

HISTORY

Chapter 6: Towns, Traders and Craftspersons



Towns, Traders and Craftspersons

Many towns and cities developed in the medieval period. The towns which rose to prominence during at this time were the administrative centres, port towns and temple towns.

Temple Towns

In the medieval period, many temple towns emerged in India due to the following reasons:

- Temples were great centres of wealth. Many pilgrims visited the city, which brought revenue to the town.
- Since most of the temples were built by the rulers to demonstrate their wealth and power, they gave several land grants to the temples.
- The temple authorities not only utilised the money for celebrating festivals, carrying out rituals and to feed the pilgrims but also invested the wealth in financing trading and banking.
- Many priests, artisans, traders and workers settled near the temples to provide their services to the pilgrims who visited the temples.
- Some of the famous temple towns of this period were Tanjavur (Tamil Nadu), Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh), Kanchi and Madurai (Tamil Nadu) and Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh).



Kalaisnathar Temple in Kanchipuram was constructed by the Pallavas in the seventh century

- Many pilgrim centres also developed into famous towns. Some of them were Vridavan in Uttar Pradesh and Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu. Ajmer became a centre of religious coexistence as Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti was visited by people of all religions. A lake near Ajmer, known as Pushkar was visited by pilgrims since ancient times.



The Pushkar Lake near Ajmer

Small Towns

Many small towns also emerged during this period. These possibly developed from the large villages. These towns had the following features:

- These towns had a Mandapika (mandi) or the markets from where villagers purchased their goods.
- They also had street markets called hatta (haat) where variety of goods and commodities were sold.
- These towns also had separate streets for artisans such as potters, smiths, sugar makers, oil pressers etc.
- Many people from far off places came to buy various products in these small towns. Many people also came to sell commodities such as saffron, betel nuts, salt, spices etc. to these towns.
- Later, the zamindars or samanthas built their palatial home in these towns. They levied taxes on the trades, merchants, shopkeepers, artisans etc.
- In some cases, they even 'donated' the 'right' to collect taxes to the local temple authorities.

A Study of Three Main Towns

Let us take a look at the three important towns during this period.

Hampi – Capital of the Vijaynagar Empire

- The city of Hampi was founded in 1336. It was the capital of the Vijaynagar Empire and was a well fortified city.
- The city was a home to various architectural buildings with beautiful arches, domes and pillared halls.
- Hampi also had well planned orchards and gardens.
- At its height, in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, it was a great commercial and cultural centre.
- The Moors (Muslim merchants), Chettis and the agents of European traders traded in the city.
- The city had beautiful temples which were the center of cultural activities.

The Virupaksha temple is one of the most famous temples in the city. The Mahanavmi festival was celebrated with a lot of vigour and energy.



The Virupaksha temple at Hampi

- Hampi was ruined after the defeat of the Vijayanagar Empire in 1526 by the Deccan kingdoms of Golconda, Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Berar and Bidar.

Surat- A Port City

- Surat in the state of Gujarat was the centre of western trade during the rule of the Mughals.
- The city was also called the 'Gate to Mecca' as many pilgrim ships sailed from there.

