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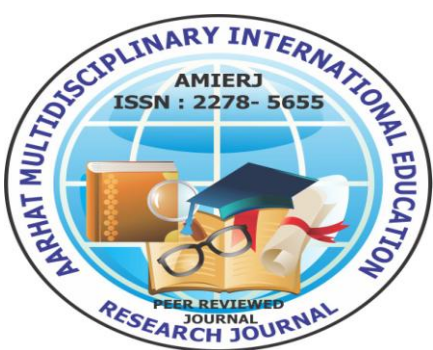
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**TRADE AND COMMERCE IN MEDIEVAL INDIA: A CASE STUDY OF PORT OF
LAHARI BANDAR WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO EUROPEAN
TRAVELERS' ACCOUNT**

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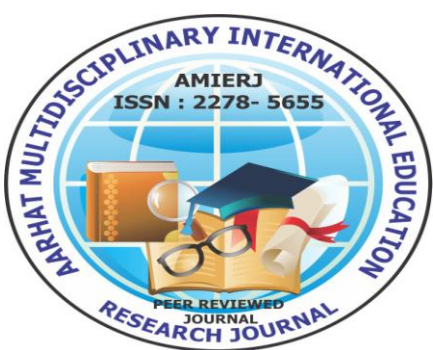
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Abstract:

Ports are the vehicles par excellence for transactions. Since time immemorial, ports have been gateways for the exchange of goods, people and ideas. River routes facilitated trade between different parts of the country. Boats carrying goods used to ply on the Indus and the Ganges. Some of the merchants had their own large boats. Maritime history is connected with the actions linked to the oceans and seas, for several eras' right from the earliest times till date. Maritime history of India has been really very important in the development of trade enriching the economy of the country. The effectiveness of a port is important in international trade since a seaport is the nerve of foreign trade of a country. The sea ports of Sind played a key role in its history. They not only broke isolation of the country and brought it in to contact with remote countries but also promoted its business activities, developed its trade and industry, and provided opportunities to soak up the foreign culture.

Keywords: Exchange Foreign, Industry Maritime, Transaction



Ports are the vehicles par excellence for transactions. Since time immemorial, ports have been gateways for the exchange of goods, people and ideas. From the primeval, the sea has been a link between states and ports have been connecting bridges between different peoples and cultures. The concept of the early modern port has its roots in the medieval urban tradition. The title of 'port' was generally given to towns whose main activity was trade, being located either on the shores of a major river or on the sea. When the role of trade and market activities became important enough to a certain port, those activities would be regulated by the urban authorities on the central government. Maritime history is connected with the actions linked to the oceans and seas, for several eras' right from the earliest times till date. Maritime history of India has been really very important in the development of trade enriching the economy of the country. Sea routes were certainly significant as they supplied the means of business with foreign countries and establishing contacts with the foreign states in ancient and medieval times. Indian maritime history traces the dawn of the Portuguese to the coast of India and the activities that resulted in this arrival of foreigners to India.

Albaruni(d.1039) was the first Muslim historian to have referred to this port of Lahribandar in his famous Kitab al Hind as Luharani.¹ While Ibn Battutah called it as Lahrei.² The Portuguese referred to it as Diul-Sind or simply Diul. Thomas Roe (1615-18), the English ambassador at port called it Syndu.³ The early European travelers pronounced it as Larrybundar, Laharibandar, Lahoribandar, Banderlaree, Bundar-I Sindh, Sindee, Laharia or simply Bandar. The sea ports of Sind played a key role in its history. They not only broke isolation of the country and brought it in to contact with remote countries but also promoted its business activities, developed its trade and industry, and provided opportunities to soak up the foreign culture. Geographically Lahari bandar enjoyed an almost central position between Persia, Iraq and Arabia on the west and Sind, Lahore and Hindustan in its north-east; the eastern part were accessible to it by sea while it was in direct communication by means of river Sind with its northern region and other countries of Asia, Europe and Africa.⁴

Location:

The exact location of the port is not determined but the references of the travelers and historians assist us to find its location. In 1333, Ibn Batuta had found it handsome; the big port positioned on the conjunction of the mouth of the river Sind and the sea shore. De Laet (d.1649) writes the port the chief port of Sind was Lahari Bandar, which was 3 days journey distance from Thatta.⁵ The same observation was made by Nicholas Whithington (1612-16) and Thevenot⁶ (1670), Manucci (1653-1703) determined its location 12 league upstream from Thatta.⁷ Hamilton (1699) tries to give the exact position of the port by writing that Thatta was about 40 miles from Lahari Bandar, “which stands about 5 or 6 leagues from the sea, on a branch of the river Indus”.⁸⁹

