



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

History

SOME ASPECTS OF TRADE AND ECONOMY IN ANCIENT INDIA

KEY WORDS:

Indus Valley Civilization, Provincial, Mauryan Period, Gupta Period, Chinasunka

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ABSTRACT

Trade is the most important factor for the development of a nation as it ensures economic stability. The Indian subcontinent was recognized as a commercial zone of vital importance in the ancient times as revealed through the evidence of early Indian trade since nearly three and a half millennium years ago. Trade and crafts are the developments of surplus agricultural production which was noticed in India for the first time with the rise of urban centers in the Indus Valley Civilizations. The civilization had a sophisticated and flourishing economic system. The people of the Indus Valley practiced agriculture, kept domesticated animals, made copper, bronze, and tin tools and weapons, and even traded with Middle Eastern countries. Mauryan period was considered one of the most flourished period of India. Political and economic stability was the reason of its flourishing. Agriculture was the economy's backbone during the Mauryas; however trade was growing increasingly significant. Cultivators appeared to make up the bulk of the population, and agricultural taxes were the primary source of revenue. Farmers were liberated from provincial rulers' tax and harvest collection obligations. Chandragupta Maurya created a unified currency for all of India, as well as a network of provincial governors and administrators, as well as a civil service, to ensure that merchants, farmers, and traders were treated fairly and safely. Industry and trade were generally prosperous during Gupta period. There was a balance of foreign trade. Luxury goods were the principal articles of long distance trade. The internal trade used to be carried on by roads and rivers. Foreign trade was used to be carried on by sea and land. In the period, Indian ports always maintained relations with Sri Lanka, Persia, Arabia, Ethiopia, the Byzantine Empire, China and the islands of the Indian Ocean. The volume of external trade of India with China greatly increased during the Gupta period. Chinasunka a Chinese silk, had a good market in India.

INTRODUCTION

The glimpses of the ancient Indian economy and trade can be started from the Indus valley civilization and the Gangetic civilization developed during the Vedic times. While excavation from the various Indus sites gives us the glimpse of the urban economy. The Vedic period also throw light on trade and its written records makes us construct the picture of the economy of that time.

Trade and commerce played a significant role in the evolution of the economy of India. It was shown from the archaeological evidence that trade and commerce through land and sea played a very important role in the growth of the Indian economy.

India has long been a trading nation, with precious goods such as spices, perfume, valuable stones, jewellery, silks, muslins etc. to offer the world since the Harppan era. The dockyard discovered in Lothal, Gujarat, gives unusually strong evidence of maritime commerce at the time. The Vedic economy valued both national and international trade equally. Manufacturing activity was brisk throughout the Mauryan rule. The Mauryans had enacted rules and regulations on trade movement. Bindusara had friendly relations with ruler of Syria and had asked him to send him figs, wine and philosophers. The Kushanas made significant progress in the Indian trade and developed trading links with China, Rome, Sindhu, Sauvira, Kapisa, Gandharas, Puskalavati, Madhura, and Varansi. Guptas not only expanded their eastern trade but also opened up western sea-borne trade, resulting in unparalleled economic success. The, resulting in the spread of ideas and cultural practices, notably in the fields of language Pallas and Cholas established connections throughout southern India. Trade enhanced cultural interaction, religion, and art.

Objective of the study

1. To understand the trade policy of Ancient time
2. To show challenges and possibilities of trade in ancient period

Research Methodology

- 1) This research paper is conceptual and Exploratory in

nature. In this paper secondary data method is adopted. The secondary data was collected through books, periodicals, and journal and published material related digital learning for the study.

