Chapter 2
Maritime trading activities in coastal Canara

“There was a firm impression in the minds of contemporaries, sensed also by historian later, that the ocean had its own unity, a distinct sphere of influence. Means of travel, movements of people, economic exchange, climate and historical forces created elements of cohesion, religion, social systems and cultural traditions.” (Chaudhuri 1985:3)

Coast which served as an interface between land and sea should be given a nodal position in the maritime history. Coast provides not just the high level of biodiversity but also a high level of biological activity which has fascinated and attracted people not just from that region but also outside settlers, travellers for thousand years. Most of them came for trade, for some of them, it was the entry point for missionary activities or also an immediate halt for political expansions. Due to vast open sea, these regions were open to change from the very early period. The constant movement of commodities, ideas and beliefs gave unique characteristics to this coastal region to assimilate and absorb the various cultures. Karnataka, having a long and vast coastline of nearly 200 miles, beginning at the southern tip of Goa in the north to the border of Kerala in the south, created a ground for tussle amongst various foreign traders for the control and hold of this region.

Seas and Oceans contain not only a rich diversity of resources but also a powerful stimulus to technology and skills against the challenges posed by the waters. Its role in uniting widely dispersed economies and cultures and radically different peoples and also transmitting freely different ideas, beliefs and knowledge to various parts of the world is commendable. That is why often the ports that develop along the littorals show more resemblance and commonality with the other ports rather than with the place and communities in which they are located. Prof Yogesh Sharma has pointed out coastal regions had a sense of permanence compared to the interior. The European trading organizations which had a strong maritime orientation focused on coastal regions as primary zone of activity (Sharma 2010: XVII), Settlements along the sea – coasts were usually considered blessed and relatively safer from the devastating effects of famine. The importance of coastal region was highlighted by Yogesh Sharma about alternative
food sources provided by the sea that somewhat provided refuge to people from drought and famine. Another rewarding approach of the inward look from sea to land was brought about by historians Himanshu Prabha Ray and Edward Alpers (Ray 2007). Maritime communities and their interaction with different cultures reflected in the lives of littoral society which could be called truly cosmopolitan, diverse culture. Due to the flourishing trade between the Mediterranean world and western coastal India along with Persian and Indian Ocean, there has been significant intermingling between the people of West Asian world and Western coastal India. Several West Asian communities also settled in the Western coastline and added not just linguistic diversity to the Western coastline but also created a mixed society where diversity can be seen in almost all the cultural spheres like religion, cuisine, clothing, and custom. During the early medieval period, India had extensive trade links with the different parts of the world. Hence she became a hub for foreign trade. Earlier the Muslims had their control on India’s trade and later was set aside by the Portuguese. Gujarat, Goa, Calicut, Cochin, Quilon, etc. were important ports of West coast of India. These ports played very significant role in bringing people from different parts of the world; State also promoted commerce by giving absolute freedom not only to their merchants but also to foreign traders and travellers to visit the country. In Vijayanagara, the complete freedom of travel and ownership granted by the kings to the travellers without differentiating them on the ground of their nationality and religion - whether a Christian, Jew, Moor or Heathen. The great equality and justice shown by the Vijayanagara rulers to his subjects and also to enterprising communities, drew an enormous number of merchants to the city. Thus, India’s foreign trade has a rich heritage from the early days.

Commercial activities of Portuguese in the Canara from the period sixteen to mid Seventeen century A.D. provides a fascinating study. They came to India primarily for the trade, and it was exotic spices mainly pepper which attracted them here. Cultivation of specific quality of rice on a larger scale also gave them ample opportunity to conduct trade. For the supply of rice, Portuguese merchants depended heavily upon Canara. Much of the rice they got from the local chiefs in the form of tributes, and for the rest, they had to rely on local traders and intermediaries. As per the Portuguese records of 1554 A.D., the chief of the Basrur had to pay 500 bags of rice as a tribute to them (Shastry 1981: 203). Apart from tributes, there are several references available in Portuguese records which confirm that Portuguese also used to
purchase rice from Canara. In 1525 A.D. Captain Simao de Menezes was appointed by the Portuguese Governor to secure rice from the Basrur (Shastry 1981: 203). Bhatkal, Basrur and Barkur were important ports for the export of fine white rice. Rice was supplied to both neighbouring places like Malabar, North Canara and also to distant places like Red sea ports and the Persian Gulf (Subrahmanyam 1984: 442).

Apart from rice and pepper, commodities which were frequently used for the commercial exchanges were mostly agrarian produce like coconuts, sugar and sugarcanes, choor, timber, sandalwoods, and arecanut which were usually carried in open traditional crafts. These commodities were greatly procured from the hinterlands via river channels by local traders to important trade centres. To secure these produce for further export, Portuguese merchants had to sell their articles which they brought from Portugal and other countries. These exchange items usually included horses, silk, perfumes, copper, gold, salt and vermillion. These are no such clear statistics regarding the commodities exchanged year by year between Portuguese and the Canara merchants, but by using treaties and agreements, a good quantity of rice bags was obtained from Honnavar, Basrur and Bhatkal ports. Very soon Portuguese secured the monopoly of peppers supplies from Basrur and Gersoppa. In contrast to the rulers of Mirjan, Gersoppa and Bhatkal, Basrur chiefs were paying their annual tributes of rice to Portuguese. Strategies for acquisition and construction of the fort were the only solution to Portuguese to suppress the resistance posed by the rulers of defying territories. Hence Portuguese acquired several Canara forts to procure and control the pepper trade. Later, by gaining control of larger part of Canara coast, Portuguese tried to centralize the exports and imports of this region. The closing of the customs house at Basrur was also a part of the same strategy when they tried to centralize the imports of horses from Persia when they moved it to Goa (Subrahmanyam 1984: 447). They depended heavily on Honnavar for the pepper trade whereas Basrur was crucial for the rice network. By 1620 Gangulli and Basrur port alone exported 1500 Khandis (1 Khani = 220.32 Kg) of pepper annually (Shastry 1981: 207).

