



Evidence about Trade


Traders always kept moving in order to sell goods at prices higher than the prices they bought at. They earned some money for their livelihood by doing so. Black polished ware made in Northern India have been found from several archaeological sites throughout the subcontinent. They have got especially bowls and plates of this fine pottery. The traders bought these items from the places where they were made and carried them where they could be sold.

Similarly, traders from other countries like Rome and Arabia came to India by ships and across land in caravans to buy goods such as spices, sandalwood, silk and muslin. Many Roman gold coins have been found in south India. It testifies the flourishing trade relations between the two countries. South India was famous for gold, precious stones and spices. Pepper was especially valued in the Roman empire, so much so that it was known as **black gold**. Compare this with the value of petroleum which is called black gold today.

We can find a list of goods brought into **Puhar**, an important port on the east coast in Sangam poems : horses, black pepper, gems, gold, sandalwood, pearls, corals, crops and other foodstuffs. Some traders travelled in the boats along the coasts. Some traders explored new sea routes. Arab traders used the monsoon winds to travel across the Arabian sea to reach the western coast of the subcontinent more quickly. They timed their journey to sail along the monsoon winds. Ships sailing from the southern end of the Red Sea would wait for the south-west monsoon to pass, before they set sail. The returning north-east monsoon from across India would bring the ships back. The traders desirous to travel across the Bay of Bengal also used the north-east monsoon to reach the east coast and south-west monsoon to return.

New Kingdoms Along the Coasts

Hills, plateaus, river valleys and a long coast line mark the southern half of the subcontinent. Kaveri is the most fertile river valley than



the other river valleys. The chiefs and kings who controlled the river valleys and the coasts became rich and powerful.

Sangam poems use one word *muvedar* for the chiefs or heads of three main ruling families of the south—the **Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas**. They became powerful in south India around 2300 years ago and ruled upto about 1800 years ago. Each of the three chiefs had two centres of power, one inland (river valley) and one on the coast. Out of these six centres (cities), two were more important, **Puhar or Kaveri pattinam** (the port of the Cholas) and **Madurai** (the capital of the Pandyas). Collection of regular tax was not in practice. Instead, the chief demanded and received gifts from the people. They also went on military expeditions and collected tribute from neighbouring areas. They kept some of the wealth and distributed the rest among their supporters which included their family members, soldiers and poets. The poets used to compose poems in praise of chiefs. These compositions are found in the Sangam literature.

The **Satavahan** dynasty became very powerful in western India around 200 years later. The most important Satavahana ruler was Gautamiputra Shri Satakarni. He ruled over western and parts of central India. He and other Satavahana rulers were known as lords of the *Dakshinapatha*, meaning the lord of the route leading to south and also the lord of the entire southern region. He sent his army to the eastern, western and southern coasts to take control over them. The Satavahana kingdom lasted between 2100 years ago and 1700 years ago.

The Silk Route

Techniques of making silk were first discovered in China around 7000 years ago. The Chinese people kept the techniques a closely guarded secret and went to sell silk cloth to distant lands. They went on foot, horseback and on camels. The paths they followed came to be known as the Silk Route. **The land route was through Iran and west Asia to Roman Empire.** The **glossy shine and smooth texture** of the silk cloth attracted the rich people of the Roman empire. Silk was very expensive as the traders brought it along dangerous routes through mountains and deserts, paying tributes in the way to pass through. About 2000 years ago, wearing silk cloth became the fashion among the rulers and rich people in central Asia, west Asia and Roman empire. Silk, being a highly valued fabric in most societies, the Silk Route became famous. Some kings tried to control the large portions of the route to benefit from taxes, tributes and gifts brought by the silk traders. However, in return, the kings often protected the traders from attacks by robbers. Parts of the routes were under the control of Chinese rulers, Kushanas, Persian rulers and Roman emperors. The Kushanas ruled over central Asia and north-west India around 2000 years ago. Their capital was Peshawar and second capital Mathura. During their rule a branch of the Silk Route extended from central Asia down to the seaports at the mouth of the river Indus, from where silk was shipped westwards to the Roman empire.

Silk was also sent from China by sea. It was along the south-eastern Islands of Asia to south India to Bharuch to Red Sea to Mediterranean Sea to Roman empire.

The Spread of Buddhism

Kanishka was the most famous Kushana ruler who ruled around 1900 years ago. He organized a Buddhist council where important matters were discussed by scholars. The famous poet, Ashvaghosha who wrote the *Buddhacharita*, a biography of Buddha lived in his court. He and the other Buddhist scholars began writing their works in Sanskrit this time.