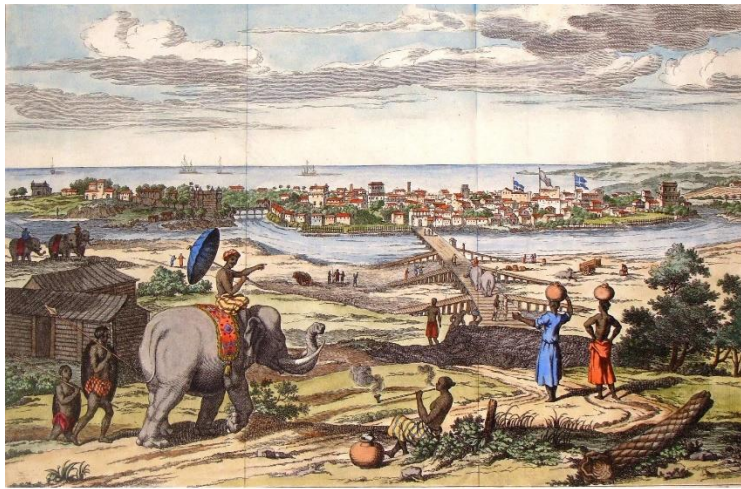


The city of Surat in the late seventeenth century

- Surat was a port city where the Portuguese, English and Dutch traded in various goods. According to an English writer, on an average 100 ships of different countries could be found anchored at the port.
- Surat was a major textile market. There were many retail and wholesale shops which sold cotton textile. The textiles were famous for their zari (gold lace) borders.
- The European traders had their factories and warehouses in the city.
- In order to cater to the needs of the people who came from various countries to Surat for trading purposes, many rest houses were built. The city also had grand buildings and gardens.
- Surat was also a major banking centre at this time. The Surat hundis were accepted in far off markets of Cairo (Egypt), Basra (Iraq) and Antwerp (Belgium). Hundi is a note of deposit made by a person. This amount could be claimed by another person by presenting the note of deposit.
- Due to the decline of the Mughal Empire, the control of the sea routes by the Portuguese and the competition from Bombay gradually led to the decline of the city.

Masulipatnam- A Fishing Town

- The town of Masulipatnam also called Machipatnam was situated on the delta of River Krishna in the present day state of Andhra Pradesh.



The city of Masulipatnam in 1676

- It was a port city and both the Dutch and the English made efforts to gain control of the city. The fort in the city was built by the Dutch.
- The city was a part of Golconda which was ruled by the Qutb Shahi rulers. They imposed various taxes on the sale of textiles, spices and other products in order to avoid the passing of trade into European hands.
- The competition among various groups such as the Europeans, Persian merchants and local nobles made the city prosperous.
- Later the city passed into Mughal hands when Golconda was annexed by Aurangzeb in 1686-87.
- In the late seventeenth century, European traders shifted their base to cities such as Bombay, Calcutta and Madras as these cities could be developed into administrative and commercial centres also.
- The once bustling city of Masulipatnam gradually began to decline and today is only a small town.

Traders and Craftsmen

Traders, merchants and craftsmen play a big role in the prosperity of any city.

Traders

- In the towns which developed during the medieval period, many traders such as the Banjaras and horse traders formed their own associations called guilds. Manigramam

and Nanadesi were two most prominent guilds at this time. They traded within the country and with South-East Asia and China.

- Traders generally travelled in groups called the caravans as they had to pass through several territories.
- Some communities which emerged as famous trading communities were the Chettiars, Marwaris, Gujaratis, Muslim Bohras and Hindu Baniyas. They traded in the ports of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, South-East Asia, China and East Africa.
- Spices and textiles were the main items of export while gold and ivory was brought from Africa, tin, silver and Chinese blue pottery from South-East Asia and China.
- The Arabs, Chinese, Jewish and Persian traders traded in the western part of the country.
- Indian cloth and spices were sold in European markets at very high profits which attracted the European traders to India.

