

**WORKING PAPER: II**

# **TRADE NETWORKS AND COMMODITIES**

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# Trade Networks and Commodities

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## 1. Introduction

In the Working Paper I, the role of small-scale maritime communities involved in utilizing the resources of the sea since at least the prehistoric period had been discussed, with a view to shifting the emphasis from Empires and luxury trade to sailing networks and people to people contact. Maritime trade has conventionally been viewed as trade in luxury items and controlled by the state or Empire, but as shown in this paper, it is time to frame intercultural interactions across the seas with reference to maritime communities. This stress on fishing and sailing groups is further corroborated by finds of boats and boat burials in archaeological contexts in Vietnam. For example, boat burials associated with Dong Son bronze drums and dated from 500 BCE to 200 CE have been found not only along the coast of Vietnam, but also in the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago and have been linked with seafaring communities. These maritime activities resulted in vibrant interchanges in the first millennium BCE between South and Southeast Asia, as evident from material remains of Indian origin found at archaeological sites, such as that of Oc-Eo in the Mekong delta. In addition to material artefacts such as beads of carnelian and glass and other items, the archaeological record also shows the spread of writing in the Brahmi script and religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism across Southeast Asia. The evidence for the spread

of Buddhism and Hinduism will be discussed in the next Working Paper. Here I would like to highlight the cultural and religious underpinnings of much of trading activity in the historical period, which facilitated cross-cultural interactions across the seas.

“We can mention a great number of carnelian and agate beads of Indian origin, which were found in the Iron Age sites in Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam: in particular, specific etched beads and beads with animal shape..... The pottery imported from South India appeared very early in Central Vietnam. It was evidenced in the early Cham sites such as Tra Kieu and Go Cam in Quang Nam province....The superimposition of Indian culture never derived from a policy of political subjugation nor to economic exploitation; rather the very process signified a peaceful outlook and a cooperative approach.”

It is vital to incorporate this archaeological data in an understanding of cross-cultural interactions across the Bay of Bengal, which enables current research to move away from nineteenth century paradigms and models, such as the often-touted term - Maritime Silk Road. The term ‘Maritime Silk Road’ or ‘die Seidenstrasse’ is of recent origin and was first proposed by the German Geographer Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (1833–1905) in the nineteenth century. He suggested that the road focused on trade in silk connecting Han China and Imperial Rome in the early centuries of the Common

Era, but lost its relevance with the collapse of the two Empires. While the use of the term did not result in academic research on the concept, it did inspire Sven Hedin (1865 – 1952) to lead four expeditions from 1893 to 1927 to central Asia. An unintended outcome of the expeditions by Hedin and others was the discovery of hitherto unknown oases cities, Buddhist caves, etc. in central Asia and China and looting of paintings, sculptures and manuscripts from these sites so evocatively portrayed by Peter Hopkirk in his book. In recent years China has revived the terminology in an attempt at ‘mythologising’ the past in order to serve a current foreign policy interest, as discussed by Kwa Chong Guan of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore.

At this stage attention should also be drawn to the fact that traditionally it was Indian cotton textiles that were traded across the Indian Ocean and it is with an overview of the archaeological record of cotton fabrics that I start this paper. The beginnings of the maritime system in the subcontinent may be traced to the exploitation of marine resources in the Mesolithic period around 10,000 BCE when fishing and sailing communities settled in coastal areas. By the third millennium BCE, there is evidence for trade networks between the Makran and Gujarat coasts of the subcontinent and the Persian Gulf. This is an issue that has been dealt with elsewhere and will not be repeated here. In this paper, the focus is on the historical period starting with centuries around the beginning of the Common Era. This first section is followed by an overview of trade and exchange as discussed in Sanskrit and Buddhist texts and a discussion of movements of crops and plants, as evident from the archaeological record that has been studied and analyzed in recent decades. The final section presents an analysis of the organization of maritime trade in South and Southeast Asia in the early historic and early medieval periods.