By now, a new form of Buddhism, known as Mahayana Buddhism had developed. **Mahayana** literally means greater vehicle. **Mahayana** school differed from the orthodox Hinayana school mainly in two ways :

1. Earlier, **certain signs** were used in sculptures to show the Buddha's presence. For example, his attainment of enlightenment was shown by sculptures of the peepal tree (Fig. 18.1). The tree and the empty seat below it indicated the Buddha had attained enlightenment while meditating under this tree. Now, **statues** of the Buddha were made. These were sculpted in Mathura and Taxila.
2. Belief in *Bodhisattvas* and their worship began. *Bodhisattvas* were supposed to be enlightened persons. Now they could live in complete isolation and meditate in peace. However they chose to remain among people to teach and help them. To show their gratitude people started worshipping them. Worship of *Bodhisattvas* became very popular and spread throughout central Asia and China. It later spread to Korea and Japan.

The old form of Buddhism now called *Hinayana* did not believe in idol worship or in the worship of the Bodhisattvas.

The Buddhist rulers built many *stupas* and *viharas*. Dozens of caves were hollowed out of hills for monks to live in western and southern India. These caves often located near passes through the western Ghats. The traders also halted in these cave monasteries on their way to and fro the coasts. It was because the roads connecting the prosperous ports on the coast with cities in the Deccan ran through these passes.

Buddhism also spread in parts of south east Asia such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia etc. **Thervada** Buddhism, the older form of Buddhism was more popular in these areas.

The Quest of the Pilgrims

A **pilgrim** is a religious man or woman who travels a long way to a holy place to worship or get knowledge. The journey of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims is called a quest as they faced the dangers they encountered on their travels which often took years. A **quest** is a long search of




A sculpture from the stupa at Sanchi



An image of the Buddha from Taxila



An artificial cave at Karle, Maharashtra



something which is difficult to reach or find. They came to visit places associated with the life of the Buddha as well as to learn at famous monasteries. They spent time studying there and returned with books and statues of the Buddha. The pilgrims often travelled with the traders in caravans and ships to distant lands.

The best known of these Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, who came to the South Asia subcontinent were :

1. Fa Xian (or Fa Hsein) came 1600 years ago
2. Xuan Zang (or Heiun Tsang) came 1400 years ago
3. I-Qing (or I-Tsing) came 50 years after Xuan Zang

Return Journey of Fa Xian

Fa Xian boarded a merchant ship from Bengal. After two days they faced a storm. It was difficult to sail the ship in that storm with full loads. The merchants began throwing their merchandise to save the ship from sinking. Fa Xian threw away all his personal belongings but clung to his books and the statues of the Buddha that he had collected. 13 days later the storm stopped and in 90 days they reached Java. Fa Xian broke the journey for months and then boarded another merchant ship for China.

Xuan Zang took the land route back to China through the north-west and central Asia. Loaded on the backs of 20 horses, he carried statues of the Buddha made of gold, silver and sandalwood and over 600 manuscripts. While he was crossing the Indus his boat capsized and over 50 manuscripts were lost. After reaching China he translated the remaining manuscripts from Sanskrit into Chinese. It was how he spent the rest of his life.


A Centre of Buddhist Learning

Nalanda (Bihar) was the most famous Buddhist monastery at the time when Xuan Zang came to the subcontinent. He spent many years studying there. Over 5000 students studied subjects like grammar, medicine, mathematics besides religion and philosophy. Xuan Zang wrote, "The teachers are men of the highest ability. They follow the teachings of the Buddha in all sincerity. The rules of the monastery are strict and everyone has to follow them. Discussions are held throughout the day".

The Beginning of Bhakti

Bhakti or Worship of the deities including Shiva, Vishnu and Durga became common during this time (around 2000 years ago). The idea of **Bhakti** is present in the Bhagavad Gita, a sacred book of the Hindus, which is included in the Mahabharata. Shri Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, the god, asks Arjuna, his friend and devotee, "Abandon all **dharmas** and take refuge in me as only I can set you free from all evil."

Bhakti is generally understood as a person's individual devotion to his or her chosen deity. The earlier rites and rituals of big and elaborate sacrifices were difficult to follow but bhakti was a simple path to



follow. The sacrifices were limited to the so called high castes. The path of *Bhakti* could be followed by anyone, men or women, rich or poor, of any caste.

It was believed that if a devotee worships a particular deity with a pure heart, the deity will appear in the form of *avatar* in which the devotee may desire. The god, Vishnu may take any form to rescue his devotee from misery.

Gradually the worship of the deities spread to different parts of the subcontinent. *Bhakti* inspired some of the best expressions in art—sculpture, architecture and poetry. Artists made beautiful images of these deities. These images were placed within special homes, called temples. The poets composed poems in the praise of the gods and devotees.

Bhakti

The word *Bhakti* comes from the Sanskrit term *bhaj* meaning to divide or share. *Bhakti* is directed towards the *Bhagavat* (deity or god) which means one who possesses and shares *bhaga*. The word *bhaga* literally means good fortune or bliss. The devotee, known as the *bhakta* shares the deity's *bhaga*.

Devotee of the Devotees

Appar, a *vellala* (large land owner) and a devotee of Shiva composed a poem in Tamil about 1400 years ago. In which he says that he worships the devotees of the Shiva, even if they are lepers of any caste.