There is no evidence to verify the accurate capacity of the port as the how many ships at a time it could accommodate? Abu'l Fazl (d.1602) writes that the port could accommodate no less than 40,000 boats.¹⁰ Alexander Hamilton observed that the port was capable to receive ships of 200 tons.¹¹ During Shahjahan's reign it was said in exaggeration to be so a big port that it could accommodate 1000 ships at a time.¹² Ships of up to 200 and 300 tons burthen called here.¹³ Larger vessels and ships used to anchor at Lahari Bandar and after unloading the cargo, the merchandize were brought to Thatta in small boats up the river and by the land on packed animals. The guard house on the shore kept over the movements of ships on its waters. The incoming vessel on reaching the creek would intimate its approach by firing a gun, to which the guard house responded. The people of the port thus learning of the arrival of the ship would, on the one hand, convey the message to the merchants of Thattah and on the other, repair to the guard house on boats. Enquiries then ensued regarding the nature of the vessel, traders, crew and cargo, after which all concerned proceeded to the creek (stream) where the vessel had anchored. The journey was performed on barks or *ghurrabs*¹⁴. If it was a local ship it was allowed to move up and anchor under Laharibandar, if not so then it had to stay on

the spot, but in either case the cargo on board was transferred to boats and forwarded to the city.¹⁵

Besides these maritime activities, a brisk traffic went on between Thatta and Lahari Bandar. Thevenot, wrote his account of Sind in the 1660s, mentions Lahari Bandar as a great centre trade providing better harbor for ships, than any other place.¹⁶ The climatic condition of the port was not favorable and healthy; there were fewer amenities which created problems for the merchants. In spite of these drawbacks, the port flourished due to location and geographical situation. Abd-ul Rahim Khankhanan visited Laharibandar (d. 1627) with the purpose of bring the port under direct royal control and to prevent any contact between the Tarkhans and the Portuguese. It was feared that the Portuguese might be called by the Tarkhans to help them against the Mughals.¹⁷

Commercial Activities:

Amongst the local merchandise the ships were consigned with large quantities of cotton fabrics, *Bafta*,¹⁸ white stripped and also painted cloth, quilts, lawn¹⁹, silken goods, fine leather goods coarse indigo²⁰, smoked fish and ornamental wooden goods²¹. Some of the surplus merchandise of Multan, Lahore and even Agra used to be included in the outgoing cargo from the Bunder. Thus it received sugar, both candy and powder from Multan and Lahore, Bengal cloth, painted cloth and white cotton fabrics from its northern provinces²². The most important items of trade were textiles drawn from the weaving centers of the village of Sind and indigo, but there were a multiplicity of other commodities of export, mainly food grains, especially wheat, and other goods such as saltpeter, sugar leather goods writing cases and similar goods inlaid with ivory and ebony, quilts and mattresses. The incoming vessels were loaded with equally valuable cargo that is the proceeds from the sale abroad of the earlier outgoing merchandise. The major portions of these proceeds were naturally in the form of coined or uncoined money or even foreign currency. Lesser portion of cargo reaching the Bandar (port) consisted of some

merchandise such as fawn, dry fruits, and silk. Articles of imports were those sold in the most Indian markets: metal, pepper, spices, and luxury consumer goods from west Asia, Pearl from Bahrain, gold and silver which was brought by the Portuguese, drugs and dates. Much of the trade was linked up with the Gujarat ports of Cambay, Diu and Surat carried on in coasting vessels. A significant part of the trade also moved westward along the coast of Harmuz and Muscat. Food grains, textiles and indigo were exported to Persia in return mainly for silver lairs of Persia. Also some of the Gujarati west Asian voyages seem to have touched on Lahari Bandar on the way. Manucci came as adventurer and visited Sind in 1659. He noticed that the port of Lahri Bandar was full of Arabian and Persian vessels which imported dates, horses, pearls, gum mastic, henna-leaves, and stones. In return they exported white and black sugar, butter, olive oil, cocoas (Indian nuts) white linen and printed goods.²³

Custom Duties:

