

## TRADE AND COMMERCE SYSTEM IN ANCIENT INDIA

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### Abstract:

*Ancient times as Metallurgy. Mining of metals was known even in pre-Vedic period and during the Harappa period various metals like copper, lead, silver were in use. During Vedic period, metal (ayas) was chiefly of two kinds—krishna ayas (black metal or iron) used during later Vedic period and loh ayas (copper). The Jatakas refer to eighteen import handicrafts and industries. The Vaishyas developed institutions like Sreni, Nigama and Puga to regulate trade and avoid intrusion by other varnas and develop monopoly. Proper rules of conduct of trade were laid by the head of trade guilds, known as Sarthavaha or Srenipramukha. The rules were called Samay and Srenidharma. Taxila, Pushkalavati, Kapisa and Vidisha prospered as trade centres, under the Indo-Greek rulers. Kautilya asked the king to develop measures to stop obstruction of the trade routes by his favourite men (vallabhas). Frontier guards (Antapalas) were also appointed. The close contacts between the commercial classes and the king's court is very clear from the rules of the settlement layout of the historic city of Patliputra. Here, people lived in various parts, according to their social status. Kautilya looked upon artisans and traders as big thieves and held them under suspect. He demanded strict control over them, as also with the often indisciplined frontier guards (antapalas). Guilds of merchants were properly registered and even served as banks. During Mauryas, most important trade route was from Taxila to Patliputra. Ships in ancient period were usually of the two-masted type. In the 2nd century A.D., a regular sea-route was in operation for the quest for gold (swarna). Monsoons (Arabic: Mausam) were discovered by Hippalus (Greek captain) and this discovery in 45 A.D. that monsoons could sail ships from Alexandria to Western India in just a 40-days period, tremendously increased the Roman sea-trade, due to shortening of trade-route. Muziris (Cranganore, Kerala) and Puhar (in Cholamandalam) were major sea-ports and foreign settlements. Among land-routes, the silk-route was very often in use till Kushan period.*

### KEYWORDS:

Location of cities, Weight and measures, Import and Export, Manufactures Goods and Transport.

### INTRODUCTION

The Ancient Indian merchants went from village to village to collect for example, cotton thread from the spinners or cotton cloth from the weavers and to sell them in village where they were in demand. The Ancient merchants earned a profit through supplying the goods acquired. What was true of thread or cloth also applied to grain and or cloth also applied to grain and or cloth also applied to grain and other products. Soon there was large trade or exchange of goods in the country. Ancient Indian Trade was made easier by the invention of a new method of exchange money. Before coins were used, goods were bartered or exchanged. But coins were advantageous because those were easy to be carried from one place to another. As the use of coins increased, there were more and more traders. However coins of this period were

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crude pieces of silver and copper with a design punched on them. Trade was not limited to small area. Goods purchased in the Ganga Valley were sent across the Punjab to Takshasila (Taxila) or else across the Vindhya mountains to the port of Bhrikukachcha (Broach). From there ships took them to western Asia or South India. City is essentially a place of exchange for trade and commerce in Ancient India. Commerce involved the buying and selling, or products. Greater demand of products necessitated the concentration of artisans in the towns of Ancient India. Specialization led to proficiency and skill in the crafts. It also encouraged artisans working on a particular craft to live in the same part of the town, which facilitated the obtaining of raw materials or selling the finished product to merchants.

### TRADE AND COMMERCE SYSTEM IN ANCIENT INDIA:

#### Location of Cities.

The largest cities and towns are situated along major river systems and coastal areas where people could control the movement of goods and raw materials along the trade routes. Built on enormous mud-built platforms high above the floodwaters, the cities had a vantage point from which to view the surrounding plains. Watch towers built along the city walls could provide lookouts to signal the approach of riverboats and caravans.

#### Period of Trade - and weather considerations

Overland trade would have been undertaken after the monsoon rains are over. Sea-borne trade would have been determined entirely by the monsoon winds. The northeast monsoon winds would have aided the passage of boats towards the Red Sea from May to June while the south-easterly winds in August would have provided wind power for the return journey. After August the ships would have been engaged in coastal traffic. Many of the ships would probably have hopped along the Makran coast and then sailed to the Persian Gulf to the port cities of Mesopotamia.

#### Other groups

Scribes, priests, Administrators, Sweepers, Farmers, Caravan-leaders, Traders

#### Weights and Measures:

##### Cubic weights are made from banded chert or other patterned stone

Doubling from 1 : 2 : 4 : 8 : 16 : 32 : 64 then going to 160 then in decimal multiples of 16 when the next largest weights have a ratio of 160, 200 and 320. The next set consists of 1600, 3200, 6400, 8000 and 12,800. The largest weight found at Mohenjo-Daro is 10,865 grams  
Measures consisted of a cubit (52 cm) and the long foot (33.5 cm)

Seals Information on seals consists of Animal before an object, i.e. a manger or standard; Ideograms consist of letters and numerals.