Crafts in Towns

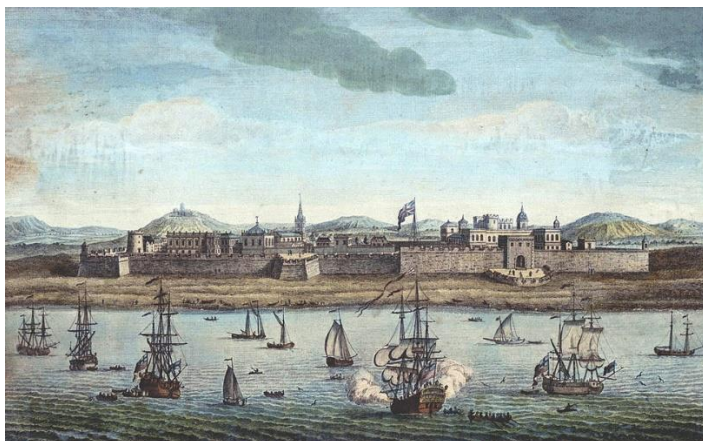
- Bidar, a kingdom in the medieval period had craftsmen who were expert in their inlay work in copper and silver. This is the reason why Bidar's craftsmen also came to be known as bidri.
- The community of the Panchalas or Vishwakarma included the masons, carpenters, blacksmiths and bronze smiths etc. They were generally associated with the construction of temples, palaces, tanks and reservoirs.
- The weaving community such as the Saliyar or the Kaikkolars emerged as wealthy communities which donated huge sums of money to the temples.
- Several works which are a part of cloth making such as dyeing, spinning and cleaning were performed by the specialists.



Preparing a piece of cloth include cleaning, spinning, weaving and dyeing

Emergence of New Traders and Cities

By the end of the seventeenth century, the European traders began to gain prominence. They traded in spices and textiles which were in great demand in the European countries. The English, the French and the Dutch formed their East India Companies in order to gain access to the Indian trade. Gradually, the Europeans powers due to their naval superiority gained control of the sea trade and forced the Indian traders to work as their agents. The English emerged as the most successful economic and later political power in India.



St. George Fort in Madras in the eighteenth century

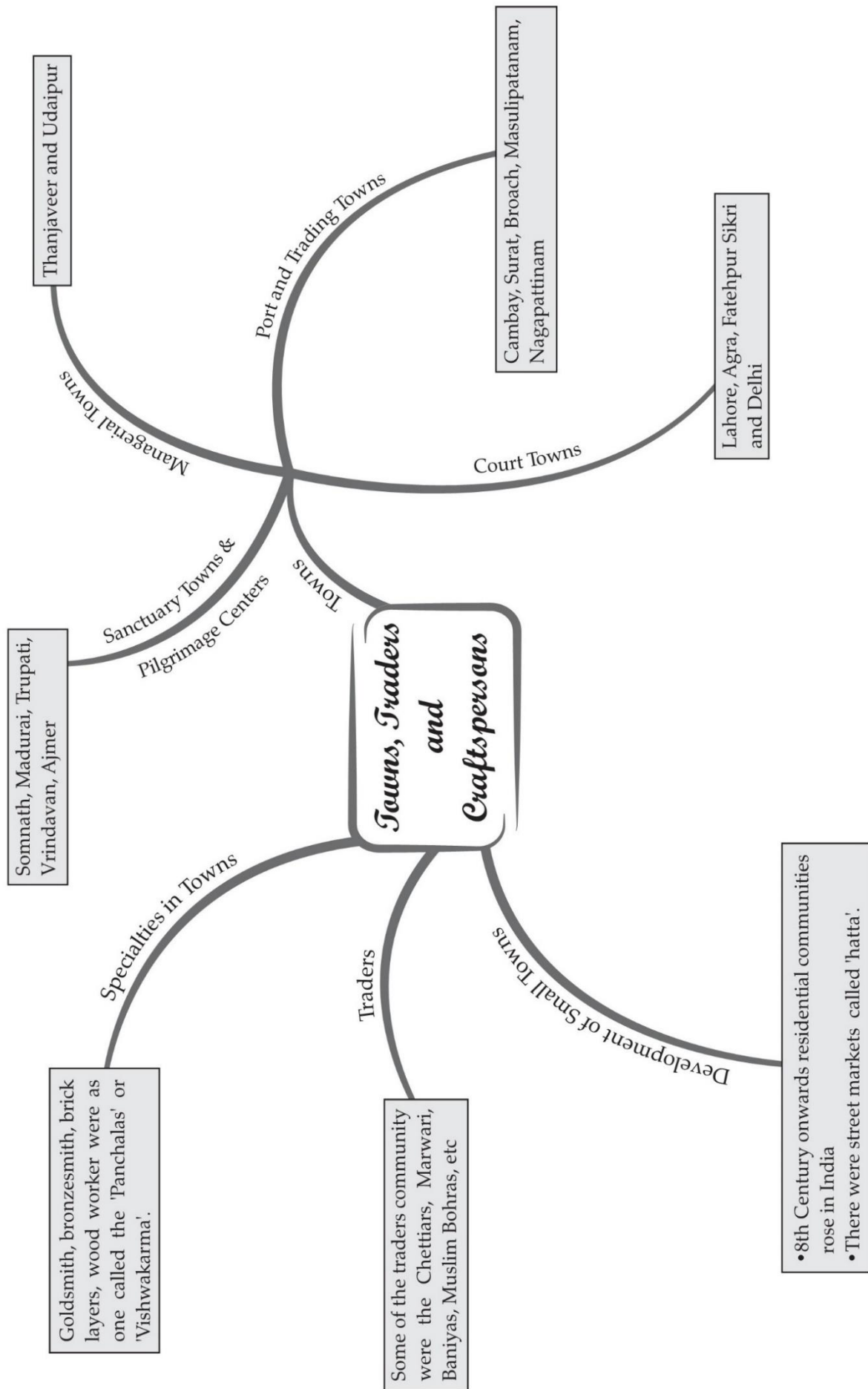
With refined and intricately designed clothes and great overseas markets, Indian textiles began to expand at this time. There was an expansion in the crafts of spinning, weaving, dyeing etc.