## 2. Cotton Textiles and Indian Ocean Networks

India has historically been one of the major producers of cotton fabrics in the Indian Ocean region and these have been the staple of trade networks across

the region. Though a local weaving tradition has existed for nearly 4,000 years in the Indonesian archipelago, Indian textiles were nonetheless considered special and continued to be imported. These imports included the double-ikat silk *patola* and the block-printed cotton textiles, which were traded to the region because of their status and ritual significance. This ritual significance of textiles is evident in 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century inscriptions from Java, which record the ceremony and feast associated with donation of land and establishment of a *sima*, i.e. an area with changed revenue status. Together with gold and silver, pieces of cloth - *wdihan* for the men and *kain* for the women - were important gift items at this ceremony. It is important to underscore the fact that though several varieties of cotton cloth were produced in the subcontinent, it is only some of these that travelled across the seas. Secondly clothing was an important marker of social and cultural identity and a vital function of textiles was in ritual, as shown above.

Indigo is perhaps the oldest organic dye used and Greek sources refer to its origin in India. The first century CE text in koine Greek, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* catalogues it as an item of export from Barbarikon at the mouth of the Indus river (section 39) and the west coast of India. The *Periplus* contains a useful list of commodities traded across the Indian Ocean and refers to the west coast of India as providing spices, medicinal and aromatic plants, gems, textiles, both cotton and silk, dyes, such as indigo, grain, rice, sesame oil, ghee or clarified butter, ivory, pearls and tortoise shell.

Cotton was the most common fibre used in the subcontinent at least from the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE onward. At the site of Mehrgarh in Baluchistan seeds of the cotton plant (*Gossypium* sp.) were found in 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE context. The evolution of a cultivated version of cotton (both *Gossypium arboreum* or tree cotton and *G. herbaceum* or short staple cotton) in South Asia is dated to around the same period. Terracotta spindle whorls found at archaeological sites in the Indus valley in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE attest to the spinning of yarn in the region. There are indications for the use of indigo

dyed cloth, while at Mohenjo-daro, Marshall found two silver vases wrapped in red-dyed cotton cloth in the lower town. The archaeo-botanist Dorian Fuller has reviewed the evidence for the presence of cotton and flax at Harappan sites, as also in other parts of the Indian subcontinent. He suggests an increase in spinning activity in peninsular India from the second half of the second millennium BCE as a result of increasing social complexity.

Silk is another important fibre and is known to have been in use in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE at Harappan period sites. Current evidence suggests that the fibres belong to the wild silk moth (*Antheraea* sp). References to silk and silk working in Sanskrit texts indicate that silk technology and production was well established in the subcontinent in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE. The South Asian silk industry is also known to have evolved independently from the silk traditions of China. The *Arthaśāstra* lists valuable goods considered important to be included in the king's treasury and this includes a range of textiles such as silk, where a distinction is made between *patrorna*, *kaūṣeya* and *cina-patta* (II.11.107-114). *Patrorna* has been identified as uncultivated silk collected from various trees and together with *kaūṣeya*, which Xuanzang differentiates from Chinese silk and refers to as gathered from wild silk worms, it forms the Indian varieties of silk. *Kaūṣeya* is already mentioned in 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE grammar of Panini (IV.3.42) and occurs in the Epics, as well.

A piece of silk was found in a Buddhist relic casket dated to the early centuries CE at Devnimori in Gujarat. The site of Devnimori is situated on the eastern side of the river Meshvo, overlooking the gorge and the valley and excavations have dated the Buddhist monastic complex from 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. One of the two caskets found inside the stupa contained silk bags, gold bottle and some organic material inside a cylindrical copper box. Clearly silk-weaving was an established tradition in early India as further supported by inscriptional evidence. A 5<sup>th</sup> century Sanskrit inscription of the chief of a guild of silk weavers from a now lost temple at Mandasor in central India describes designs woven by them on silks as *varnantara-vibhaga-cittena*, translated as 'with varied stripes of different colours'.

Excavations at the burial site of Ban Don Ta Phet in central Thailand have yielded cotton fragments and thread. The analysis of cotton shows that it was made of *cannabis sativa* fibre which might have originated from cotton plants found in South Asia. Similarly, remains of textiles have been found at Ban Chiang in Thailand. Moreover, at Tha Kae, central Thailand 'door-knob' spindle whorls, of which ninety fragments were found in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, context, some with traces of iron remaining inside the central perforations are similar to those found at Kodumanal, Tamil Nadu. Archaeological excavations at Kodumanal will be discussed in a later section here. Unlike Kodumanal, Tha Kae was occupied from the end of the first millennium BCE to the late first millennium CE. Judith Cameron has suggested that probably this shows the transfer of technology from India to Thailand along with fibre and iron during the early centuries of the Common Era.

