

12.1 Trade and Cultural Relations in the Ancient times

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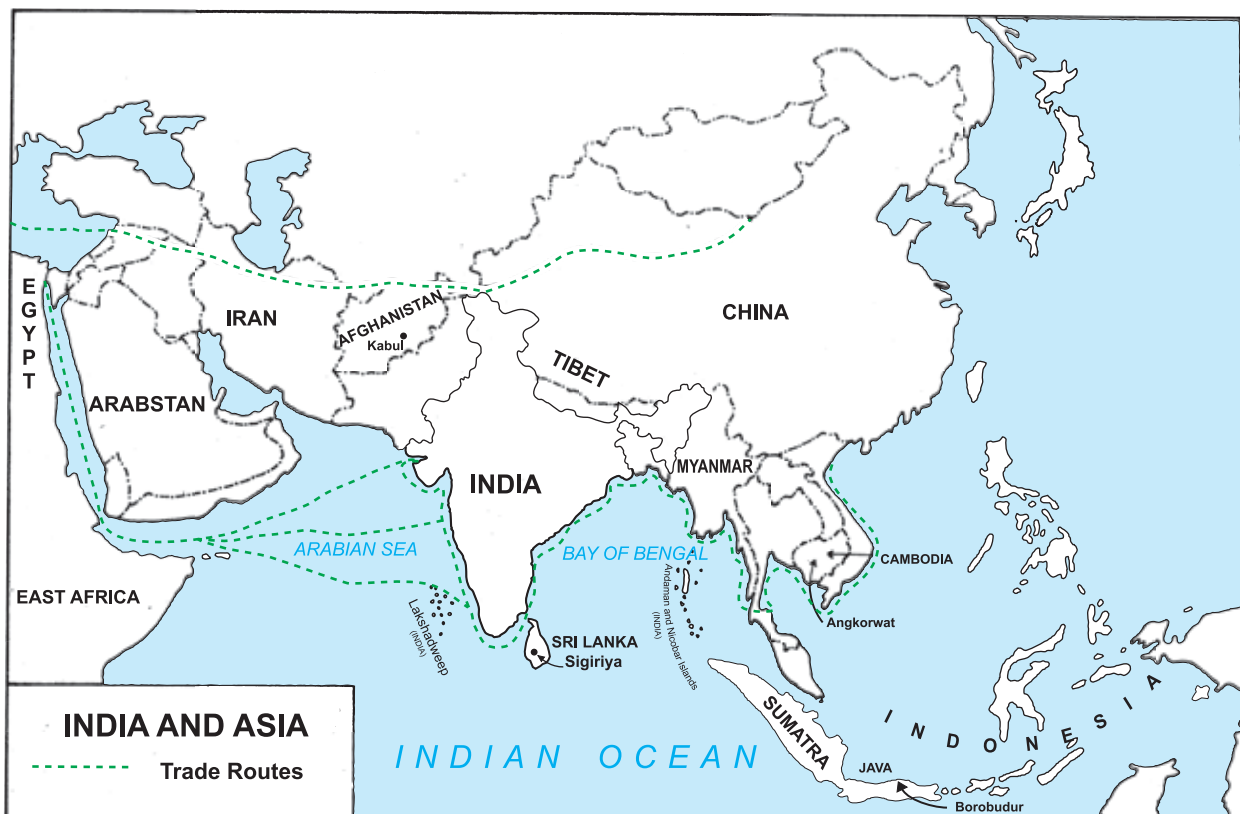
So far, we studied about the transitions in the various fields such as historical, social, financial, cultural etc., over a prolonged period of about 4000 years. In this lesson we are going to study about the impact of the Indian culture on the other countries.

It is very significant that the Indians travelling or migrating to other countries

never tried to impose their culture, religions and political rule on the local people. Wherever they went, they had cultural contact and exchange with the native people and it resulted into the enrichment of the native cultures.

The spread of Indian culture in the nations lying beyond the Hindukush mountains was mainly a result of the spread of Buddhist religion.