2.1 Geographical and Historical Background
The long coastline of Karnataka has various phases of development and reorganization. Various narratives of the travellers about the places of coastal Karnataka have helped us in rebuilding the process of change under Vijayanagar rulers and Keladi Nayakas and later
Bijapur and Mysore rulers. The tussle between Hindu-Muslim rulers and later advent of Europeans have coloured the territories with different cultures and religion. British named the region Canara which was mainly comprised of maritime countries of Tuluva, Haiga and Hindu Konkan (as Konakana) and also neighbouring areas of Malabar. Canara region is surrounded on one side by water and other three sides by different areas speaking different languages – Dravidian and Aryan. This confluence of two distinct cultures deeply influenced its art and literature. This place has also reflected its religious tolerance and liberalism by patronizing not just the different religions and religious sects of India, but rulers of Karnataka had also shown their broadmindedness by giving propagators of Christianity to build their churches on their land. Even the merchants from different countries who came here for trading purposes were allowed to follow their cultures by making their habitational enclaves in the Indian soil.

The Beautiful state of Karnataka is the seventh largest state in India, and it is positioned just below the Goa and Maharashtra state in the North and Andhra Pradesh in the East. In the south, it touches the Kerala and Tamil Nadu State and bounded by the Arabian Sea in the west. Karavali, Malenadu and Bayaluseeme are its three major geographical zones. Karavali is the coastal part of Karnataka whereas Malenadu is the hilly terrain which mainly covered the Western Ghat area. It is situated immediately the East of the Sahyadri considered as very fertile land surrounded by the mountain and woods (Robson 1786: 28). A major part of this state falls under Bayaluseeme which is mainly comprising of plains of the Deccan Plateau (Menon, 2001:18-21). Karavali area is the coastal Karnataka region, also called as ‘Canara’ or ‘Kanara’. The Coastal region of Karnataka is situated on the West coast of India extending approximately 180 miles long (Hamilton 1828: 333). The ancient name of this region was ‘Kol Kannam’ means no man’s land in Tamil. However, the most popular name was ‘Parashuram Srashti’ or ‘Parashurama Kshetra’ means the creation of Parashurama (Silva, 1961:74). The name was given to the legend Parashurama one of the Avatar of the God Vishnu who recovered the land Canara from the Sea after throwing his axe into it due to which Sea fell back till his axe fell.
Again historians have different opinions on the name Canara and its origin. Some say that the name is invented by the European when they came to this region for the trading proposes. When Portuguese, Dutch and English visited this area at the beginning of 15th and 16th Century, during that time this region was under the Bednore Dynasty and this dynasty was also known as ‘Kannada Dynasty’ as people of this dynasty were mainly speaking the Kannada language. European called this Kannada as Canara as they pronounced letter ‘d’ as ‘r’, and hence the name Canara came into existence. In 1585, a Dutch visitor, Von Linschoten believed to call the people of this region as ‘Canarian’ (Gazetteer 1985:1). When British took charge of this region, they retained the same name in their official records (Silva & Fuchs 1965:1-2).

The Canara exactly located on the 12th to the 15th degree of Northern Latitude touches Goa and Gunduck district of Bijapur in the north and south Malabar province. To the east, it has...
Mysore and territories of Bhalaghaut whereas western part of it closed by the Arabian Sea. A major portion of Western Karnataka is elevated and thickly forested Land which is also called Sahyadri range or Western Ghat. It runs parallel with the long coastal strips. Within this elevation, several natural passes are formed which have been providing excellent means of transportation communication between coastal regions to the interior of ghat regions. It is important to note that through these passes movement of people and also goods took place. Epigraphs too substantiated such movements especially the movement of cows and cattle (SII VII No. 222, 229, 248, 262, 273). Sahyadri range has several rivers in the form of streams and quite a large number of water channels (Dalvi 1996: 12-24). Climate is monsoon tropical, and southwest monsoon is the heaviest. Coastal Karnataka receives very heavy rainfall between the months of June and July. Annual average rainfall is very high that led to the formation of alluvial soil due to silt formation by rain. The entire Coastal region has rich natural vegetation. River basin of Sharavathy, Aghanashini and Panchagangavali make several waterfalls and spray zones that support exceptional riverine habitats. Their moist valleys are covered with extensive bamboo groves, natural teak woods, eucalyptus and betel nut plantation.

Walter Hamilton, Author of East India Gazetteer, highlights that Canara is exploitation of Carnata that applies to the country north of river Chandragiri and the area above the ghats (Hamilton 1828: 333) but later collectively they formed the part of the Madras Presidency. For the administrative convenience, this region was divided into North Canara and South Canara. This stretch from south of Goa till north of Malabar is geographically the most suitable area for the development of natural harbours.