Ancient Indian trade and Economic policies

- India was the one of the largest economies in the world, for about two and a half millennia starting around the end of 1st millennium BC and ending around the beginning of British rule in India. Around 500 BC, the Mahajanapadas minted punch-marked silver coins. The period was marked by intensive trade activity and urban development. By 300 BC, the Maurya Empire had united most of the Indian subcontinent including Tamilakam, which was ruled by Three Crowned Kings. The resulting political unity and military security allowed for a common economic system and enhanced trade and commerce, with increased agricultural productivity. Features of ancient trade in different civilizations and Dynesties

Indus Valley civilization

Indus valley civilization was known as Bronze Age and its economy based was urban .The Indus Valley civilisation, the first known permanent and predominantly urban settlement, flourished between 3500 BCE and 1800 BCE. It featured an advanced and thriving economic system. Its citizens practised agriculture, domesticated animals, made sharp tools and weapons from copper, bronze and tin, and traded with other cities.^[2] Evidence of well-laid streets, drainage systems and water supply in the valley's major cities, Dholavira, Harappa, Lothal, Mohenjo-daro and Rakhigarhi, reveals their knowledge of urban planning.

- Archaeologists have excavated canal and docking facility at the coastal city of Lothal, signifying the importance of overseas trade during the Indus. There were contemporary civilizations like Sumarian Mesopotamia Egypt and China of Indus valley civilization
- The Indus civilization's economy appears to have depended significantly on trade. Important occupations were agriculture and cattle-rearing.

Vedic Age or civilization

- The Aryan's were spending nomadic lifestyle and cattle

rearing being the chief occupation. Cattle and cows were held in high esteem and frequently appear in Rigvedic hymns; goddesses were often compared to cows, and gods to bulls.

- Aryans had learned to use iron by 1,000 BC and as the community settled down, Agriculture gained prominence. In the course of time Aryans went on to become farmers. They learned to farm rice cultivation by 600 BC. It's because of farming activity a more ordered and settled society evolved.
- In early vedic period pastoral economy means Cattle rearing was the main occupation and the measure of wealth was cattle and wealthy man was called Gomat
- Unite of currency was Nishka
- In the Early Vedic Period, the barter system was more prevalent with little to no monetary value transaction being part of the exchange
- In post Rigvedic period, the barter system was still in practice, it was largely replaced by the exchange of gold and silver coins known as Krishnala.

Mahajanpadas age

- During the Mahajanapadas, the emergence of a stable agrarian civilization gave rise to conceptions of private property and land revenue, as well as new forms of economic organisation. At the period, arts and industries such as ivory work, mural painting, stone carving, and so on were greatly developed. Business was conducted both within and beyond the country. Bharuch, Tamralipti, Sopara, and other prominent ports of the period embarked on waterborne commerce with Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, Babylonia, and other countries. The main items were silk, gold, and embroidered fabric. There are examples of the cooperative system in the period's trade and commerce. Karshapana, the medium of exchange, was copper and silver. Dharan was another name for the silver Karshapana. A silver Karshapana was worth one-tenth of a Vedic Niska.

Mauryan Dynasty

- The Mauryan Dynasty ruled over most of India. It included what is now Iran, as well as parts of India's central and northern regions. During the Mauryas, agriculture constituted the backbone of the economy, but trade was becoming increasingly important. The majority of the population looked to be cultivators, and agricultural taxes were the principal source of revenue. Hundreds of kingdoms, numerous small armies, powerful regional chieftains, and internal strife gave way to a more centralized, disciplined administration. Trade under Mauryan Administration indicates that Indians had developed an extensive system of inland trade which was borne along prominent trade-routes. The Khyber Pass became a strategically important port of trade and communication with the outside world. Greek states and Hellenic kingdoms became important trade partners of India. Trade extended through the Malay Peninsula into Southeast Asia. The export items included silk goods and textiles, spices and exotic foods. Scientific knowledge and technology with Europe and West Asia also took place. During the Mauryan period, trade routes followed either major roadways or navigable waterways. Both the west and the northern coasts of Burma were used for sea commerce.
- The north-south-west route (*from Sravasti to Pratisthana*), the north-south-east route (*from Sravasti to Rajagriha*), and the east-west route (which followed the Ganges and Yamuna river courses) were all important internal trade routes.
- The most important route was the Royal Highway, which ran from the north-west (*in the Taxila region*) to Pataliputra.
- This road continued east along the Ganga to the Tamralipti port. The most major seaports of India at the time were Tamruk (*Tamralipti*) on the east coast and Broach and

Sopara on the west coast.