As many people were taking up the work related to textiles, craftsperson's began to lose their independence. It was because they began to take loans from the Europeans. This meant that they had to weave the cloth as promised to the European agents. Weavers also lost their autonomy as now they had to produce designs which were demanded by the Europeans.

Three cities emerged and gained prominence during this time, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. A clear demarcation of the native population from the European populations was seen in these cities. Europeans built forts in the cities. They lived in the residences of the St. George Fort in Madras and St. Williams Fort in Calcutta. These came to be known as **white settlements** since they were occupied by the Europeans. In the **black towns**, local artisans, traders and craft persons resided.

MIND MAP : LEARNING MADE SIMPLE

CHAPTER-16



Important Questions

➤ Multiple Choice Questions :

Question 1. When did Murshidabad became the capital of Bengal?

- (a) In 1703
- (b) In 1704
- (c) In 1709

Question 2. Which town been called the gate to Mecca?

- (a) Surat
- (b) Somnath
- (c) Bombay

Question 3. contain copper and tin.

- (a) Gold
- (b) Silver
- (c) Bronze

Question 4. What did the Indian traders bring from Africa?

- (a) Gold and ivory
- (b) Spices
- (c) Cloths

Question 5. Vasco da Gama was a resident of:

- (a) Portugal
- (b) Spain
- (c) Italy

Question 6. Who was mulla Abdul Ghafur?

- (a) Trader
- (b) Farmer
- (c) Samant

Question 7. Who had huge banking houses at Surat?

- (a) Surat seths
- (b) Kathiawad seths
- (c) Aggarwals

Question 8. When did Hampi fall into ruin?

- (a) 1555
- (b) 1560
- (c) 1565

Question 9. Which cities were gateways for trade?

- (a) Khambhat, Ahmedabad and Surat
- (b) Gandhinagar, Ahmedabad and Surat
- (c) Surat, Ahmedabad, Kachh

Question 10. 'Bidar' is:

- (a) Art on baked earth
- (b) Art on cloth
- (c) Inlay art on Metal

Question 11. How was water supplied to the city of Thanjavur?

- (a) Wells
- (b) Tanks
- (c) Both a and b
- (d) None of these

Question 12. The fort at Masulipatnam was built by whom?

- (a) Dutch
- (b) English
- (c) French
- (d) Portuguese

Question 13. Kabul and Qandahar were linked to which route?