The Indian trade with distant lands is mentioned in the texts like ‘Kathasaritsagara’, Jataka Stories, ‘Deepvamsa’, ‘Mahavamsa’, etc. These texts narrate many stories of the sea travels and adventures of the Indian merchants. The Sangham literature mentions



the boats of the yavanas who brought gold and carried back black pepper in exchange. There are a number of inscriptions reported from the western parts of Maharashtra, that mention the donations given by yavanas.

‘Ophir’, a port city is mentioned in the ‘Old Testament’ (Bible), which is supposed to be referring to ‘Sopara’ near Mumbai. The Indian teakwood and the Himalayan cedar timber was in demand in Babylon. Beside the timber, commodities like sandalwood, ivory, tortoise shells, monkeys, peacocks, pearls, precious and semi-precious stones, as well as black pepper, cinnamon and incense were also exported from India. A sailor’s handbook of his sea travels is known as ‘Periplus of Erythrean Sea’ (Latin name : Periplus Maris Erythraei). The ancient port cities like Bharuch, Sopara, Kalyan, etc. are mentioned in this periplus. Also the important trade centres like Ujjain are described in it. Beside the periplus there are other texts like ‘Geographia’ written by the Greek historian Strabo, ‘Naturalis Historia’ by Pliny the elder, ‘Geographia’ written by the Greek mathematician-geographer Claudius Ptolemy, ‘Indica’* by the Greek historian Arrian, etc., which are the sources of information about the Indo-Roman trade.

**Arrian was the historian of the 2nd century C.E. He never visited India. Most of the information in his work is derived from ‘Indica’ written by Megasthenes.*

‘Periplus of Erythrean Sea’ mentions that Hippalus, the Greek navigator had accurately traced all the ports on the Erythrean Sea.

In the 1st century C.E. the Indo-Roman trade had begun to grow. The silk route and the ports on the south and west coasts of India played vital role in this trade. The records of the Greek historians mention of a

group of merchants, who paid a visit to the court of the Roman Emperor Augustus.

The coin hoards found in Tamilnadu had Roman gold coins in it. Many of those coins show cuts taken for the purpose of assaying (for the checking the grade of gold) the gold. It means those coins were not in circulation as coinage but they were valued for its gold. It is said that Nero, the Roman emperor had paid one million gold coins for a single chalice of emerald of Indian make. Pliny the elder had expressed concern about that the Roman gold being drained into India. He compared India to an enormous sink draining all gold of the world. Strabo tells us that animals such as snakes, hunting dogs, tigers, elephants, birds like parrots and peacocks, things like hides and horns of rhinoceros, expensive textiles, pearls, ivory and spices, etc. from India were in great demand among the Roman elites.

Apart from the Roman gold coins, many other things like lead, zinc, corals, wines, olive oil were the Roman imports coming to India. The archaeological survey conducted in the sea near ‘Bet Dwaraka’ in Gujarat, in the year 2000-2001 has yielded amphorae of various sizes, anchors, potsherds and a lead ball, etc. The amphorae were used to transport olive oil and wines, which were imported from Rome. There are many archaeological sites, which have yielded evidence of the Indo-Roman trade. It confirms that the cities in Maharashtra like Paithan, Ter, Kolhapur*, Bhokardan (Bhogvardhan) in the Jalana district were important trading centres.

**Ptolemy has mentioned Kolhapur as ‘Hippokura’.*

12.2 India and Gandhara (Afghanistan and Pakistan)

It is apparent that geographically Afghanistan (Gandhara) was favourably

By the way: The crows were known to ancient sailors as the birds who begin to fly in the direction of land, the moment it is in their view. The sailors used to follow the crows in order to reach the coast safely. Crows trained for these purpose were known as 'Dishakak'. A Harappan terracotta tablet shows a boat and dishakaks flying above it.

The story of 'Baveru Jataka' offers a testimony to the use of dishakak by ancient Indian sailors to reach the coast. This story

also clearly indicates that the ancient Indian merchants used to sail to distant lands.

'Baveru' is identified with Babylon. Babylon was a kingdom that existed in Mesopotamia during 1800-600 B.C.E. The Achaemenid emperor Cyrus II conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.E.

This story confirms that ancient Indian merchants used to carry birds like crow and peacock for selling.

situated on the trade route that linked India and Central Asia. It had close cultural connections with India from the ancient period of janapadas till the introduction of Islam. Whether it were the invaders from the Central Asia, or the Buddhist monks sent out by Emperor Ashoka, or the Chinese monks travelling to India, all had to pass through Afghanistan.