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6 Cattle coming from Seven Ghatts and also descending of cows from the Eight Ghatts.
Fig. 2 Political map of Coastal Karnataka (Source: Google image)

The whole coastal Karnataka which is approximately 300 Km stretch also known to Greco-Roman writers of the early centuries AD as ‘Pirate Coast’ (Aruni 2005:43), can be divided into three parts North Karnataka (Uttar Kannada), Udupi and South Karnataka (Dakshin Kannada). Uttar Kannada was ruled by Kadambas in 4th to 6th Century, and later district came under Chalukyas, Rastrakutas, Hoysalas and Vijayanagar Empire. Amongst Europeans Portuguese were the first to arrive at it coast and tried to introduce certain policies to control the trade. After that Dutch too tried their hand in monopolistic trade. Maratha too got the control over this in the 1750s, and finally British got it in 1799. It was the part of Madras Presidency until 1862 when it was transferred to the Bombay Presidency. It is a huge district of Karnataka having a long stretch of approx. 122 Kms on the West coast of India. The maximum area of this region is covered with thick forest. Sharavati, Aghanashini, Gangavati
and Kali are important rivers which flow in this region. The long strip of the country is described by a British traveller in the following words, “intended by numerous creeks and bays joined by the estuaries of rivers low and sandy with broken and rugged rocks cropping up in places, but country near the seaboard is well planted with coconut trees.” (Sturrock 1894: 1, 3, 4).

2.2 Trading Scenario of early Indian western coastal region

The Western coast of India had very early trans-oceanic trade even before the second millennium BC (Saletore 1956: 26). Its peninsular location made it suitable for the Sea trade in the entire South Asian region and earned a respectful position by handling a large volume of traffic. There are several indications about the antiquity of the trade between India and Egypt for numerous products, but there is a dearth of evidence and proof that exchange took place through the ports of West Coast. Archaeological sources have proved that Lothal had reached the zenith of its prosperity by 2000 BC, which is indicated by the establishment of new factories and workshops of coppersmiths, beads makers, and shell workers (Nandagopal 2006: 61). Prosperity and commercial activities of early Indian port can be reflected in the following words,

“the industrial and luxury articles of Lothal reached the Arabian and Sumerian ports so much so Sargon II boasted that Dilmun and Meluhha ships were landed in the port of Akkad” (Nandagopal 2006: 62).
Inscriptional studies of Balligame (E.C. VII S.K. 118) by Dr. Vasantha Madhava suggests that the coastal Karnataka had an extensive trade in precious stones and gems along with the finest breed of horse and elephants (Madhava 1985: 04). This inscription also highlights that traders of this region used to travel by land and sea water routes and penetrated all the countries of six continents. It is important to note that this inscription suggested that the merchants of this place had touched nearly every country in the world (E.C. VII, SK 118). The same inscription also mentions that merchants of this place had relation with the Parasa (Persia). Madhava’s inscriptional studies of 1182 A.D. of the same place also reveal that word ‘Tursk’ used for Turkey suggest that merchants of this place had trade contact with the Arabs and Turks (E.C VII SK 197). Similarly, contact with the Eastern world is reflected in the inscription of the King Java, the record of the reign Airlangga of 1019 to 1042 A.D. which mentions “the ports controlled by the king and situated at the mouth of the Brankas in the bay of Surabaya, came the merchants from the Karnataka, besides those from Kalinga, Bengal, Ceylon etc.” (Saletore 1955: 59-60).
One of the crucial points which Madhava has found is that of the epigraphical resemblance between Karnataka and South East Asia. Some of the inscriptions are engraved in late Brahmi script and composed in verse that reflects the exactly similar style of the records of the early Kadambas of Banavasi. Impacts of Karnataka on the territories of the Greater India reflected in the seventh and eighth century’s records of the Indo-China and Indonesia where Saka era was predominately used. (Madhava 1985: 05). During Ancient times western Karnataka consisted of ‘Tulu’, ‘Haive’, ‘Konkana’ and ‘Mala rajya’ (SII, Vol no. 297) which were ruled by several early dynasties namely the Kadambas, the Chalukyas of Badami, Rashtrakutas, the Chalukyas of Kalyan and the Senas and Hoyasalas from the fourth to fourteenth centuries who received recognition from the local dynasties. Later Vijayanagar rulers got control of this region in full sway. Towards the end of the 14th Century, the whole western coastal region was under complete control of Vijayanagara Empire. It remained effective till the middle of 16th Century. Even later feudal chiefs of Tuluva and Haiva regions accepted overlordship of Vijayanagara rulers.

Several Greek and Roman writers too have referred several ports of Indian west coast which have suggested vital trading links with the Mediterranean countries though the name taken by them are difficult to identify with the names of the western ports because of difference in local pronunciation and different accent of foreign travellers. However, it can be safely said that the ports of the coastal Karnataka have their share of direct trade contact with the West by its inter-portal trade with the large emporia. There was flourishing trade between India and the Roman Empire from Second century B.C. to second century A.D. Indian goods had great demand in the Mediterranean world. Apart from this, it played very significant role in handling Chinese silk route. Due to internal turbulence in the land route, land route of the silk trade was diverted to sea routes, and India served as mid-way in transporting goods from China to Roman Empire. A part of the movement of goods took place overland to India and after that via Sea route to Roman Empire.

