of various rulers and chieftain towards the Portuguese interference and dominance gave a clear picture of existing circumstances. The emergence of new port heavily affected by the initial trade activities conducted by the overseas traders and their settlement to the port also contributed to its urban characteristics. Settlement patterns of the port town also reflected the social stratification that was required for commerce to grow in an organized way.

When Portuguese initiated their trading exercise, procurement of rice and pepper and their exports and imports were largely in the hands of local merchants. It was only merchants of Basrur who were punctual enough to pay the rice tributes to the Portuguese religiously on time. In contrast to rulers of Honnavar, Gersoppa, Mirjan and Bhatkal on account of this reason, these rulers were constantly at war with Portuguese and considered their interference as ruining their coastal trade. Moreover, a coastal war fought between Portuguese and local rulers affected the coastal trade and port activities. Several wars and attacks for the control of fort at Basrur and Honnavar disrupted the commerce in port towns. Compelling peace treaties and agreements between the conquered local rulers and Portuguese ultimately passed the burden on the cultivators and traders which adversely affected and obstructed marketing of spices in the general market as total produce was diverted to the Portuguese factory rather than added to the economy of these ports. When Gangolli and other bases grew in prosperity, it led to a significant number of traders and enterprising people shifting there, leaving behind their previous base to sink into poverty and gloom. It was only at the start of the seventeenth century the Portuguese started losing one by one of their grip from the Western coastal trade, a good part of Canara trade was diverted to other colonial powers like British and Dutch. After
Portuguese, trade links of Canara with Goa declined dramatically that is why Basrur port through which most of the rice and pepper were transported to Goa was also drastically affected.

The frequency of arrival of the big cargo ships from various countries to these two ports considerably decreased in the later seventeenth century. River connecting these port towns underwent sedimentation due to frequent flooding and tidal winds. Both the towns were linked by the river which was used mainly for the navigation of commodities from the hinterlands to the mouth of the sea for their further movement. Slowly upon realizing the situation, entry of larger ship through these ports diminished significantly. Later in the mid-seventeenth century menace caused due to Marathas plundering acts under the leadership of Shivaji and Peshwas. In addition to Marathas menace, Tipu Sultans’s further destruction of trade and trade routes severely obstructed the routine trade.

The place in history that these two ports held is unquestionable. Both the port cities have a long history of antiquity. Through this study, various reasons and dynamics are methodically analysed, and layers of its past are unfolded to know the causes for their decline. By mid-eighteenth century these two ports of Canara – Honnavar and Basrur seemed to have lost its power and position. Historical facts are enough to suggest that more than the political reasons they were greatly affected by the environmental factors. Though it is not possible to mend the past and even recounting of the bygone times and glamour, what is important and countable is to find the path for the future. In this context, it may be considered here to analyse the reasons for the disruption of the two ports namely Honnavar and Basrur and also indicated solutions for their revival.

Firstly, climactic factors including hydrological changes have been cited as a key for the decline of these port cities. Specifically to Basrur, due to regular flood in early seventeenth centuries the river cease to remain navigable even for the medium or smaller size vessels owing to excessive siltation and sedimentation. Portuguese records also referred to the accumulation of mud at the bottom of the river and soil erosion near fort area that ultimately led to the decay of the port.
Unlike Basrur, Honnavar harbour is located at the mouth of the sea hence port is vulnerable more to sand sedimentation rather than mud geomorphic process. Being on the sides of the river Sharavati mouth along with nearshore coastal processes that include tidal winds both monsoons and post monsoon changes, led to erosion as well as sedimentation.

The decline in the natural resources, excessive deforestation, soil erosion, reduction in the availability of natural forest resources had affected the life of common people severely. At one point in time heavily available forest resources were drastically reduced due to no planning. The land losing its production capability also is a reason for Basrur's downfall. Due to the excessive usage of chemical fertilizers, rich tools required for the agriculture made the local people poor. Local people were forced to use the modern tools which were not that comfortable in their agricultural practices. This made them vulnerable (Acharya 1975: 213).

Secondly, the political factors too attributed to the decline in several ways. The fall of Vijayanagara Empire left the port cities abandoned by merchants. The raids of Tipu Sultan who thought that trade makes the country attractive to strangers who then interfere with the working of the kingdom worked against the well-being of these port cities. He almost ruined the trade in these cities. Maratha warriors invaded this region for getting money from the local chiefs. The attack was mainly on foreign merchants through whom they collected a good amount of money. When the British couldn’t figure out any solution, they had to let go the trading activities.

Thirdly, the economic factors that also provided a setback to the trade and commerce in this region. This study has proven that Basrur economy was stable and efficient but internal and external pressures have contributed to the change in its siltation. When the water routes formed due to five rivers lost its significance, simultaneously Basrur too reduced from International port town to the fleet of local ferry. Moreover, due to the excessive deforestation, Varahi River was filled with silt. Due to this, big ships were not able to enter Basrur. Traditional fishing system declined as the motorized ships took over the Basrur surroundings. When the activities on Varahi became rare, it directly affected the Basrur prosperity.