Emperor Ashoka's Period : We have seen that the 13th edict of Emperor Ashoka mentions the names of Greek kings, who were his contemporaries. It also mentions that people in their kingdoms were following the path of morality as outlined to his message of Dhammavijaya. Among these kingdoms was included the kingdom of Kamboja in Afghanistan.

The Ashokan edict at Kandahar is in Greek language and the script used for it is Aramaic. This inscription shows that Afghanistan was the integral part of Ashoka's empire.

Ashoka had sent 'Thera Mahyantika' (Majjhantika) to Kashmir and Afghanistan and 'Thera Maharakkhita' to the Greek (Yona) kingdoms, for spreading the teachings of Gautama Buddha.

Kushana Emperor Kanishka and Post-Kushana Period :

Kanishka's empire had spread from Pataliputra in the east to Kashmir in the north and further to Central Asia. Purushpur (Peshawar) and Mathura were the two capitals of his empire. Ancient Kapisha (Begram) was an additional capital of the Kushanas, which was located on the silk route at a vantage point. The trade route from Afghanistan to China was under the rule of Kushanas. This route starting from Taxila extended further, crossing through Khyber pass to Bamiyan in Afghanistan and from there to China through the plateau of Pamir.

In the Kushana period, Buddhism reached China by this trade route. Some of the coins of emperor Kanishka carry the image of



Gold coin of Kanishka

Gautama Buddha. It also has a legend which reads, 'Boddo'. This is the oldest representation of Gautama

Buddha in an image form on a coin.

The Chinese monks like Fa-Hien, Yuan Chwang, who travelled through India have described the Buddhist viharas and stupas in India. There are numerous remains of viharas and stupas in Afghanistan. Among them a place called 'Shahji-ki-Dheri' near Peshawar in Pakistan was excavated. The importance of the stupa discovered at this place is underlined by the fact that it was built during Kanishka's period. It is also known as 'Kanishka's Stupa'. According to prevailing tradition, the sacred remains in the box (*karandaka*) found there are of Gautama Buddha. The box has an inscription. It also mentions the name 'Agnishala', the main supervisor of the building work of 'Kanishka Vihara', in the precincts of 'Mahasena Sangharama'*. This box is in the Peshawar museum at present.

**Sangharama means the residential complex built for the bhikkhus.*

The ancient 'Nagarhar', modern 'Hadda' near Jalalabad in Afghanistan was another important centre of Buddhism. There are several remains of stupas and viharas scattered over the place. The sculptures found around the stupas are excellent specimens of Gandhara style. 'Takht-i-Bahi' is another important place, which is enlisted as 'World Cultural Heritage'. It is in the Pakhtunkhwa province of Gandhara region. It is a part of Pakistan now.



A Sculpture from a stupa at Hadda

The building of the vihara complex at Takht-i-Bahi had begun in the 1st century C.E. The work was continued till 7th century C.E. Among the remains discovered there are three stupas and other buildings.

Apart from these remains in Afghanistan, the famous 'Bamiyan statues of Buddha' are declared as the World Cultural Heritage. Bamiyan is 250 kilometres away from Kabul, to the west of it. There are about 750 caves hewn out in one of the cliffs of the mountain ranges known as 'Kuh-e-Baba'. There were very beautiful Buddhist murals painted inside these caves. The same cliff has two huge niches dug in it. In these niches were built two standing Buddha statues in stucco. One of it was 53 metres tall the other was 38 metres. The core of these statues was carved out in the original sandstone of the cliff. The core was plastered with several layers of mud mixed with straw. The folds of Gautama Buddha's robes were modelled in this clay plaster. His forearms were supported with the help of wooden armatures and fixed with wooden pegs. According to Yuan Chwang the statues were surrounded by colourful murals and even the statues were painted and decorated with gold coating and precious stones.

These statues were destroyed by Taliban, a fundamentalist organisation in 2001 C.E.

The government of Afghanistan, with the help of UNESCO and various associations from countries like Japan, France, Switzerland, etc. is working to restore this World Cultural Heritage. Some of the murals inside the Bamiyan caves were rediscovered, when the work of restoration began. Also, remains of a 19 metres long 'Mahaparinibban' image of Gautama Buddha were found.