Several lists of products are given by the author of Periplus, which were exported to Roman Empire from Indian ports in exchange of commodities like spices, gems, silk, pepper, ivory, cotton, betel (Karnataka State Gazetteer 1973:35). If we look at these products, most of them were available only on the coastline of Karnataka, and from there this specific quality of
products supplied to another part of India. So probably some of these products might have exported to them as well. This export caused a drain of Roman gold into India, and that is why a large number of Roman coins were found in India especially in its coastal zone.

The earliest reference of this western coast is mentioned in Pliny who calls the ports between *Muziris* and *Nitrias* as dominated by pirates. The name *Nitrias* according to some scholars can be North Canara districts. However, Dr. B A Saletore has the opinion that there is also a close similarity between *Nitrias* and Netravati too and he says further that Pliny’s Barace is undoubtedly Basrur the Barcelore of later times. (Appendix to South Canara District Manual 1938:172). The existence of good numbers of ports on the west coast of India, traders used to bring finished as well as raw goods from different parts of India to export them to West Asian and African ports further. This trade contact with neighbouring regions and also with overseas countries this region reported movement of goods and people. Migration of merchants from Arab countries increased the number of Muslims traders in this region. Hence before the advent of the colonial period, trade in the west coast of India was dominated by the indigenous traders and also Muslim traders of Arab countries. Arab traders played a significant role in the international trade during pre-colonial period.

![Figure 1: Roman trade in the subcontinent according to Periplus Maris Erythraei1st century CE.](image-url)
To understand the traditional maritime trading activities of early India, it is important to comprehend first several factors and their functions in governing the commerce.

### 2.2.1 Trading Vessels

Indo-Roman trade was not just solely dependent on the direction and duration of the wind but also on the types of vessels used for the sailing: excellent ports for harbouring ships, rich markets of spices and other exotic commodities together with proficient merchant communities. All these had its positive impacts on the coastal trade, and it can be safely said that the ports of the coastal Karnataka have their share of direct trade contact with the large emporia in the west by its several means of commerce.

The earliest representation of sailing boat appeared in Mohenjodaro polished painting that shows earliest patterns of boat making. This bears testimony to the fact that India had great maritime activity along with flourishing shipbuilding industry which played a significant role in shaping the trading nexus with the foreign countries. Seals, potsherd paintings, foreign coins give a direct indication towards the existence of trade and navigation both oceanic and riverine in Harappan times. Hence only iconographic records have depicted boats on seals, amulets, coins, pots and also as reliefs on religious buildings that have survived and given us some clues about the trading vessels shapes, designs and size. (Blue 2009:5).
Fig 2: Sailing Boat (Mohenjodaro Polished painting, 3000 B.C.) National Museum, New Delhi

Fig 3: River craft (Potsherd painting, Mohenjodaro, 3000 B.C) National Museum, New Delhi
Textual records are very limited in giving a description of the vessels involved in the trade. Sailing vessels appeared on the seals and coins are not easy to identify whether they were seagoing vessels or only river vessels. Neither these depictions give a clear picture about the exact size of the vessels nor their belonging whether they are indigenous or have been made by foreigners. There is a possibility that exchange of techniques and methods of building vessels might have taken place. A graffito on a pot of 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} century AD in Tamil Nadu gives information about Roman trading vessel with twin steering paddles and two or three masts (Sridhar 2005:67-73). Similar patterns of ‘two masted’ ship building also appear in 2\textsuperscript{nd} century AD Satavana coin and also in 6\textsuperscript{th} century AD Pallava coin. There is also a possibility that ship operating in the Indian Ocean during Roman Imperial period were constructed in Grecco-Roman style, but there is also a chance when they sailed to India, wear and tear were
repaired by the local population (Casson 1989:73,81). Use of Indian teak and cotton mast for sail came in use. Similar conclusion forwarded by Lucy Blue in the following words:

“The final scenario is that perhaps some of the vessels involved with trade between the Red Sea and India were constructed in India either by ‘Roman’ shipwrights or Indian craftsmen, using Indian teak for the hull and rigging components, and had sails made from Indian cotton.” (Blue, 2009:9)

The size of the ships mostly depended upon the requirements or quantity of goods exported and imported and also on the size of the ports. For small ports usually, small crafts and rafts were used. Local boats were used for transporting goods from small ports to the main sea coasts (Blue 2009:5). The most dominating ship in the Western Indian water was Muslim Ships, and these were mostly single mast with large wheels held by two cords on either side of the boat. Sometimes instead of cords they also used nails and glue for joining purposes. In some of the cargos, huts were also provided for the passengers. In volume and size, the largest ship can compete with the contemporary Portuguese ships. The early 16th century records give details of the size of Muslim ships between 375 to 800 tons capacity. It says the ship of 800 tons belonged to the Sultan of Gujrat and was the biggest ship in the Gulf of Cambay, but later it was captured by the Portuguese in 1510 at Hurmuz (Pearson 1976:8). In the early 16th century, Pearson’s finding suggests that there were about 36 Portuguese ships in India and the biggest amongst them was 550 tons until in the mid-16th century when Portuguese sent a ship of 1000 tons to India. The size of the ships kept on increasing, and larger vessels increasingly came in use (Qaiser 1972:195-220). Sultan of Bijapur even owned a ship of 200 tons but usually average size of the ship ranging between 300 to 400 tons (Qaiser 1968:65-66)
In tenth century onwards maritime activities greatly increased in Eastern water as well due to the emergence of great civilized states under Hindu and Buddhist influence. This increase in commerce, triggered not just the Indian merchants venturing into the Far East Asia but also encouraged Chinese merchants to land their ships to Indian coasts for the trading purposes. It also encouraged the development of shipbuilding technologies in southern and eastern India. Some of the Chinese sources indicate that several great ships were owned by the Tamil merchants. A major portion of exports from China was not carried in Arab ships, rather those were shipped in by the Tamil merchants of Coromandel and Ceylon (Raychaudhuri 1982: 127). Later these ships were overshadowed by the Chinese ocean-going Junks. These ships were designed in such way so that maximum advantage of prevailing wind of the monsoon could be taken care. This dependency finally devised vessels on the basis of eastern and western coasts of Indian subcontinents for their eastern and western trade. Western vessels were dominated by ‘Dhow’ which were built by teak woods from western Indian rain forest. These were rope sewn with a mainmast and mizzenmast.