Textiles fragments were found at the burial site of Pontanoa Bangka in Sulawesi, one of the Lesser Sundas on the eastern border of the Indian Ocean and were radiocarbon dated to CE 500. The fragments were of cotton and were decorated with "stamped (squares within larger squares), a decorative technique unique to India." There is continuing evidence for import of patterned and other textiles from India to the Indonesian archipelago in the period from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century. This is further corroborated by late eighth century Sanskrit inscriptions from central Java and by the strong Pala influence on local statuary. Textiles, especially cottons were imported into Southeast Asia from India, not only as clothing and as gifts in ceremonies, but also used as adornments around images in temples and to decorate ceilings. Another prominent use is as manuscript covers and their further reproduction in murals. A study of patterns in the eleventh and twelfth century temples of Pagan shows a strong influence from Eastern India.

In addition to local consumption, Indian textiles were also re-exported to neighbouring countries such as Japan and China. These examples can be added to, but this may not be necessary, as the major role of Indian textiles has been well established by

references quoted above. To further strengthen the argument, the movement of crops needs to be brought into the dialogue, before we move on to a section on understanding the structure that framed economic activity, as evident in early Sanskrit literature.

### 3. Movement of Flora and Fauna across the Seas

The earliest evidence of contacts between Southeast Asia and India is perhaps provided by archaeobotanical studies of various crops and plants found in archaeological contexts. The movement of these perishable items was the result of travel by small-scale fishing and sailing groups across the Bay of Bengal. These movements are often reflected in the adoption of loan-words from the people who introduced certain plants into a geographically contiguous society. In this regard, lexical data becomes an important tool of analysis. The adoption of new plants and crops also altered the landscape where these were imported and cultivated. Several Southeast Asian plants and spices revolutionized the cultural landscapes – or, rather, seascapes – of the Indian Ocean.

Certain trees and plants are believed to have been introduced from Southeast Asia to India in ancient times and from there to the Middle East, East Africa, and Europe. Examples include sandalwood (*Santalum album* L.), the areca palm (*Areca catechu* L.), betel pepper (*Piper betle* L.), banana (*Musa* spp.) and citrus cultivars (*Citrus* spp.), ginger (*Zingiber officinale* Roscoe), and galangal (*Alpinia galanga* (L.) Willd). Several spices too, featured actively in exchange with Southeast Asian participants. These included cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum* (L.) Merr. Et L.M. Perry), nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans* Houtt.), and Sumatran camphor (*Dryobalanops sumatrensis* (J.F. Gmel. Kosterm). Many of these were indigenous to the relatively isolated regions of present-day Indonesia. A significant factor facilitating the integrative potential of these maritime communities was their large cargo-carrying vessels, which not only facilitated transformation of the local settlements into centres of commerce and production,

but also linked the local groups into regional and trans-regional networks.

The terms for certain plants and crops used in India, indicate origins in Southeast Asia, such as spices like the clove. Conversely certain crops of Indian origin were introduced to Southeast Asia as well. These include staple crops such as rice and lentils, as well as fruits such as jackfruit. The site of Khao Sam Kaeo (KSK) located 8 kms from the coast on the Tha Tapao River has been dated from 4<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. Phu Khao Thong (PKT) lies in the Kra Isthmus and though smaller than KSK overlaps it in terms of chronology, with dates ranging from 200 BCE to CE 20. Rice was the dominant cereal at both sites and was identified as a Chinese domesticate. The excavators suggest that labour intensive wetland rice agriculture (of *indica* rice) was introduced in the middle of the first millennium CE.

It has been suggested that many of the pulses found at archaeological sites may have been for the consumption of the Indian community settled in peninsular Thailand. *Indica* rice is the dominant species cultivated in modern Thailand, and wetland rice agriculture is practised throughout the region today. Therefore, it is posited that labour-intensive wetland rice agriculture (of *indica* rice) was introduced after sustained Indian contact in the middle of the first millennium CE, and associated with the development of Indic states in mainland Southeast Asia.

Faunal remains also indicate movement of certain animals across the sea. How were these exchanges in the first millennium BCE organized? In the next section we discuss the evidence from early Iron Age sites in peninsular India that is usually marginalized in studies on inter-cultural contacts.