In Other Parts of the World

Jesus Christ also preached his religion at this time (2000 years ago) in west Asia. He was born in Bethlehem which was then part of the Roman empire. He taught people to treat others with love, kindness and trust, just as they themselves wanted to be treated. He taught in simple language using short stories to make his teachings clear. Christ's teachings appealed to ordinary people and spread through west Asia, parts of Africa and Europe. The first Christian preacher came from West Asia to the west coast of the subcontinent within one hundred years of his death after Christ.

Key Words

- » Muvendar : three ruling families of South India.
- » Expeditions : journey undertaken by a group of people with a particular purpose.
- » Silk Route : ancient inland route followed by silk traders connecting China to Rome.
- » Mahayan : a sect of Buddhism who made statues of Buddha and worshipped Bodhisattvas.
- » Hinayan or Theravada : the older form of Buddhism.
- » Bhakti : intimate, two way relationship between the devotee and the deity.
- » Pilgrim : a religious men or women who travels a long way to a holy place to worship or get knowledge.

Time Line

- ◆ Discovery of silk making in China (about 7000 years ago)
- ◆ The Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas (about 2300 years ago)
- ◆ Growing demand for silk in the Roman Empire (about 2000 years ago)
- ◆ Kanishka, the Kushana ruler (about 1900 years ago)
- ◆ Fa Xian comes to India (about 1600 years ago)
- ◆ Xuan Zang comes to India, Appar composes devotional poems in (about 1400 years ago)

SUMMARY

- ▶ Roman gold coins found in south India is the evidence of trade between the two countries.
- ▶ South India was famous for gold, precious stone and spices, especially pepper, which was known as black gold in Roman empire.
- ▶ The chiefs and kings who controlled the river valleys and the coasts became rich and powerful—river valleys were fertile and the coastal ports were trade centres.
- ▶ The Satavahana ruler were known as lords of the Dakshinapatha.
- ▶ The inland route followed by silk traders from China to Roman empire was known as the Silk Route.
- ▶ Kanishka, the most famous Kushana ruler, 1900 years ago organized a Buddhist council.

Exercise Time

A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

1. Black polished ware was made in
 - a. South India
 - b. North India
 - c. Arabia
 - d. China
2. Silk was first discovered in
 - a. China
 - b. India
 - c. Rome
 - d. West Asia
3. Buddha Charita was written by
 - a. Fa Xian
 - b. Xuan Zang
 - c. Ashvaghosa
 - d. Kanishka
4. The idea of Bhakti is present in the
 - a. Vedas
 - b. Bhagavad Gita
 - c. Upanishads
 - d. None of these
5. The word *muvedar* is used in
 - a. Sangam poems
 - b. Buddhacharita
 - c. Bhagawad Gita
 - d. Poem by Appar

B. Fill in the blanks :

1. About 1600 years ago, a Chinese pilgrim called _____ came to India.
2. _____ was known as black gold in the Roman empire.
3. Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas ruled about _____ years ago.
4. Puhar was an important port on the _____ coast of the subcontinent.
5. _____ was the capital of the Pandyas.

C. Match the following :

1. Xuan Zang
2. Muvendar
- a. Buddhacharita
- b. Chinese pilgrim

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3. Ashvaghosha
 4. Bodhisattavas
 5. Lords of the dakshinapatha
 - c. Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas
 - d. Satavahan rulers
 - e. Mahayana Buddhism

D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

1. Pepper was the most valued product for the Roman empire.
2. The Kushanas were among the best known rulers, who controlled the Silk Route.
3. Sangam poems mention the word 'muvendar' which means five chiefs.
4. The Great poet Kalidasa wrote the biography of Buddha.
5. Among the river valleys of the south, the Kaveri Valley is very fertile.

E. Define the following terms :

1. Mahayan
2. Bhakti
3. Mavendar

F. Answer in one word or one phrase :

1. Which form of Buddhism did not believe in idol worship ?
2. How many manuscripts Xuan Zang carried with him ?
3. Which was the centre of Buddhist learning ?
4. Who wrote a poem saying he is the devotee of the devotees of Shiva ?
5. Which winds were used by the traders to cross the Arabian Sea ?

G. Answer these questions briefly :

1. What kinds of evidence do historians use to find out about trade and trade routes ?
2. How did Arab traders use Monsoon winds to sail ships ?
3. Why did kings want to control the Silk Route ?
4. Distinguish between Hinayana and Mahayana forms of Buddhism.
5. Why did the Chinese pilgrims come to India ?

H. Answer these questions in detail :

1. How did new kingdoms flourished along the coasts ?
2. Why did silk and Silk Route become famous ?
3. How did Buddhism spread around 1900 years ago ?
4. Why did Bhakti become popular in Hindus ?

PROJECT WORK

- Find out about a major pilgrimage in India today :
 - a. Who can go on the pilgrimage –men, women or children ?
 - b. How do people travel ?
 - c. What do they take with them ?
 - d. What do they do when they reach the holy place ?
 - e. Do they bring anything back with them ?
 - f. How much total time is taken in the pilgrimage ?