Traditional means of transport on land included horses, asses, bullocks and bullock carts whereas boats and ships were the usual means of water transport. Several changes were introduced in the techniques and patterns of ship buildings. Various styles of ships that anchored in the west coast of India like almadia, caravel, and paranguee (Rao 2003: 156).
These ships arrived from different parts of the world brought certain innovations and styles in ship building that were incorporated by the local ship builders. Whereas land transports had hardly reflected any change in its style, it did not add any new means in carrying goods. With the coming of Portuguese system of defence and protection in the ship got a further boost. Earlier there was no provision of weapons and fleets of the military in the ship. Such provisions were required to protect the ship and its merchandise from the attacks of sea pirates and enemies.

2.2.2 The wealthy and affluent coast
Due to heavy rainfall, this region counts as one of the most fertile lands of Indian territories. Hence, the high agricultural productivity of the Canara zone gives the capacity to generate a surplus. Thomas Bowrey in his account highlights that the ecological interface between the riverine and coastal region created very fertile land affording great plenty. (Temple 1997:132). Countless palm trees and arecas along the coast gave region economic sustainability. An indication of high food productivity in the Canara region was the considerable export of food and grain from these areas to other regions. Fryer noted that during his voyage to the Canara coast he came across the Portuguese Armada from the south with two hundred paddy boats with their convoy’ which was on its way to Goa and the Portuguese settlement in Gujarat. (Crooke 1992:14). About rice, Pietro Della Velle writes, “their diet, for the most part, is nothing but rice of which is found in abundance so that everybody even of mean fortune keeps a great family.” (Edward 1892:42). The topography of this region has a profound impact on its agrarian system. Sahyadri Ghats range provides dense forest wealth along with several sources of water that originated from the ghats in the form of streams and rivers that help in the cultivation of other agricultural crops like rice and spices by supplying regular water.

Topographical features of Coastal Karnataka ensure availability of a variety of the forest produce as well as sandalwood and Timber wood which have a direct effect on the climate. This forest produce, maintain moisture and also prevent soil erosion. Soil and climate of Canara are similar to the Malabar. The abundance of commercial crops in this region is due to its distinct quality of red soil which supports some of the specific produce to cultivate in this region. Heavy rainfall also helps this area in the cultivation of the rice. Land of this region also supports multiple crops due to its varied quality which differs from area to area. For
example, soil near the sea is sandy, coarse, and rough near the valley which sustains its productivity even in heavy rain falls. Vegetation can be divided topographically as North Canara and South Canara. Produce of North Canara or Uttar Canara is dominated by sandalwood, nutmeg, pepper, cinnamon, sugarcane, and teak in abundance. South Canara whom Hindu calls Tuluva mainly dominated by the Brahmmins who claim proprietor right over the soil of this region as they consider that this land was created purely for them by Parasurama (Hamilton 1828: 338). About Pepper, an English Traveller Hamilton confirmed that the ‘Svadi’ (ghat region) has the best in India (Hamilton 1930: 147).

2.2.3 Various trading routes and trading communities
Indian traders enjoyed a better position in all the trading activities in the past. Whether it was seaborne trade or inland trade, Indian traders got upper hand in international commerce. They exercised their trading control not only to West Asia and Africa but also went as far as Europe and other western countries. It is not just their role in commerce which is important but also to note that it is the merchants who referred to as the donors in the several inscriptions. Their role in preserving history by giving grants to different religious institutions along with inscriptions serve as proof of it. These Inscriptional proofs have helped the researchers tremendously in reconstructing history. Increasing affluence of the merchant communities started influencing religious institutions. Their social status also raised when they started patronizing them through financial support. However, this ancient glory of India’s overseas trade faded with the time with the arrival of colonial powers who ultimately changed the dimensions of trade and made it just a supplier of particular commodities to the modern western world.

