

6th – Traders, Kings and Pilgrims I



How to find out about trade and traders:

Northern black polished ware, one of the fine pottery, especially bowls and plates, were found from several archaeological sites throughout the subcontinent. Traders may have carried them from the places where they were made, to sell them at other places. South India was famous for gold, spices, especially pepper, and precious stones. Pepper was particularly valued in the Roman Empire, so much so that it was known as black gold.

Contact between lands can occur in different ways:

- **Interaction through trade:** for example, the flourishing trade that existed between people of Indus Valley civilization and Mesopotamia.
- **Interaction through migrations:** for example, the migration of the Aryans into India.
- **Contact through religion:** for example, the spread of Buddhism from India to Central Asia.
- **Contact through conquest:** for example, the Tamil conquest of South-East Asia.

New kingdoms along the coasts:

The southern half of the subcontinent is marked by a long coastline, and with hills, plateaus, and river valleys. Amongst the river valleys, that of the Kaveri is the most fertile. Chiefs and kings who controlled the river valleys and the coasts became rich and powerful. Sangam poems mention the muvendar. This is a Tamil word meaning three chiefs, used for the heads of three ruling families, the cholas, cheras, and pandyas. Who became powerful in south India around 2300 years ago. Each of the three chiefs had two centres of power: one inland, and one on the coasts.

Of these six cities, two were very important: Puhar or Kaveripattinam, the port of the cholas, and Madurai, the capital of the pandyas.

The chiefs did not collect regular taxes. Instead, they demanded and received gifts from the people. They also went on military expeditions, and collected tribute from neighboring areas. They kept some of the wealth and distributed the rest amongst their supporters, including members of their family, soldiers, and poets.

Around 200 years later a dynasty known as the Satavahanas became powerful in western India. The most important ruler of the Satavahanas was Gautamiputra Shri Satakarni. We know about him from an inscription composed by his mother, Gautami Balashri. He and other satavahana rulers were known as lords of the dakshinapatha, literally the route leading to the south, which was also used as a name for the entire southern region.

Contacts with Greeks and Romans:

The Greeks are believed to be one of the first to enter into trade with the southern kingdoms. The Greeks and the Romans also had close trade links with the western coast of India. Musiri, the seaport near present-day Pattanam in Kerala, was an important trading centre. However, with the end of the Roman Empire in the 4th to 5th centuries CE, the trade links of the Cholas and the Pandyas with the west were reduced.

Ginger, cardamom, sandalwood, turmeric, saffron and pepper from India were valuable items in the west. Indians imported tin, lead, antimony, gold, glass, copper, ceramics and sweet wine from the Roman Empire. Arikamedu, near



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Puducherry, was an important centre of trade with Rome. Roman coins, pottery and other articles have been found at Puhar, Kanchipuram and Madurai too.

Contacts with South -East Asia:

India had a well-developed system of the trade with the countries of South-East Asia. Trades from Sri Lanka brought their goods to India to sell them to Greek and Roman merchants. Historical sources also tell us about the economic activities between Kambuja (present-day Cambodia) and the kingdom of the Cholas after Kambuja was conquered by the Cholas. The Tamil introduced their culture in some of the place they had under their control like Sumatra, Java and Bali. A large segment of Bali's population practice Hinduism even today. Rajaraja Chola is believed to have allowed the construction of a vihara by the king of Malaya at the Tamil port of Nagapattinam.

The Sakas:

Coming to power after the Indo-Greeks, the Sakas established their rule over different parts of India. The Sakas introduced the satrap system of government. The empire was divided into numerous provinces or satrapies, each under a satrap. Rudradaman (130-150 CE) was the most famous Saka king. There are many Sanskrit works belonging to this period. Asvaghosha wrote the *Buddhacarita*. He also compiled the *Saundaranandakavya*.

The Parthians:

Tracing their origin in Iran, the Parthians moved to India and occupied a small portion at the north-west of the Indian subcontinent in the 1st century CE. The most renowned king was Gondopernes, in whose reign Saint Thomas the Apostle is believed to have come to India to spread the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The Kushanas:

The Kushanas were a tribe from the steppes of Central Asia. The Kushanas migrated to India and gradually occupied parts of Iran, Afghanistan and north-western India. The power of the Kushanas reached its zenith under Kanishka (120-144 CE). The Kushanas exchanged embassies with the Chinese as well as the Romans. Purushapura (present-day Peshawar) was Kanishka's capital. He issued numerous gold coins, which can be found even as far east as Mathura and Benares. Kanishka is believed to have created a calendar which came to be known as the Saka calendar. The Saka Era starts counting years from 78 CE. The Saka calendar is the one officially followed by the Indian government today. After ruling for over 200 years, from the middle of the 1st century CE to the 3rd century CE, the Kushana Empire collapsed.