According to Yuan Chwang's description there was a library of rare Buddhist manuscripts at Bamiyan. Archaeologists have indeed found birch bark and palm leaf manuscripts in a Bamiyan vihara.



Bamiyan Buddha images

Some images of Hindu gods and goddesses have also been found in Afghanistan. Among them is an image of Ganesha found near the city of Kabul. This image is dated to 4th century C.E. and it is the earliest image among the extant Ganesha images. It may be noted that even in India an image of Ganesha, as ancient as this one is not found. There is one temple called 'Khair Khana' near Kabul. The excavations at this site have yielded an image of God Surya mounted on a chariot.

A detailed review of all the Buddhist and Hindu remains in Afghanistan is not possible in this book. However, the above examples are enough to confirm the close cultural association between the Gandhara region and India before the advent of Islam.

12.3 India and China

The route that links Asia and Europe was referred for the first time as the 'Silk Route' by Ferdinand von Richthofen, German geographer. The silk route runs more than 6000 kilometres. One may have an impression that the silk route is an unbroken highway. However, in reality this route is an intricate web of major and minor lines bifurcating and crossing each other.

One of the major lines of this route linked China and India and then extended

further to Central Asia, linking one oasis to the other in the desert. It was easier for the merchants and travellers to find facilities of accommodation and food in the oasis cities. They also found ready market for their merchandise. Another line crossed through the steppes to the north of this main line. Journey on this line was relatively shorter. However, it was rarely used by merchants as it was infested by troublesome pastoral tribes and it hardly have any accommodation and food facilities en route.

The Silk route that continued from the Xinjiang province of China bifurcated into two lines and both reached Taxila. One of it reached the Gandhara region from the city of Kashgar in Xinjiang and the other reached Kashmir via Leh from Yarkand in the same province. The Chinese monks used the same route to reach India. An internal line to the north of the Xinjiang line started from the province of Gansu (Kansu) and reached Kashgar. The famous 'Great Wall of China' is in this province.

By the way : Some Chinese texts mention Kashmir by the name of 'Ki-Pin'. Some texts have mentioned the ancient city of Kapisha (Begram) in Afghanistan by the same name. Chinese literature mentions India variously as 'Shen-tu', 'Tien-chu', 'Tien-tu', 'Xien-tu', 'Yuan-tu', 'Xuan-tu', etc. Among all these names the name Yin-tu has prevailed in China till today.

In China the kings of 'Han' dynasty were ruling, when Kanishka ruled in India.

Sir Aurel Stein, the British archaeologist was the first to conduct an archaeological survey on the silk route traversing through India, China and Central Asia.

It was in the 1st century C.E. that Buddhism began to spread from India to China. The 'Han' dynasty that arose in China in this period had expanded its empire up to Central Asia. They dominated the silk route. Keeping in with the tradition 'Ming-ti' the second king of the Han dynasty had sent his representatives to India. They returned to China accompanied by two Buddhist monks, 'Kashyapa Matang' and 'Dharmaraksha' in 67 C.E. They carried many Buddhist texts with them. The texts were loaded on white horses. After reaching China the monks translated the texts in Chinese language. The Chinese emperor built a temple in their honour, which is known as 'White Horse Temple'. This is the first Buddhist temple built in China.

In the 3rd century C.E. the rule of the Han dynasty ended and the period of disintegration and unrest began with it, pushing common people to a state of desperation. This period lasted till 6th century C.E. People got attracted to Buddhism in this period in large numbers. Many Chinese pilgrims began to visit Buddhist centres in Central Asia and India. In the 4th century C.E., Kumarjeeva the famous and highly learned monk translated many Buddhist texts in Chinese language. In the 6th century the popularity of Buddhism reached its peak in China. By this time both sects of Buddhism, Theravada (Hinayana) and Mahayana, and their sub-sects were well established in China. In 7th century C.E. Islam and Christianity were gradually introduced. Kubalai Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan had great interest in Buddhism.

