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INDIA AND FOREIGN TRADE

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Abstract : Trade involves the transfer of goods to services from one person or entity to another, often in exchange for money . A system or network that allows trade is called a market. An early form of trade, barter , saw the direct exchange of goods and services. Barter involves trading things without the use of money. Trade originated with human communication in pre historic times. Trading was the main facility of pre-historic people, who bartered goods and services from each other before the innovation of modern day currency.

Index Terms – Network, trade, market, barter, communication

Introduction

Trade is believed to have taken place throughout much of recorded human history. Trade is one of the basic process that link individuals and groups. Trade binds people to one another through the expectations of reciprocal giving, through the formal calculus of wages and markets , and through the desires or needs to obtain items not locally available . In this way, trade is a fundamental element of human culture . Trade is the activity of buying, selling, or exchanging goods or services between people, firms or countries.

Trade in Sangam age

The History of the early Tamils begins with the Sangam age. The Sangam age has been so differently delimited by different scholars. It is deemed to begin in the 6th century B.C. The Sangam Tamils have five fold divisions of land. The ancient Tamils noted that the habitable parts of the earth's surface were divisible into five natural regions. The named each region a tinai. Tinai seems to be derived from a root tin on tit which means a stretch of land. The word tinai is also used in the sense of the earth in general. Internal and Foreign trade was well organized and briskly carried on in the Sangam age. The Sangam Literature , Greek and Roman accounts and the archaeological evidences provide detailed information on this subject. Merchants carried the goods on the carts and on animal back from place to place . Internal trade was mostly based on the barter system.¹

Inland trade

Ancient Tamilians were active traders in various commodities, both locally and outside Tamil country. The Kingdoms of northern India sought pearls, cotton fabrics and conch shells from Tamilakam in exchange for woolen clothing , hides and horses.² Mercantile transactions took place in busy market places. Traders used various modes of selling hawking their goods from door to door , setting up shops in busy markets places or stationing themselves at royal house holds. Sellers of fish , Salt and grain hawked their goods, the textiles merchants sold cloths from their shops in urban markets and the gold smith , the lapidary and sellers of sandal wood and ivory patronized the aristocrats quarters. ³Most trade was by barter, paddy was the most commonly accepted medium of exchange , followed by purified salt. Honey and roots were exchanged for fish liver oil and arrack, while sugarcane and rice flakes were traded for venison and toddy.⁴

Markets

Sangam works such as Maduraikanchi and Pattinapallai give detailed description of the markets in big cities. The market or angadi , was located at the centre of the city.⁵It had two adjacent sections the morning bazaar nalangadi and the evening bazaar allangadi. According to the Mathuraikanchi , the great market was held in a large square and the items sold included garlands of flowers, fragrant pastes, coats and metallic belts, leather sandals , weapons, shields,carts, chariots and ornamented chariot steps. Garments shops sold clothing of various colours and patterns made of cotton , silk or wool , with the merchandise neatly arranged in rows. The jewelers , who conducted business from a separate street, sold precious articles such as diamonds , pearls, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, topaz, coral beads and varieties of gold.⁶

Vanchi, the capital of the Cheras, was a typical fortified city, with two divisions inside the fort the Purankar and the Akanakar. The Purankar was the outer city adjacent to the fort wall and was occupied by the soldiers. The Akanakar, the inner city, included the King's palace and the officers quarters. The city market was located between these two divisions, the artisans and traders lived close to the market. Kaveripattinam, the port city of the Cholas, had its market in a central open area close to the main suburbs of the city Maruvurpakkam and Pattinapakkam. Maruvurpakkam was adjacent to the sea where the fishermen and the foreign merchants lived. The main streets of the market met at the center where there was a temple dedicated to the local guardian deity of the city.⁷ The market Kaveripattinam was similar to the one in Madurai. Large quantities of the dyes, scented powder, flowers, textiles, salt, fish and sheep were sold. Flowers were in great demand, especially during festivals such as Indira vizha.⁸

External trade

External trade was carried between South India and the Greek Kingdoms. After the ascendancy of the Roman empire, the Roman trade assumed importance. The port city of Puhar became an emporium of foreign trade, as big ships entered this port with precious goods. Other ports of commercial activity include Tondi, Musiri, Korkai, Arikamedu and Marakkanam. The author of Periplus provides the most valuable information on foreign trade. Plenty of gold and silver coins issued by the Roman Emperors like Augustus, Tiberius and Nero were found in all parts of TamilNadu. The main exports of the Sangam age were cotton fabrics, spices like Pepper, Ginger, Cardamom, Cinnamon and Turmeric ivory products, pearls and precious stones. Gold, horses and sweet wine were the chief imports.⁹

Trade with Egypt and India

Egypt and India in earlier times ivory and ivory articles went from the west coast of India into the Nile Valley. The Egyptian fleets were sent to punt "which brought back great store of Myrrh, Ebony and Ivory, Gold, Cinnamon, Incense, Eyepaint, Apes, monkeys, dogs, panther-skins etc. In Syria great quantities of Arabic and Eastern treasure incense, oil, grain, wine, gold, silver, precious stones" and from Babylon, lapis lazuli were remitted. The precious stones imported in later times from India by western countries. The garments of royal linen manufactured from Egypt and import to India. Indian muslin and cotton cloth exported to Egypt. The apes, monkeys, dogs and panther skins are imported India.¹⁰