Specifically to Honnavar, shifting of the administrative base of North Canara from Madras to Bombay affected drastically to the status and position of Honnavar. In 1855, Honnavar which
was then the headquarters of the District Judge and Additional Sub-Collector of Canara, had a population of 11968 (Pharaoh 2006: 555). The 1872 returns showed a population of 5191 or a decrease of more than one half as the place lost its importance by the transfer of the district from Madras to Bombay.

Fourth and the last reason, change of lifestyle, new and fast mode of transportation may also have contributed to some modification of the old establishment and its way of life. The present state of empirical research also gives a reason to establish a relation between economic development and cultural change. Specifically to Honnavar, findings also imply that under British rule, in the 19th Century, the opening of two main roads joining the ports of Kumta and Karwar, changed from fair weather coasting craft to large steam ship (Canara, 1883: 55) affected the old Banadar markets of Honnavar and Mirjan as the river was not able to anchor large ships since sea sand deposited in the river and prevented easy movement of the ship.

In the case of Basrur, new technology and infrastructure created an alternate system of communication. When the motorized vehicles started to wander around, new land roads were constructed. New roads were built to reach the other side of the Western Ghats. A newly constructed bridge for NH17 was formed between Basrur & Gangolli, but this new way of life rejected the old established system of communication for the transportation of goods. Kundapura, which was in the proximity of national highway, started to grow as an alternative town to Basrur and very soon Basrur started losing its links with surrounding villages. Hinterlands as well as neighbouring villages which have made Basrur as the centre now shifted the dependency to Kundapura, Udupi & Mangalore (Acharya 1975: 213). The port condition became more miserable due to lack of trade that hit hard the members of the upper middle class and their flight to the neighbouring trade centre’s further worsen the economic condition of this place.

Both the port cities’ importance as a highway of commerce continued to decline with the colonial advent and constant warfare amongst the local rulers and feudatories. The town started showing its early signs of deterioration in late 17th century. Sources indicate apart from the changed environmental conditions, frequent warfare and unfavourable economic
conditions discouraged traders from undertaking any new venture. Hence this analysis proves and supports the hypothesis proposed in this research.

In addition, through this study, some solutions surfaced for the revival of the port of Honnavar and Basrur. This methodical study has reflected the common process of siltation and its cause that creates difficulties for ships to navigate in water. Recent studies have also revealed that amount of siltation is mainly due to environmental and physical conditions, and directly related to the geometric configuration of the harbour entrance. Hence accumulation of sand and mud in the harbour basin is a natural phenomenon, and this problem will exist as long as harbour exists. Therefore, a conscious attempt and certain measures should be taken from the government to restore the dying ports. It can be made possible by adopting various scientific and latest technology to minimize the siltation process and associated maintenance at the harbour side.

- The flow pattern of the water in the entrance area at the dock can be handled by using latest designs and architectures. Such step can reduce the sedimentation near dock area.
- A further study is needed to work on harbour so that nautical depth concept can be applied. Proper measurements and thorough data regarding harbour can give accurate picture so that it can allow larger vessels to enter the basin.
- A port being interconnected with several islands and hinterland via its water channel can provide a strong impetus to its economy like earlier. If extra precaution is taken to keep guard on the mud concentration during monsoon season especially near river bed sides by utilizing rain water (particularly during monsoon times) through proper channels, it can prevent soil erosion which ultimately would reduce the chances of getting soil deposition in the river or to its tributary.
- An advance distributive mechanism can also bring changes in the distribution system that can be possible with the effectiveness of transport infrastructure. This will provide benefit in the distribution of manufacturing goods with more specialization as a part of economic growth.
- A good port can also attract large shipping companies and terminal operators that can help in building and restructure the port to upgrade further and improve their
facilities to enhance its performance for becoming a world class port. Hence such efforts can bring organizational changes too.

- A port can also restart its maritime trading expedition by joining hands with various neighbouring suppliers and purchasers. These hinterlands can effectively help in procuring goods and also to ensure their availability from the remote areas. Due to hinterland expansion, geographical distribution can also get expanded, and that can directly affect the supply chain network. Dislocation of the early port industries and their relationships which got lost in centuries before can be re-established and reorganized once again.

- Sometimes decentralization of the harbour into small watercraft ports is essential to realize the enormous resource potential of hinterlands. This can also promote inter-district as well as interstate trade and commerce. Specifically to Basrur, it is not possible to achieve its position as deep water port, as River Varahi is no longer a deep river, but it is capable enough to create Basrur a collection and distribution point by collaborating with other smaller and surrounding ports and harbours.

- Transportation of goods can follow sea routes so that it can help tremendously in reducing road traffics. Specifically to Honnavar, if sea routes for the larger vessels can be opened from Honnavar port it can reduce Mumbai highway traffic and can also provide great relief to Mumbai port.

Ports remain strategically important infrastructure. Their operations affect local, regional as well as national economy. The solutions presented above will provide not only economic and technical benefits but also offer significant help in employment. If proper corrective measures are taken while deploying port policies, ports can get a new lease of life, and they can again start their journey to regain their lost glory.