### 4. Iron Age Sites in First Millennium BCE

Southeast Asian archaeologists have long recognized that the earliest archaeological evidence for iron in mainland Southeast Asia coincides with the earliest evidence for interregional maritime trade



and exchange. It is significant that the dates for the introduction of iron in mainland Southeast Asia range around 500 BCE and are later than those in large parts of India. It has been suggested that in the first phase, iron was largely used for weapons and for thwarting the “predatory imperial ambitions of the Han Dynasty of China,” especially in the region of Yunnan and north Vietnam. In large parts of mainland Southeast Asia, the increased use of iron also led to intensive agriculture and expansion of irrigation facilities. Archaeological excavations at sites such as Noen U-Loke in Thailand have shown that water was brought through channels into moats around sites and these large water control structures date to the late Iron Age between about 100 and 500 CE.

These early beginnings also provide a different perspective on trans-oceanic exchanges, as traditionally trade has been linked with urban centres and the Mauryan state. Archaeological evidence from Iron Age sites in peninsular India offers a long pre-Mauryan prehistory of exchange and trade, both overland and coastal and presents several analogies with coastal sites across the Bay of Bengal. Chronologically, the Iron Age megalithic sites span several centuries, from 1200 BCE to 300 CE, and extend across all regions of peninsular India with the exception of the western Deccan or present state of Maharashtra. These Iron Age sites are often associated with mortuary monuments, such as urn burials and terracotta sarcophagi, marked on the surface by large standing stones, though there is regional variation from stone circles to enormous standing stones at sites in north Karnataka, as also dolmens. There is evidence for exploitation of mineral resources and their exchange across the peninsula. 7 habitation sites, 148 burial sites and 22 habitation-cum-burial sites are known to have been located in the vicinity of gold resources. Not only was gold mined, but also exchanged as is evident from finds of gold ornaments at widely dispersed sites. This is further supported by the fact that 60% of the megalithic sites were located in regions with no known mineral or ore resources nearby.

Another correlation that is increasingly evident is with tanks or reservoirs, for example at the site

of Hire Benkal where in addition to the stupendous standing stones, settlement sites, both megalithic and Early Historic have also been identified. It would seem that these tanks were largely for collecting run-offs or rain water and were filled only during some months of the year. Another difference lay in the fact that there was no mechanism for the distribution of the water.

Surveys undertaken by Moorti and Brubaker have provided an overview of the hierarchies within megalithic sites. Of the total number of 1933 sites discovered so far, the largest concentration (34%) is in Karnataka, followed by 31% in Tamilnadu. A more recent survey of published literature suggests a similar database of 2207 megalithic sites. Of these 1668 were cemeteries, 55 were habitations, 128 were both habitations and burial sites, and the association of 356 sites was unclear. A study of site sizes indicates that the larger megalithic sites were found along major routes of communication. These routes are known to have continued in the subsequent periods. Perhaps the most interesting is the stretch extending from the Palghat gap and Coimbatore to the Kaveri delta. An analysis of the dimensions of sites indicates that there were at least 26 large settlements, each capable of supporting a population of approximately 1000 people.

It is no coincidence that those in coastal areas score over others located further inland, in terms of the richness of grave goods. The lower Krishna valley on the Andhra coast was more intensively settled by Megalithic communities than other parts of Andhra. A similar situation may be envisaged for the Tamil coast where the littoral Megalithic settlements of Souttokeny and Moutrapalon near Pondicherry and Adichanallur further south have yielded a wide variety of grave goods. Adichanallur was extensively excavated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is one of the largest known mortuary complexes, containing several thousand megaliths and covering an area of some 114 acres and far richer in terms of gold ornaments and beads as compared to other contemporary sites.

In addition to the variations in site sizes indicating the presence of large towns and smaller villages,

archaeological excavations at Kadebakele on the Tungabhadra River in Koppal district of Karnataka has provided insights into their adaption and reuse over the extended period from 1500 BCE to fifteenth century CE when the site was in existence. There are indications that the mortuary monuments continued to be restored and revisited and that there are indications of occasional feasting around them.

One especially significant site for this paper is Kodumanal on the northern bank of the river Noyyal, a tributary of the Kaveri. The site straddles the ancient route from the Palghat gap eastward to Karur and Uraiyur along the Kaveri. Hundreds of inscribed potsherds were found at the site in stratified contexts, with inscriptions in Prakrit, Sanskrit and Tamil. The Kodumanal finds gain further significance in view of data now available from Sri Lanka. The finds of pottery sherds inscribed with Brahmi letters from Iron Age levels in Anuradhapura have raised several questions regarding the traditional view of the introduction of writing from north India to Sri Lanka. These diverse communities in peninsular South Asia used at least four languages, viz. Prakrit, Tamil, Old Sinhala and Sanskrit, which were all written in the Brahmi script, with some evidence for the presence of Kharosthi as well.