Each port had one custom house, also known as *furza*. Usually custom duties were imposed at the ports. They were levied at custom house where dues were composed under the seal of *Mutasaddi*; and passes issued allowing merchandise to be detached. The main comptroller of the port *Shahbandar*, often secured the revenue of the port on farm and therefore, he was always afraid of loss of trade and revenues, if the Portuguese were not kept in good in humor, what they brought to him was estimated at rupees one lakh. Ibn Battuta in the 14th century had found it to be a fine town on the sea coast, possessing a large harbor, visited by merchants from Yemen, Persia and other countries and yielded in tax (custom duty) a large amount (6 million *dinars* or silver *tankas*).²⁴ After the arrival of the European merchants the revenue of Laharibandar increased, and owing to its importance and wealth, Akbar (1556-1665) made Laharibandar as *khalisah jagir* (crown property).²⁵ The total revenue received during the reign of Akbar from the port was 5.521,419 dam.²⁶ Later on due to the influence and power of Nurjahan (d.1645) the port was bestowed on Asaf Khan (d.1641).²⁷ When the English merchants

desired to set up a factory there, they were the favored by the Asaf Khan and nearly half of the custom duties were remitted by him on the English goods.²⁸ The favor and patronage of Asaf Khan encouraged the English to establish commercial relation with Sind.

European Settlement:

In the sixteenth century, Portuguese were the supreme master of the Arabian Sea. Thus no maritime commerce could be conducted from Lahari Bandar without entering in some sort of alliance with the Portuguese. Before the establishment of an English Factory here, the Portuguese alone represented the European element.²⁹ The Portuguese merchants and the missionaries settled at Laharibandar. Gradually, it is believed, these Firangis had acquired a practical monopoly over the Sindh sea trade directed mainly to the Persian Gulf, and they did not allow any other foreign merchant to come.³⁰ Thomas Roe testifies to the hold of the Portuguese over Lahri Bandar by writing that “Syndu is possessed by Portugal.”³¹ The English factors on their arrival found a number of the Portuguese ships at port and the Portuguese “fector” or agent resided there to look after their interest. The first English ship that came to Lahri Bandar was the expedition. It brought the famous English adventurer Robert Sharley to the port in 1613.³² He was harshly treated by them and even his house was set afire.³³ In the last decade of sixteenth century, Pelseart experiential view that after the disintegration of Ormuz the Portuguese power began to decline, which resulted, Sind trade begun to decay.³⁴

Ships from Basra, Gombroon, Hormuz and Masqat, used to visit this port very often; and *cartaz* (pass) were issued to them and local merchants by the Portuguese.³⁵ An understanding was ultimately reached between the English and the Portuguese in 1635, through negotiations conducted by the English factor Methwold and this led to a lifting of their monopoly by the Portuguese. An English factory was established here. Before the English established, their past relations with its merchants had not been smooth. In a one incident, when in 1620 A.D, the English had seized goods of the local merchants, while they were on their voyage to Masqat,

Asaf Khan, the governor of the port, asked the English to give them competition; otherwise, he threatened the matter would be reported to the Emperor.³⁶ In the middle of the seventeenth century when, the English took over the Sind trade they could affect only its partial restoration.³⁷ It is possible to that a good chunk of this trade was by about the 17th century, diverted Northward, to be carried out through Kabul and Qandhar, for the markets of Persia, Khurasan and other West Asian countries.³⁸ As a result of this traffic of goods from Sind to Multan for exit through Qandhar, Bhakkar rose as a highway halting station.³⁹

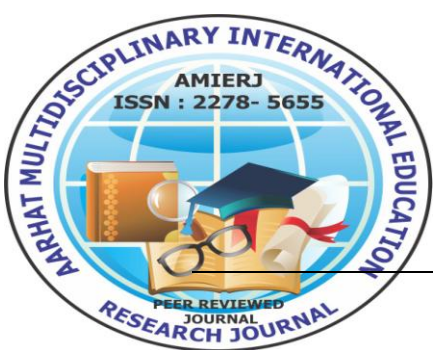
Decline:

During the reign of Jahangir the harbor was not in perfect order occasioning some loss in the volume and frequency of the trade through the Bandar. If so then Pelseart's interpretation of the reason for the decline of the trade due merely to the weakening of Portuguese's hold and absence of any other European trading company (as the Dutch or English) on the coast to act as carriers would not be absolutely correct. In some ways trade at Lahari bandar was considered to be freer than at Thatta. The English factor reported in 1636 that at the latter place "the will of governor is a law; while at Laharibandar "it is not so" for they're the prices are known and set down in a rate book not to be involved or altered at every covetous or unjust governor's will.⁴⁰ The importance of Lahribandar was reduced after the fall of Ormuz (1635).⁴¹ But nature proved more formidable enemy than the political change. By the middle of the 17th century, it started to deteriorate as a result of silting.

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