Trade with Palestine

The end of the second millennium B.C. the Hebrews ended their servitude in Egypt and migrated to Palestine and among them sweet spices were counted holy. On the rise of Israel's prosperity trade became important. Cinnamon, brought by Arabian merchants from India, became one of the ingredients of the sacred anointing oil of the Hebrew priests. The Xth century B.C. the queen of Sheba gave king Solomon of spices very great store and precious stones, there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. In those days India was the land of articles went west. The spices and the stones went in Indian boats to the African coast before they reached the queen's hands. The almug trees identified with sandal wood and the word derived from Sanskrit valgu. This sandal wood, native to South India, especially Mysore, Coimbatore and Salam districts.¹¹

Trade with China

Chinese Cinnamon found in the coasts of Arabia and East Africa. The Indian ships follows that there commercial inter course between China and India in the IInd Millennium B.C. The Mahabharata mentions silk from China among the tributes received by Yudhisthira. Chinese annals mention Voyages to Malacca prior to the Christian era and probably as early as the XIIth century B.C. Hence Malaya was the entre pot of this trade. The betel leaf is daily use in the Tamil country. The chief trade with China was in silk and sugar.¹² Thus pattu originally meant a fold, a cloth folded many times and worn on the shoulders. Silk was called sinam, that which came from China. Sarkkarai, a word borrowed from Sanskrit, originally meant sand, the name was extended to sugar because its grain look like those of sand. Akkaram originally meant the sugar-cane and the name was metonymically extended to the sugar cane products, jaggery and sugar. Sugar was also called sini the product of China. Silk and sugar were originally exchanged for Incense, red, coral, costus and pepper.¹³

Greek Intermediaries

The Greeks were the greatest intermediaries of this trade of India with Europe, in the half-millennium that preceded the birth of Christ. One result of this extensive International commercial intercourse was that the Tamil names of South Indian articles of trade were borrowed by the Hellenes. They are Oryza from Tamil arisi, karpion from karuva, Cinnamon Ziggiberos from Tamil injiver, ginger, peperi, from Tamil pippali, long pepper, since extended in the European languages to black pepper, beryllos from vaidurya which was mined in ancient times in the Coimbatore district. The Romans of the earlier part of this aged retained their original manly simplicity of life and did not reach Rome in the early consular times.¹⁴

The Time of Augustus

In the period of the Emperor Augustus there was a great development of India's trade with Rome. The increase of Rome influence at palmyra and the consolidation of Roman power in Alexandria the principal emporium of trade between the East and the West, were the causes of the sudden expansion of this trade.¹⁵

Trade in Living animals

The trade in mammals and birds was indirect and conducted through the land route. The four specimens of tigers exhibited by Claudius created perhaps a great impression, for on a mosaic found near the arch of Gallienus are represented four tigers eating their prey. The other

South Indian mammals which were imported into the Roman Empire were the buffalo and the Elephant. The white elephant was a special attraction at Rome in the time of Augustus, who had large number of elephants killed.¹⁶

Trade in animal products

Animal products were taken by the sea-route. Hide and furs were the chief of them. Ivory was one of the most important animal products sent from India to Rome. After that Romans chairs, beds, scepters, hilts, scabbards, chariots, carriages, tablets, book-covers, table-legs, doors, flutes, Iyres, combs, brooches, pins, boxes, bird-cages, floors imported India. The Romans bought pearl from the gulf of Mannar. Madurai and Uraiyur had the chief pearl marts in India.¹⁷

Trade in plant products

Early in the imperial era pepper became a staple article of Rome's sea trade with India. Pepper went chiefly to Malabar and Travancore. White pepper was specially prized because it was less pungent but more tasty than black pepper formed more than half the cargo of many a west bound ship; for it was more important than salt or sugar in the cookery books of the day. Ginger was also imported from India, but more as medicine than for culinary purposes. Cardamom was used both in medicines and in perfumes, so too Cinnamon. It is curious that Cinnamon leaf, called malabathrum, was known to be Indian, but the Romans thought that cassia its root, and the wood were grown in Africa; so cleverly did the Arabian traders conceal its origin from the Romans. The oil of the spikenard was another highly prized article. Gingly oil and sugar i.e. jaggery called by Strabo honey obtained from trees in India without the aid of bees, were minor articles of trade.¹⁸ Cotton cloth was a very large item in the exports from South India. The woods imported by the Romans from India, some were ornamental and timber woods and others fragrant ones used as unguents and medicines of the former the chief were ebony, rosewood and teakwood of the latter the chief were sandal wood, red sanders, agil and makeir bark. The Periplus testifies to the export of coconut oil and Pliny of the banana, rice, millets and various medicinal plant-products, like nutmegs and tamarind, the betel leaf and nut are also mentioned by various writers.¹⁹

Trade in mineral products

The ancient Indians exported large diamonds. The Romans obtained large and famous specimens, perhaps used as amulets after the Indian example. Agate, Carnelian, Sard, Onyx and blood stone besides were largely exported from India. Cups hollowed out of precious stones were much prized. Rock-crystal glasses stained so as to look like precious stones were also obtained from India by the Greeks and Romans. The Roman trade in India iron and steel was an important one. The excellent Parthian metal was perhaps really Indian.²⁰

Imports from Rome

In exchange for these articles the Romans sent chiefly coins, but also coral and wine, and lead and tin. But the adverse balance, adverse to Rome, was so great that the Indian trade seriously affected the coinage of Rome.²¹

Romans in South India

The Roman merchants brought wine and gold coins into South India, and the name Yavana which originally meant 'Greek' was by this time extended to the Romans too, the Greeks having sunk to insignificance in matter of international relations. A poem refers to "the cool, sweet-smelling wine, brought by the Yavanas, in beautiful vessels and drunk daily from gold cups held by damsels who wore bright bracelets."²²

Conclusion

Trade is the branch of Commerce that deals in only the exchange of goods and services whereas Commerce are the comprehensive term that includes all the major activities that facilitate the exchange and generates the revenue for all.

End notes

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