Amongst several determining factors affecting the course of the trade like sailing routes and sailing time was the direction of the wind. Ships voyaging between the Red Sea and the coast of India solely depended on the monsoon. The economy of South East Asia that is even today largely dependent on the Monsoon winds and the rain that comes with it. Hence this monsoon winds which was not only leading governing factor for the agrarian produce but also a controlling factor for the shipping expedition (Pearson 1976:7). Ships departed from the ports of Egyptian Red Sea for Eastern trade usually began its journey in midsummer when the southwest monsoon would help the movement of the ship from the Gulf of Aden and Indian
Ocean (Casson 1989:13-21). Roman ships usually followed two routes, one either it went to the northwest coast or second it took a more direct route across the Indian Ocean to the southwest India to the ports of *Muziris* and *Nelkynda* (Casson 1989:83). Hence it is monsoon which decides the season of trade for example shipping from Aden to Malabar was regulated by winds from October to February. It is important to note that ship coming across the Arabian Sea from Red Sea, East Africa, or the Cape of Good Hope had to adjust their timing in such a way so that ship reached the Indian coast when the Southwest Monsoon was slackening. Otherwise, it would be impossible to enter the Indian water when the Northeast Monsoon began. Likewise, a ship bound to Cape of Good Hope had to start the voyage on the onset of Northeast monsoon and reached the Cape before the slackening of it (Moreland 1962:213-15). Even in these favourable circumstances when wind supported the voyages travelling time was not less than two months. By the time ships anchored the coast of India, it was already September. For the return journey, these Roman and the West Asian merchant had to wait another two and a half month for the commencement of northeast monsoon which usually comes in late November or beginning of December only. Hence to accomplish their trade business these merchants and seamen had almost two months to utilize the time for the business and marketing exercises. These merchants had to rely on the locals not just for the shelter and foods but also for the access to the inland trade and articles of imports and exports. Therefore, the role of these indigenous communities cannot be ignored that made the overseas exchange a constant part of their coastal economies.

Amongst well defined international routes in Asia, there were important centres like Malacca, Malabar, and Cambay along with feeder ports which were also the lifelines of the trading networks. Asian export to the Western world was dominated by the spice trade, and Malabar was the primary supplier and also the most desired destination for the foreign travellers. This trade in spices was mainly controlled by the European, Mamluks of Egypt and the Arab merchants. Spices trade, especially Peppers from Malabar to the Red Sea and from the Red Sea to Hurmuz was handled by the Arab merchants in their individual ships, and these merchants belonged to Cairo or Jiddah and ports of Mecca. The medieval prosperity of this region was based on the revenues which were collected through taxes on the trans-shipment of spices. One of the important Asian trade centres of 15th and 16th century maritime trade was Hurmuz which was the important centre for the exchange of commodities brought from Persia,
the Persia Gulf, Oxus River Valley and Afghanistan. From this enter-pot Commodities also got from the Red Sea, Gujrat and Malacca.

Western coastal trade was dominated by the Malabari and Gujarati merchants who controlled the vast overseas trade of India with West Asia and then with the Persian merchants. The most important item imported to India by the Persian and European merchants was horses. In the 15th century, Indian rulers desired the best quality of horses for the show-off and the war. Many horses brought to Vijayanagara via Canara ports of Honnavar and Bhatkal, and sometimes their numbers increased up to 3000 to 4000 in a year (Pearson 1976:13). Likewise, Deccan Sultanates got them through the ports of Goa and Chaul. Hence, before coming to colonial power to Indian coast, territories came in constant contact with the Rome, Greek and Egypt for the trading purposes.

Remarkable influences are visible in the Indian Ocean network, for example, some Roman influence can be seen in the coastal culture of India. Likewise, traces of Indian influence are also visible in the art and architecture and also of Roman works of silver and ivory. Even between the 1st and 2nd Century BC, textile from India was in high demand in Egypt and the Mediterranean region and these regions became the centre of the overseas market for the Indian goods. Even in medieval times before India went into the clutches of European powers, several foreign travellers have given accounts on Indian trade and its glorious past. Arab traveller Ibn Batuta (1333-1346) gave detailed accounts on Indian affluent markets and cities. In another context, he compared the magnificent ports of Alexandria in Egypt with the Indian Western ports like Quilon and Calicut (Kivudanavar 2013:170). Portuguese writer Barbosa too gave details of its extensive trade and its remarkable varieties of merchandise. Another Portuguese traveller Domingo Paes gave a vivid description of the richness of Vijayanagar city and its heavy traffic and busy market. Its skilled craftsmen and dealers of precious stones awestruck the foreign travellers (Sewell 1985:237). It appears from the detailed narrative of Ibn Batuta, western coastal regions had a large number of sea ports and excellent harbours and relished highly profitable trade with neighbouring regions and overseas trade. Most of these trades were monopolized by Malabari and Gujarati merchants.
Merchants in precolonial era enjoyed a real neutral environment from the political front. They did not face any regulation or control in their domain, and that worked for the trade to expand. Later, merchants in the colonial and post-colonial period enjoyed a very dominant position and joined their hands with the ruler to broaden the trade in their collaboration. Hence collaborative efforts profited merchants but equally benefitted the ruler as well. However, this collaboration made them extremely influential and powerful.

Coastal trade was also dominated by the ship owners and operators, and mostly it belonged to major Islamic expatriates like Arabs, Persian and Turks. The trade was indeed controlled by the Muslim merchants like Moors of Arabia. However, the konkani speaking Navayats were the chief merchants of the place. Another category of merchants were the Kings, prince, nobles and the members of Royal family. Some of them were also the financiers. Hindu merchants like Komatties and Kannada Chetties were mainly engaged in small boat coastal trade. Mappillas from Malabar too came to Canara coast for monetary benefits (Arasanatnam 1994: 199). With the increase in opportunities, there is also evidence of entry of non-commercial communities like Saraswat Brahman and Pandidars into the seaborne commerce.