The spread of Buddhism in China in the 1st century C.E. also introduced a new trend in the Chinese art. Many of the Mahayana Buddhist monks who arrived in China, hailed from Central Asia. Their presence in China inspired the making of images of Gautama

Buddha and Bodhisattvas. This art style that originated in the Xinjiang province is known as 'Serendian Art Style' (Seres meaning China + India). Serendian Art Style was influenced by Gandhara art. It presents a combination of Greek, Persian and Chinese art forms. During the exploratory survey conducted by Sir Aurel Stein many terracotta sculptures of Serendian style were brought to light.

In the 4th- 6th century C.E. many Buddhist temples and viharas were built in China. However, stupas built in this period were very few. Instead of a stupa every temple had a pagoda of Chinese style. These pagoda being wooden, hardly any of them exists today. These pagodas used to have multiple floors. The upper floors of the pagodas successively reduced in size. The uppermost floor held a metal staff (*yashti*), which was fixed with metal rings that became successively smaller in size. Arrangement of staff and the rings seems to be the only reminder of the Umbrella in the Indian stupa architecture. Later, pagodas were built by using bricks and stones.

The influence of Buddhist art tradition from India still exists in the form of rock-cut caves. Three of them have received the status of World Cultural Heritage. Among them the caves of 'Dunhuang' are located on the ancient silk route. These caves are known as 'Mogao Caves'. Creation of these caves continued till 13th-14th century C.E.

The merchants coming from the interior regions of China used to gather at Dunhuang. It was an important meeting point for the Chinese merchants and those coming from other countries. Nearly 500 caves of Dunhuang are enriched with numerous sculptures and murals. Thousands of manuscripts were discovered from these caves.

In the next lesson we will briefly review the spread of Indian culture in Sri Lanka and the countries in Southeast Asia,

its history and the extant traces of Indian culture in those countries.

Exercise

Q.1 (A) Choose the correct alternative and complete the sentence.

- (1) The coin hoards found in had Roman gold coins in it.
(a) Tamilnadu (b) Maharashtra
(c) Karnataka (d) Kerala
- (2) The famous king Hammurabi had ruled the kingdom of
(a) Syria (b) Babylon
(c) China (d) Greece
- (3) The route that links Asia and is referred as the 'Silk Route'.
(a) Europe (b) Africa
(c) America (d) Russia
- (4) 'White Horse Temple' is the first Buddhist temple built in
(a) India (b) Japan
(c) China (d) Egypt

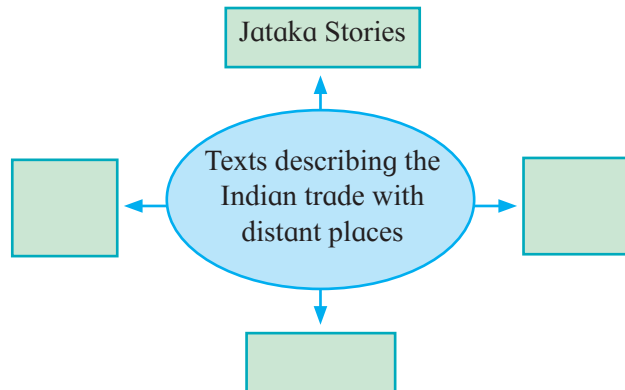
(B) Find the incorrect pair and write the correct ones.

- (1) Strabo – Geographia
- (2) Pliny the Elder – Naturalis Historia
- (3) Hippalus – Hippokura
- (4) Arrian – Indica

(C) Write the names.

- (1) A place in the Gandhara region enlisted as a world Cultural heritage.
- (2) Buddhist monks in the 4th century B.C.E. who translated many Buddhist texts in Chinese language

Q.2 Complete the concept map.



Q.3 Explain the following statements with reason.

- (1) Buddhism reached China during Kushana period .
- (2) The merchants rarely used the shorter line of the Silk Route.

Q.4 Give your opinion.

There were close cultural association between the Gandhara region and India before the advent of Islam.

Q.5 Write short notes.

- (1) Shahji-ki-Dheri
- (2) The Bamiyan Buddhas

Q.6 Answer the following question with the help of given points.

Write about the ties between ancient India and China.

- (a) Trade relations
- (b) The spread of Buddhism in China
- (c) Serendian art style

Activity

Collect more information about the 'Silk Route' with the help of internet.