Local trade was primarily focused on supplying the cities with food and the raw materials for producing tools, status objects and trade goods.

Sea trade was probably heaviest with Oman since numerous Indus artifacts have been found in Oman. Trade was conducted through a barter system and a reciprocal exchange of goods for services and probably through the exchange of standardized system of cubical stone weights. The smaller weights could have been used for taxation.

TRADE AND COMMERCE SYSTEM IN ANCIENT INDIA

**Imports & Exports of trade system in ancient India:**

Raw Materials			
s.no.	Material name	Imports	Exports
1	Gold	Afghanistan , Karnataka	Mesopotamia
2	Silver	Afghanistan , Iran	Mesopotamia
3	Copper	Oman, Baluchistan, Rajasthan	-
4	Lead	East or south India	-
5	Lapis lazuli	Baluchistan and Afghanistan	-
6	Fuchsite	Northern Karnataka	-
7	Amethyst	Maharashtra	-
8	Chalcedony	Baluchistan ,Gujarat	-
9	Carnelian:	Baluchistan ,Gujarat	-
10	Jade	Central Asia	-
11	Turquoise	Baluchistan and Iran	-
12	Shell	Gujarat, Karachi	-
13	Ivory:	Gujarat and Punjab	Oman
14	Mother of Pearl	Oman	-
15	Wool	Mesopotamia	-
16	Incense	Mesopotamia	-
17	Bronze	-	Mesopotamia
18	Indigo	-	Oman
19	Wood	-	Oman
20	Livestock	-	Oman
21	Grain	-	Oman
22	Fresh fruit	-	Oman

**Manufactured Goods**

- Carved chlorite containers: Baluchistan and Iran
- Green schist containers: Baluchistan and Iran
- Fuchsite containers: Baluchistan and Afghanistan
- Carnelian beads: Mesopotamia
- Shell inlays: Mesopotamia
- Shell bangles: Mesopotamia
- Lapis lazuli: Mesopotamia
- Clarified Butter: Oman
- Pickled vegetables: Oman
- Pickled fruits: Oman
- Honey: Oman
- Chert weights: Oman
- Wine: Oman

## TRADE AND COMMERCE SYSTEM IN ANCIENT INDIA

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### Manufactured Objects :

s.no.	Material	Objects
1	Gold	Beads, pendants, amulets, brooches, needles, ornaments
2	Silver	large utensils, buckles
3	Ivory	Combs, carved cylinders (for seals, small sticks and pins)
4	Shell	Beads, bracelets, decorative inlays
5	Steatite beads	Bracelets, buttons, vessels, faience, amulets, sealing's
6	Faience bangles	Rings, miniature animals, pots
7	Terracotta	Animals, toy carts, whistles, rattles, birds and animals, gamesmen, discs, beads
8	Agate	Beads
9	Carnelian	Beads

### Manufacturing Areas:

Kalibangan , Saraikhola ,Chanhudaro, Dholavira , Lothal, Mehargarh

### Mode of Transport:

Flat-bottomed boats and rafts on rivers were used for trading. These boats would have carried most of the trade goods up and down the Indus Valley. Human porters pulling the boats from the riverbank probably aided the trip upriver. Long oars and sails made from mat or heavy cotton cloth would also have been used.

Two wheel bullock carts were used for heavy transport across the plains. These carts were made in five different styles, which were probably used by different sections of the population. They would have been made of wood with leather and sinew bindings for the harnesses.

Pack animals included oxen, sheep and goats

Sea-going vessels would have had sails and a keel.

### Harappan Ports:

Lothal, Sutkagen-dor, Sotka-koh, Balakot

### CONCLUSION:

City is essentially a place of exchange for trade and commerce in Ancient India. Commerce involved the buying and selling, or products. Greater demand of products necessitated the concentration of artisans in the towns of Ancient India. Specialization led to proficiency and skill in the crafts. It also encouraged artisans working on a particular craft to live in the same part of the town, which facilitated the obtaining of raw materials or selling the finished product to merchants. In the field of industry the oldest one is that of textile. The profession of weavers, dyers, tailors etc. are mentioned by the contemporary literature. Working in metal was also very popular during that period. Some centres of metal industry were famous. Saurashtra (Gujarat) was famous for its bell metal industry while Vanga (Bengal) was known for its tin industry. The trade with South East Asia increased enormously during this period. The Arab, Chinese and Indian sources mention the flow of trade between east and west via India. Indian exports consisted of cotton, sandal wood, camphor, metals, precious and semi precious stones, pearls etc. In the list of imported items, horses were the most important. The best breed of horses were imported from Central and Western Asia.

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