2.3 Trade in Pre-Colonial Canara

The Southern part of India was not only blessed with long coastline in the East and West but also with excellent harbour and active enterprising groups of merchant communities who extended Karnataka’s commercial frontier across the sea and touched the shores of the western world and beyond. Traveller’s accounts especially travellers from the Muslim countries refer to some of the prominent ports of that time and those were Bhatkal, Basrur, Karwar, Kasargod, Honnavar, Barakur, Mangalore Malpe, Mirjan, Sirur and Sadasivgad. All the Arab travellers have mentioned Basrur in their account as one of the important trading places. About Honnavar too they mentioned that it was one of the major ports of western India where bigger ships could enter. Mangalore was regarded as a great commercial centre and most major town to Arab travellers. Sirur was also significant in this trading nexus as it allowed larger ships from Basrur to pass. It is not true that the entire west coastal lines were free from any danger. We have references of pirates who also created an atmosphere of terror amongst merchants. Ibn Batuta has mentioned in his account about Barakur as one of the centre of pirates who frequently robbed the merchants (Kivudanavar 2013:2). Even Karwar and adjoining coastline
were also in the control of these pirates. Ptolemy too confirmed that Mangalore too was a southernmost stronghold of pirates. Arab travellers also referred about another menace that was about crocodile infested ports like Sadasivgad (Kuppuswamy 1975:116).

The Greco-Roman accounts of the first two centuries also reflect that the west coast was busy with the trans-oceanic region. Essential items of exchange were Ivory, cotton, silk clothes and diamonds which were exported to the Indian west coast in return for mainly spices, coral, white glass, brass, tin, lead and cinnabar (Madhava 1763:12). Chinese traveller of seventh century Hiuen Tsang has also said about the rich and fertile land of Karnataka which according to him was regularly cultivated and produced abundant crops (Moraes 1990: 62-63). On potentiality of this region, a large number of epigraphs are found providing interesting details on agricultural produce. Records of Pulakeshi I (540-566 A.D) states “In the town of Alaktaka has full of agriculturists, different variety of paddy, sugar cane, forest gram, wheat etc are grown in plenty” (Panchamukh, 1974: 56-61). The coastal region of Karnataka was known to the western world as the granary of rice, pepper, sugarcane, coconut, etc. One of the early 17th Century Portuguese records suggests that Canara has a superior quality of pepper and it grew abundantly in the region of Malanad especially around Gersoppa (Shastry 1981: 204). Besides this, coastal Karnataka was also famous for the export of rice and cloth. Saltpetre iron had high demand in Europe. The Portuguese used to collect large quantities of saltpeter from the ports of the Basrur. For them, the iron of Basrur was the best in India, and they sent as much as it to the Portugal for ammunition purpose (Shastry 1987: 99).

Numbers of early visitors have described the vibrant markets of India whom they compared with the glorious and excellent port of Alexandria. This comparison itself explains the remarkably organized port cities of India in handling an extensive trade with a variety of commodities. A wealth of Vijayanagar which attracted several travelers, left behind some accounts describing its grand markets, traders of precious stones, skilled artisans, and also details of sea ports. Domingo Paes, the Portuguese traveller, highlights the heavy traffic and busy streets of Vijayanagara (Sewell 1985:237). Arab trader Ibn Batutah, in his account, has provided a list of important sea ports in controlling vast overseas trade.
Even the industries of the Canara was dominated by the agricultural industry based on agrarian and agricultural raw material. Hence major items of export were agricultural products as this region produces a mainly agrarian product and that is why primary concern of the people was to produce agrarian commodities and not non-agrarian articles. However, this does not mean that there was no significant production of industrial goods. The reason for this was that this region was always under feudal control or the tributary powers imposed by the Vijayanagara rulers. Hence main concern of the feudal chiefs was to collect revenues from the land. Therefore, they encouraged agricultural production. Moreover, trade in agrarian produce also fetched them income and people also started investing in the land. That is why there was commercialisation of agriculture rather than commercialisation of industrial goods. Sanjay Subrahmanyam has also pointed out that Canara was grain surplus region and it was always possible to exchange with its surplus craft goods. Hence even before coming of Europeans to the Asian market, Canara traders were engaged in the trade in rice and spices and also with cotton textiles for that there was high demand in the West Asia. Locally produced rice of both finer and cheaper quality had demand in the western Asia and also to neighbouring regions like Malabar and north Karnataka. There were other commercial crops like betel nuts that gained good demands in the international markets. Other than agrarian produce there were certain metals of India which were required in the foreign markets like iron, brass and copper. Establishment of the bronze factory in the west coast of India was also reported in the traveller’s accounts (Goitien: 1972:62). European traders who visited the ports of West Asia used to purchase the items brought from the Indian western coast. The exchange of commodities accelerated the pace of commerce in the coastal regions. Role of Jewish merchant Abraham Yiju was critical in conducting trade between Mangalore and Aden (Rao 2015: 9)

2.4 Important Sea ports of Canara

From the detailed narrative of Ibn Batutah, it appears that the Western coast of India was studded with a large number of seaports, excellent harbours, and extensive trade. Among these ports, Diu, Goa, Calicut, Cochin, and Quilon gained more prominence. The highly profitable direct trade between Gujarat and Malabar was almost entirely monopolized by the Malabari merchants. Imports from Malabar predominately included different range silk of Southeast Asia, important spices, and nuts especially cocoanuts. Along with that iron and wax and sugar
were also inscribed on the list. The exports consisted mainly of cotton, cloth, wheat and other grains, horses, and carnelians.