In addition to the trading systems of the north, these Iron Age communities also participated in an extensive coastal exchange network which included sites in Andhra, Tamil Nadu, the Malabar coast and northern Sri Lanka. How was this system organized in peninsular India? An issue that needs further research at this stage relates to the overlap between the Iron Age networks comprising of small-scale communities of South and Southeast Asia in the first millennium BCE, though inscriptions from coastal sites in India refer to associations of merchant groups and communities termed *nigama*/ *nikama* and *goṣṭhī*.

### **The *Nigama* and the *Goṣṭhī***

The Pali dictionary derives the meaning of the term *nigama* from the Sanskrit root *gama* with the prefix *ni*. The compound term thus has the sense of coming together or meeting. On the basis of early Buddhist texts, Wagle defines the *nigama* as a *gama* composed

of more or less integrated members of various kin groups and occupational or professional groups. It is therefore a larger and more complex economic and social unit than the village or *gama*. A significant association of the *nigama* in peninsular India, especially in the coastal regions is with Buddhist monastic centres. Two prominent sites need to be mentioned: one is that of Bhattiprolu; and the other is Amaravati, both on the Andhra coast.

The terms *nigama* and *negama* are found inscribed on unbaked clay sealings from several sites in north India. The earliest of these date from the Mauryan period. Beyond the northern plains, there are references to the *nigama* in inscriptions from early Buddhist sites. The *nigama* of Karahakata in the Deccan is mentioned in the second century BCE inscriptions of the Buddhist site of Bharhut in central India.

The Buddhist site of Bhattiprolu, a village on the Guntur – Repalle railway line in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh is significant on several counts. It provides details of second century BCE practice of relic worship in coastal Andhra, but more importantly patronage for the setting up of the stupa came from the local chief or raja Khubiraka and members of the *goṣṭhī* of *nigama*putas and *nigama*. The term *goṣṭhī* has been translated as committee or association and also occurs in the inscriptions of the Buddhist sites of Sanchi and Mathura in central and north India respectively. The name Khubiraka has wider prevalence and occurs as Kuyiran (Tamil) or Kubira (Old Sinhala) both derived from Sanskrit Kubera. Variants appear as Kupiro at Bharhut in central India, Kubirako from Bhattiprolu in Andhra, Kubira in Sri Lanka cave inscriptions and Kuviran in early Tamil cave inscriptions.

Similarly, there are references to the *nigama* of Dhanyakataka along the east coast in Andhra. Both the *goṣṭhī* and the *nigama* existed at Dhanyakataka. It is significant that both Dharanikota and Amaravati are located at the point up to which the river Krishna is navigable and may be defined as landing places for the coastal traffic. The Krishna takes a sharp turn at this spot and the association of Amaravati with the river is preserved in a stele discovered during



clearance of the site in 1958-59. Engraved on one of the faces is the legend: “the *goṣṭhī* called Vanda at Dhanyakataka” together with the representation of waters. It may be mentioned that Amaravati was the largest and longest lasting Buddhist site on the Andhra coast, which continued to be revered by pilgrims from across the seas well into the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The term *nigama* also occurs in the region around Madurai in Tamilnadu where fifty-five inscriptions in Tamil-Brahmi have been dated between the second century BCE and the second century CE.

From the third and second century BCE to the second century CE, many of the intersecting networks combined into larger systems as evident from the distribution of specific pottery types, such as the Rouletted Ware. Further evidence of the interlinkages between peninsular India and parts of Southeast Asia is provided by the distribution of Rouletted Ware (RW), which was long considered to be a marker for Indo-Roman trade. Painsstaking analysis of the pottery from archaeological excavations at Tissamaharama in Sri Lanka has led to an unbroken chronology and sequence from fifth century BCE to twelfth century CE.

Detailed analysis of Rouletted Ware was undertaken during archaeological excavations in the vicinity of the monastic site of Tissamaharama, one of the most revered temples in southeastern Sri Lanka and the capital of the ancient kingdom of Ruhuna. The Sri Lankan Chronicle, the *Mahavamsa* refers to prince Vijaya and his followers landing on this part of the coast in the fifth century BCE. The results from archaeological work at Tissamaharama have provided insights into the participation of coastal centres in Sri Lanka in maritime networks as early as the fifth century BCE, as well as the development of urban centres in close proximity to monastic establishments.