- The references in Kautilya's Arthashastra speak of an advanced trade. Active encouragement of trade on the part of the State is spoken of. Constructions of wider roads that lead to market towns have been mentioned. Arthashastra gives us a valuable, though far from exhaustive, list of imports borne along routes markedly to the Ganges valley. The costlier merchandise that consists of elephants, horses, fragrant products, tusks, skins, gold and silver were more plentiful in the Himalayas. Among the products that was exported it included textiles of Bengal, Assam, Benares, the Konkan and Pandya, the silks of China, the woolens of Nepal, the skins of the Himalayan regions, the fragrant wood of Assam and the Himalayas. The rule of the Mauryas helped to improve India's inland and foreign trade. Chandragupta Maurya had a complete control over the coveted north-western route. With the conquest of the Deccan by Chandragupta Maurya, the possession of valuable western and southern routes was ensured to the Mauryas. When Ashoka conquered Kalinga the only possible rival for the mastery of the eastern trade was destroyed. The Mauryas brought all the great inland trade-routes under the control of a highly centralized and efficient administration. Their rule enhanced the growth of trade in other ways.

Post Mauryan Period

- One of the most salient aspects of the post-Mauryan period was the growth of internal and external trade and commerce. There were two major internal land routes in ancient India:
 - Uttarapatha: Connected eastern and northern parts of India with the north-western areas, and
 - Dakshinapatha: Connected peninsular India with northern and western parts of India.
- The Uttarapatha was in more frequent use. From Taxila, it passed via Punjab up to the western coast of the Yamuna, following the western coast of Yamuna it went southwards to Mathura. From Mathura, it passed on to Ujjain in Malwa and from Ujjain to Broach on the western coast. The Broach port seems to be the most important and flourishing amongst the other ports, as the goods produced in the Shaka, the Kushana and the Satavahana kingdoms were brought to it for export. There was flourishing trade between India and Rome. Major economic system of Satavahana and other contemporary dynasties was well organized and systematic. There was all round development in the field of agriculture, industry, and trade during this period. Agriculture was the main occupation of a large section of the people.

Kushanas

- From the point of view of trade and commerce, India became a prosperous country during the Kushan period. Land and river routes developed its domestic (*internal*) trade while sea routes developed its foreign trade. Kushanas took control over 'silk route' from China to Greek via Central Asia. Indian traders bought silk from China and sent it to the traders of Roman Empire, it earned them huge profit. India exported ivory goods, spices, medicines, cotton clothes, silk clothes, aromatic goods etc. in large quantity to Rome. Apart from China and Rome, India had trade relations with Burma, Java, Sumatra, Champa, South-east Asian countries

Gupta dynasty

- During the Gupta period, Indian ports maintained relations with Sri Lanka, Persia, Arabia, Ethiopia, the Byzantine Empire, China, and the Indian Ocean islands. Sri Lanka was an important port in both the island's foreign trade and inter-oceanic commerce between the East and the West. During the Gupta era, India's external trade with China increased significantly. Chinasunka, a Chinese silk, was popular in India.