In the early fifteenth and sixteenth century trade for the Vijayanagara was conducted through the ports along the Canara coast (Subrahmanyam 1994: 18-47). Some of the important ports known to Arabs and European merchants were Honnavar, Basrur, Mangalore and Bhatkal engaged mainly with coastal trade and supplied to the demands of imperial capital. Amongst them, Bhatkal being situated close to the capital of Vijayanagara fulfilled all the requirements of the kingdom. This port listed as the pre-eminent port of the long distance trade by most of the travellers who visited ‘City of Victory’. It served one of the necessary items of import to the kingdom. By supplying horses to the rulers of the Vijayanagara, it acquired its position equal to the port of Goa and Chaul (Pires 1990: 61). Later Bhatkal and other neighbouring ports became a major trading centre for the supply of horses, rice, spices, and sugarcane.

The coastal trade of the Deccan ports appears to have been shared by both Gujarati and Malabari merchants. The Gujarati merchants engaged in import of silk and cotton clothes. They mostly imported silk, opium wheat imported silk and cotton cloth, opium and common silk camlets, wheat, and gingelly, horses in exchange of cotton and linen fabrics. Malabari merchants imported mostly agrarian produce like spices and drugs, areca-nuts and cocoa-nuts, palm-sugar along with articles like wax and emery, copper and quicksilver. Articles of export included cotton goods, wheat, rice, millet, gingelly oil, muslins, and calicoes. In the Tulu region, the Malabar merchants imported cocoa-nuts, spices, palm sugar, palm-wine, and exported rice, iron, and a variety of sugar appears to have been largely controlled by the Indians. Merchants from Coromandel, Malabar and the Vijayanagara, Deccan, and Gujarat kingdoms are described as visiting the island and Colombo. The imports consisted of very fine Cambay cotton cloths, saffron, and coral, quicksilver, cinnabar, gold, and silver. The high profit of this trade is reflected in the rate at which animals were sold in the Malabar and Coromandel. Elephants were sold in these markets at the rate of 400 or 500 Portuguese coins but sometimes they used to touch the mark of 1000 and even 1500 which is extremely high compare to anywhere in the world that time. The coastal trade of Coromandel and the Vijayanagara kingdom were carried by Hindu and Muslim merchants from Malabar and imports consisting of pearls, cocoa-nuts, horses, etc., and the exports comprising spices, rice,
and cloth. To achieve this King Krishnadevaraya realized the importance of safe harbour for
the trade. Rulers of Vijayanagara controlled scores of ports in Canara coast for trading
purposes. Abdul Razzaq in his visit to Vijayanagara noted that the total number of ports were
three hundred and the size of the ports was almost equal to Calicut (Branfoot 2005: 257).

On pre-colonial commerce, it is believed that there was a separation between politics and
commerce and rulers seldom interfere in commercial activities. Due to religious belief and
sentiments, Hindu rulers did not look at trading activities with regard and respect as the
merchant communities occupied the third position in the traditional Hindu four varnas society.
The position of merchants was below the Brahmans and Kshatriya. Similarly, for Muslim
rulers, Islamic ideology did not permit excessive profit making and usury exercise. Therefore,
the commercial activities received negative view by both the ruling authorities in India. This
anti-commerce approach served constant harassment and heavy taxation to the merchant
communities. However, later on, this notion was challenged by the historians in the light of
available evidence which suggest that trade and commerce did flourish during pre-colonial
period. Vibrant markets of India attracted several foreign traders for the exchange of specific
commodities. Merchants enjoyed total freedom in the sea and also in the port areas. Hence,
the southern part of India was not only blessed with long coastline but also with excellent
harbour and active enterprising groups of merchant communities who extended the
Karnataka’s commercial frontier across the sea and touched the shores of the western world
and beyond.

Thus, coastal Karnataka’s vast coastline made it very welcoming and also attractive for export
and import. The rich biodiversity of this region, including Sahyadri range, beckoned several
visitors and made this coast one of the very rich and affluent coasts in the world. The trade
gave an impetus to cultural exchanges that made the region more inclusive towards diversity
of religions, cuisines, clothing, and customs. The area was considered one of the relatively
safer areas because of its nearness to sea. It was less prone to famine or drought. The area was
regarded as one of the relatively safer areas because of its proximity to the sea. It was less
prone to famine or drought. Such was its charm that it was almost always under war over its
occupancy. Sahyadri Ghats range made this area more fertile giving it an agrarian boost. Crops
like rice were cultivated tremendously and thus became one of the trade commodities during
Portuguese times. Basrur chiefs paid rice bags as tributes to Portuguese. The trade to be successful depended heavily on wind direction and duration, trading vessels. The monsoon played a pivotal role in the course of travel of these ships. The kind of sailing vessels depended on the items they transported. There are many types of research already done on ships capacity and size during those times.

Maritime trading activities in the Arabian Sea contributed to the development of commerce at Indian Western coast. Pre-colonial Canara was affected by several factors which were responsible for the growth and development in this region. These agents of commerce which facilitated the trade were various merchants groups, commodities of exchange, important sea ports, wealthy and affluent coasts and also the means of communication together contributed to its rise and development. Hence in the traditional pre-colonial Canara, trade was carried both inland and overland by both Persian and native peddlers and followed various trade routes to connect with different distributive centres. Flourishing trade due to the abundance of rice and exotic spices, west coast of India experienced flocking of merchants from various parts of the world. Traders from Persia, Arabia and China visited the ports of Canara and stayed in the coastal enclave to wait for the favourable monsoon for the return voyages.