It is then evident that in the third-second centuries BCE, it was the *nigama* and its members whose presence is attested to in peninsular India, especially in coastal regions. What was the relationship between the *nigama* and the political dynasties, as also with religious centres. These issues have been discussed

in earlier publications. Here I will draw on data from early Sanskrit texts to highlight some of the differences with current understanding of terms such as economy and trade.

## 5. Economic Activity as Described in Early Sanskrit Literature

The accepted modern definition of economy relates it to the production and distribution of goods and services and considers it as distinct from politics and religion, but this distinction is not reflected in early Sanskrit texts, such as the *Arthaśāstra*, where politics and economics are not treated as separate domains, but are dealt with as one unit. The king is responsible for protecting the productive territory of his kingdom and guards it against internal and external threats. It is this protective role that provides him authority to collect taxes from the inhabitants. Kingship thus governs both the political and the economic domains. In addition to being in-charge of economic activities of his kingdom, the king was also responsible for regulating it and for maintaining law and order. It is evident that the historical conditions under which the *Arthaśāstra* was written were very different from the environment in which the present economy operates and this distinction needs to be kept in mind when using terms such as trade, markets, ports, revenue, taxation, etc in the context of early South and Southeast Asia. It is also important to emphasize the fact that the *Arthaśāstra* is not a historical document, but a normative text, though it does provide valuable insights into conceptualization of various aspects of the economy. It also needs to be ‘read’ in the context of early Buddhist sources, as also the data from inscriptions and archaeology, as will be done in this paper.

The *Arthaśāstra* accepts *artha* as one of the legitimate and desirable pursuits of life, though riders were attached to this goal, which was not absolute. Thus, the quest of *artha* was to be subordinated to that of *dharma* or ‘that which upholds the regulatory order of the universe’, and the seeking of *kāma* or pleasure was to be subordinated to that of *artha* and *dharma*. *Artha* has been variously translated as material, social and human capital.

Nevertheless, important points to be kept in mind when consulting the *Arthaśāstra* are the several references that it makes to inter-regional trade and the sea in Book II (2.28.1-13). The Controller of Shipping (*nāvādhyaksa*) is mentioned, as also collection of taxes from fishing and sailing communities; those diving for conch-shells and pearls; and traders. The *Arthaśāstra* makes a distinction between local trade transacted in fortified cities of the interior, identified as *nagara*, from that originating at distant places and exchanged at the *pattana*, located either on sea coasts or on river banks of the interior. Dharmasthas are mentioned and their duties in regulating market transactions at frontier posts are discussed in Book III (3.1.1).

One aspect that Trautmann makes no reference to in his book is the ritual economy of the period and the extent to which the religious shrine or temple was a motivating factor in channelling economic activity as also being able to monitor transactions, such as trade. Olivelle nevertheless does refer to the social role of the temple as discussed in the *Arthaśāstra* and contrasts it with the absence in the *Dharmaśāstras*. He mentions that references in the text indicate the enormous wealth of temples and their political clout, as evident from the mention of an overseer of temples. In legal disputes relating to temple property, “we see the temple or the temple god emerging as a legal entity with legal rights that can be defended in a court of law.” These references to the religious shrine need to be compared with data from inscriptions and archaeology, but before that a discussion of early Buddhist texts and wealth generation would be relevant, as it provides a different perspective to that in the *Arthaśāstra*.

Early Buddhist Canonical texts, such as the *Nikāyas* and the *Vinaya* texts expound on the subject of money: how to earn it legitimately and how to effectively use it to accumulate this-worldly and other-worldly gains. Nevertheless Buddhist writers were aware of the imbalance and disparity of wealth found within society and the fact that in reality money can subvert justice and that lack of it can result in an abject humiliation of a person. Craving

for money, however, does not bring happiness, because such cravings are impermanent, without substance and false. The emphasis is on *dāna* or giving for a meritorious cause, such as the Buddhist Sangha.