- (a) Silk Route
- (b) Cape Route
- (c) Suez Canal Route
- (d) Cotton Route

Question 14. Hampi was the capital of which empire?

- (a) Mughal
- (b) Vijayanagara
- (c) Mewar

(d) None of these

Question 15. Which of the following is an example of a temple town?

(a) Ajmer

(b) Thanjavur

(c) Berar

(d) Delhi

➤ **Fill in the blanks :**

1. The Rajarajeshvara temple was built in _____.
2. Ajmer is associated with the Sufi saint _____.
3. Hampi was the capital of the _____ Empire.
4. The Dutch established a settlement at _____ in Andhra Pradesh.
5. Pilgrims who flocked to the temples also made _____.

➤ **Write true (T) or false (F) :**

1. We know the name of the architect of the Rajarajeshvara temple from an inscription.
2. Merchants preferred to travel individually rather than in caravans.
3. Traders formed guilds to protect their interests.
4. Kabul was a major centre for trade in elephants.
5. Ajmer (Rajasthan) was the capital of the Chauhan kings in the twelfth century.

➤ **Very Short Questions :**

1. What do temple towns represent?
2. Why did the rulers endow temples with grants of land and money?
3. How did pilgrims contribute to the temples?
4. What is bronze?
5. What is bell metal?
6. How did temple authorities use their wealth?
7. What did the Indian traders bring from Africa?
8. Name a few Indian spices which became an important part of European cooking.
9. What do the ruins of Hampi reveal?
10. Why has Surat been called the gate to Mecca?

➤ **Short Questions :**

1. What did Ibn Battutah say about cash crops and industries based on them?
2. What was the status of Kashmir in the field of crafts during the medieval period?
3. What do you understand by the term 'karkhanas'?
4. Write a short note on the Mughal karkhanas.
5. What was the status of Kashmir in the field of crafts during the medieval period?

➤ **Long Questions :**

1. How was Hampi in its heyday in the 15-16th centuries? When did it fall into ruin?
2. What made the city of Masulipatnam populous and prosperous?
3. Why was Surat termed as "Gateway to the west" in Medieval India?
4. Describe the life of various trading communities in Medieval India.
5. Describe the trade activities of the big and small traders belonging to the medieval time.

ANSWER KEY –

➤ **Multiple Choice Answer :**

1. (b) In 1704
2. (a) Surat
3. (c) Bronze
4. (a) Gold and ivory
5. (a) Portugal
6. (a) Trader
7. (b) Kathiawad seths
8. (c) 1565
9. (a) Khambat, Ahmedabad and Surat
10. (c) Inlay art on Metal
11. (c) Both a and b
12. (a) Dutch
13. (a) Silk Route
14. (b) Vijayanagara
15. (b) Thanjavur

➤ **Fill in the blanks :**

1. the early eleventh century.

2. Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti
3. Vijayanagara
4. Masulipatnam
5. Donations.

➤ **Write true (T) or false (F) :**

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True

➤ **Very Short Answer :**

1. Temple towns represent a very important pattern of urbanisation.
2. They did so in order to carry out elaborate rituals, feed pilgrims and priests and celebrate festivals.
3. They made donations.
4. Bronze is an alloy that contains copper and tin.
5. Bell metal contains a greater proportion of tin than other kinds of bronze. This produces a bell like sound.
6. They used their wealth to finance trade and banking.
7. They brought gold and ivory from Africa.
8. Pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, dried ginger.
9. The ruins at the Hampi reveal a well-fortified city.
10. Surat has been called the gate to Mecca because many pilgrim ships set sail from here.

➤ **Short Answer :**

1. Ibn Battutah said that the Indian soil is so fertile that it produced rice, sugarcane, sesame and cotton in abundance. They founded the base of various village industries such as oil-processing, making of jaggery, weaving, etc.
2. Kashmir's status in crafts was very good as Kashmir became an important centre of making paper and wood binding trades. Various crafts such as stone cutting, stone polishing, bottle making, window cutting and gold beating also developed in Kashmir and other regional art and craft centers.
3. Karkhanas' were factories or organised groups of people manufacturing articles; they

were the most important centers of production. These karkhanas supplied material for the royal household.