- During the Gupta period agriculture formed a significant part of the empire's economy. However, the trade and commerce activities of the Gupta Empire grew steadily. The merchant and other traders were organized into guilds. These guilds were given concessions in the taxes that were liable to be paid to the government. The guilds played a chief role in the goods industry and also helped to further strengthen the economic condition of the empire. The guilds had regulated their own laws and all the member merchants were expected to abide by these laws. There was industrial development during the Gupta period.
- The textile industry was an essential industry of this empire. Some of the major items of produce included silk, muslin, calico, linen, wool and cotton. These goods were also exported. There were other flourishing industries of the Gupta empire like ivory work, stone cutting and carving of stones like jasper, agate, quartz, carnelian, lapis-lazuli, etc.; metal work of precious metals like gold, silver, copper, iron, bronze, lead, etc.
- Pearl industry was also very popular. However, the most important industry was pottery. Trading activities within the empire were carried out very smoothly and efficiently. Animals were used for transporting goods from one place to another. Goods were also transported via sea-route with the help of ships. The Gupta rulers issued large number of gold coins. These gold coins were known as dinars. The Uttarapatha (*northern route*) was the main artery of commercial and cultural exchange between the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia and the Ganga Yamuna doabs in Northern India. It was a network of continually shifting itineraries consisting of multiple feeder routes intertwined with the central axis. Uttarapatha commonly designates the North Country or northern Region encompassing territories from the Gangetic Basin in Northern India to Mathura, Taxila and Bactria north of Afghanistan and Western Central Asia.
- The Indo-Gangetic plain mainly drained by the Indus, the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the Brahmaputra along with their tributaries played an imperative role in the headway of Indian commerce. It macadamizes not only the land route but also water routes to have access directly into the seas. It was within the valleys of the rivers chief kingdoms, the important trade centers, the industrial belt, which helped the progress of internal trade, was founded. The region of Uttarapatha may be supposed to have initially covered right from Manipura (*Assam*) to Taxila in Gandhara. Different trade routes covered the entire area.
- During this period, internal trade further expanded to numerous trade centers. Kalidasa gives a very good description of the town-market and its business transactions. Like the previous phase, we have reference to two types of merchants in the Gupta period, namely Sresthi Andsarthavaha. The former also acted as bankers or moneylenders. The Sarlhavahu or caravan-trader was an important figure in city life.

Coinage system

- Coins are as important as the inscription in history. They confirm the information derived from literature. They are of various metals—gold, silver, copper, or alloy and contain legends or simple marks. The coins are very important to the reconstruct of the ancient Indian history. It is a part of archaeological sources. Those with dates is probably very valuable for the framework of Indian chronology.
- Coins are almost our sole evidence with regarded to the Indo Scythian and Indo Bactrian King. The Bilingual coins had served as Rosetta Stones in deciphering the Ancient Indian writings. The purity of the metal reflects the financial conditions of the Gupta Empire. The inscription on the coin indicates territory over which the rulers ruled. Some coin throws significant light on the personal events of certain rulers. The discovery of the same kind of coins at different places helps up in fixing the coverage of various

kingdoms in ancient India. The lower denomination was usually found in copper coins. The study of coinage in history is called numismatics.

- The beginning of ancient Indian coinage can be traced between 1st millennium BCE to 6th Century BCE. This stage comprised of coins that were made of copper and silver. The Indus Valley Civilization seems to have conducted an extensive trade on a wide network, but it was predominantly conducted around the barter system. However, the Harappans also used metals like silver of fixed weight for trade and mercantile activities.
- The Rigveda has references to nishka (*gold*) and nishka greeva (*ornaments of gold*) but it is not sure if these could be understood as coins. However, the later Vedic texts had references to nishka, suvarna, shatamana, and pada. The most conventional system of coinage emerged with the circulation of punch-marked coins that were mostly made of silver, and sometimes even copper.
- The Mauryan Empire used the punch-marked coins but with royal standard to make sure of their authenticity. The liberty to use two different metals for coins was granted, and hence coins in silver and copper were very popular. The Kushanas (*1st-4th Centuries CE*) were the first dynasty in the subcontinent that issued a large number of gold coins.

CONCLUSION

Trade has been an important factor of every civilization and it is persistent since beginning of human development. It has been a framework for flourishing of dynasties. Ancient Pattern of trade gives us light for Modern commercialization.

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