The most frequently used term in the texts for money is *bhoga* and it is listed among the ten most desirable things. The other nine are beauty, health, virtues, life of continence, friends, truths, understanding, *dharma* and heaven. Money is referred to as bringing two kinds of happiness: one is happiness resulting from the lawful acquisition of money and its expenditure on meritorious deeds; the second is happiness due to absence of debt. In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha explains to the merchant Anathapindika or feeder of orphans and the helpless, five good reasons to acquire money. Not only do Buddhist texts extol the virtues of the merchant Anathapindika, but his generosity in the purchase of Jetavana for gifting to the Sangha is prominently sculpted at the second century BCE site of Bharhut in central India, with an inscription identifying the scene, as also at other sites, such as Bodh Gaya, Sannathi, Amaravati, etc. Thus it is evident that endorsement for economic activities such as trade and generation of wealth was provided by several normative text such as the *Arthasastra* and the Buddhist Canon.

This was by no means limited to the early period, but continued well into the present. The Hindu temple was an important institution for cultural integration and several religious shrines were located in coastal areas. Monastic and temple-centred religious institutions formed an important intermediate group between the state and the family. Thus the temples and monasteries were not merely centres of devotion and worship, but were also principal institutions in the period from 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century for establishing laws and enforcing them on their members. This is a theme that will be discussed at length in the next Working Paper. Here we continue with a focus on institutions involved in providing support to economic activities, such as the guilds that developed in early medieval India.

## 6. Merchant Guilds

The inscriptions of the corporate body termed Ainurruvar start with a eulogy of the guild and list its members, as mentioned in the Introduction. The earliest eulogy is to be found in the mid-tenth century Kamudi record from Tamilnadu, whereas the Bedkihal inscription is the earliest from Karnataka dated to 1000 CE. These inscriptions eulogise the Ainurruvar as descendants of Vasudeva, Kandali and Mulabhadra who transacted business in eighteen pattanam, thirty-two *velapuram* and sixty-four *ghattikasthanas*. In addition to these common elements, the inscriptions refer to the charter that the Ainurruvar had in which their rights and duties were detailed, as also the dharma of merchants that they practiced.

A constant catchphrase is their close association with Aihole in Karnataka through its deity Parmesvari or Bhagavati. Their association with Aihole remains enigmatic, as the earliest records at the site, i.e. the Gaudaragudi and Lad Khan temple inscriptions refer to the term five hundred but in relation to brahmanas, termed *mahajanas* or *caturvedins*. Karashima suggests that the brahmanas may have taken the lead in initiating commercial networks, but their relationship to the Ainurruvar that comprised of a diverse range of groups remains unclear (Karashima 2009: 143). It is significant that in the case of the inscriptions from Kolhapur, the guilds contributed to Jain temples and Jain ritual worship of the Tirthankara.

The association of merchants and trade-guilds in administration occurs widely in many of the texts of the period as well and has been a feature of early administrative structures in India. Some of the merchant guilds such as the Ayyavole known as the Vira Bananjas in Karnataka had linkages with other regions. In their inscriptions, they refer to themselves as being resident in thirty-two coastal towns, eighteen *pattanas* or market towns, and sixty-four *ghatikā-sthānas* or establishments for learned men. They had their own banner with a hill symbol and usually met in different places on weekdays and made donations to temples from the cess on commodities sold in the market.

In the twelfth century merchants who proclaimed their south Indian origin financed the construction and endowment of a Hindu temple modeled on the Meenakshi temple of Madurai at Quanzhou, the premier China international port of that era. After the thirteenth century there are no further records of the guilds; by the fifteenth century numerous sources describing the Melaka emporium detail instead the critical role of two south India-based networked merchant communities: the Chulias (Tamil-speaking Muslims) and the Kelings/Klings (Chetti, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada Hindu merchants). In the fifteenth century, the Italian traveller, Niccolo Da Conti described the Chulia traders as “... very rich, so much so that some will carry on their business in forty of their own ships, each of which is valued at 50,000 gold pieces.” Another group of traders settled in the Malay peninsula and in north Sumatra were from Gujarat who traded in several varieties of cotton cloth.

In the final analysis, the vibrant trade networks that extended across the Bay of Bengal had several partners. Nigamas as well as trade guilds from the Indian subcontinent were vital partners in these networks along with local trading systems of Southeast Asia. Evidence for this dynamic cultural interchange is evident in the archaeological record, as also in inscriptions both in South and Southeast Asia. In the next Working Paper, we will discuss the part played by religious shrines, especially those located in the coastal areas and their role both as institutions of learning and also as consumers of commodities.

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