4. The karkhanas in the Mughal period were known as Buyutat also. Together with storing and manufacturing articles for the royal household and nobles' requirements, the mint, public treasury, treasury, department of construction of monuments, repairing, roads and artillery also came under Buyutat.
5. Kashmir's status in crafts was very good as Kashmir became an important centre of making paper and wood binding trades. Various crafts such as stone cutting, stone polishing, bottle making, window cutting and gold beating also developed in Kashmir and other regional art and craft centers.

➤ Long Answer :

1. In its heyday in the 15-16th centuries Hampi was an important centre of commercial and cultural activities. Moors, which was a name used collectively for Muslim merchants, Chettis and agents of European traders such as the Portuguese, visited the markets of Hampi.

Temples were the hub of cultural activities. Temple dancers known as devadasis performed before the deities, royalty and masses in the many-pillared halls in the Virupaksha, a form of Shiva, temple. The Mahanavami festival was one of the most important festivals celebrated at Hampi.

Hampi fell into ruin following the defeat of Vijayanagara in 1565 by the Deccani Sultans.

2. The city of Masulipatnam was a centre of intense activity during the 17th century. Both the Dutch and English East India Companies attempted to control this city as it became the most important part on the Andhra coast. Qutb Shah rulers of Golconda imposed royal monopolies on the sale of textiles, spices and other items in order to prevent the trade passing completely into the hands of the various East India Companies. This led to a fierce competition among various trading groups such as the Golconda nobles, Persian merchants, Telugu Komati Chettis and European traders. As a result the city became populous and prosperous.
3. Surat was the emporium of western trade during the Mughal period. People in Surat used to trade with West Asia via the Gulf of Ormuz. There were a number of religious pilgrims who used to set sail on ships to Mecca from Surat. It was a cosmopolitan city and people of all castes lived in the city. Portuguese and the Dutch had their factories and warehouses at Surat. According to an English chronicler, on an average a hundred ships of different countries could be found anchored at the port at a given time. There were several retail and wholesale shops selling textiles to the western traders in the city. The Surat hundis were honoured in far off places like Egypt, Iraq and Belgium.
4. **There were many kinds of traders in Medieval India:**
 - Several traders, especially horse traders, formed associations with headmen who

negotiated on their behalf with warriors who bought horses.

- There were also communities like the Chettiars and the Marwari Oswal who went on to become the principal trading groups of the country.
- Gujarati traders, including the communities of Hindu Baniyas and Muslim Bohras, traded extensively with the ports of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, East Africa, Southeast Asia and China. They sold textiles and spices in these ports and, in exchange, brought gold and ivory from Africa, and spices, tin, Chinese blue pottery and silver from Southeast Asia and China.

5. There were many kinds of traders. These included the Banjaras and several traders especially horse traders. The traders usually travelled in caravans and formed guilds to protect their interests. There were several such guilds in South India from the eighth century onwards—the most famous being the Manigramam and Nanadesi. These guilds traded extensively both within the peninsula and with Southeast Asia and China.

There were also communities like the Chettiyars and the Marwari Oswal who went on to become the major trading groups of the country. Gujarati traders, including the communities of Hindu Baniyas and Muslim Bohras, traded extensively with the ports of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, East Africa, South east Asia and China. They sold textiles and spices in these ports and in exchange, brought gold and ivory from Africa; and spices, tin, Chinese blue pottery and silver from Southeast Asia and China.

The towns on the west coast were home to Arab, Persian, Chinese, Jewish and Syrian Christian traders. Indian spices and cloth sold in the Red sea ports were bought by Italian traders and eventually reached European markets, fetching high profits. This ultimately drew European traders to India.