

Q How was overseas trade organized in South India up to 300 A.D? Discuss this with special reference to Roman trade & point out its impact on Indian economy.

Overseas trade form an important part of early South Indian economy. Around the beginning of the Christian era monsoon was discovered. So the sailors now could sail in much less time and thus various ports of South India became popular during this time, such as Arikamedu, Kaveripattinam, Perimula etc. This was the time when trade with the Romans also flourished.

The Sangam texts give vivid literary sketches of the markets & traders of Tamilakam. The 'paravatai' were inhabitants of the sea-coasts who were initially involved in fishing & making salt but gradually diversified into pearl diving as well as long distance trade in pearls, chank bangles, tamarind, precious stones, spices etc. The term 'yavana' was initially used in ancient Indian texts to refer to the Greeks but later it was used for all foreigners. Sangam poems mention large Roman ships sailing on the Periyar river, bringing in gold & wine & sailing away with cargoes of black pepper. A poem by Nakkirar refers to the Pandya king Nanmayan drinking perfumed & cold wine brought by the Yavanas.

Romans also imported muslin, pearls, jewels & precious stones from South India. Iron goods, especially cutlery, was also exported to Rome. After the establishment of Parthian rule in

India. Iran, a part of the Silk trade got diverted towards India. Sometimes silk from the North-western part was brought to South Indian ports and then sent to the Roman empire.

In return the Romans exported to India wine, amphorae and various types of pottery which are extensively found at various sites. For instance, two types of Roman pottery found at South Indian sites are amphorae jars & terra sigillata. Amphorae are jars with a large oval body, narrow cylindrical neck, and two handles. Terra sigillata is a red glazed pottery, decorated by being pressed into a mould. Remains of these pottery were found at Arikamedu near Pondicherry, Uraiyur, Kanchipuram etc.

This trade with Rome was highly in favour of India as Pliny mentions about drain of Roman gold to India because of this maritime trade. This is also evident from the discovery of large number of Roman coins in excavations. Roman coins discovered in India comprise almost 170 finds from about 130 sites. Most of the coins belong to the reign of emperor Augustus & Tiberius. There are silver coins known as 'denarii' & gold ones known as 'aurei'. Roman bronze coins are also found at several places, mostly in Tamil Nadu. At some areas where there were well-established currency system, Roman coins may have been melted down for bullion.

This long distance trade with the Roman empire also had its impact on the Indian economy, such as -

i) Promoted urban settlements - Graeco-Roman sources mention many towns & cities & use the term 'emporium' for coastal towns associated with foreign trade. Sangam poems also describe many urban centres. Champakalakehmi has also given an account of urban centres of early South India, such as Madurai, Kanchipuram, Kavepattinam, Uraiyur, Muchiri etc. Thus, the growing trade with the Roman empire also led to prosperity and thus promoted urban settlements.

ii) Encouraged various crafts & arts - Arts & Crafts saw a remarkable growth. ~~Due~~ Due to huge demand of iron cutlery & precious gems & stones, crafts associated with them flourished. Various texts talk about these craftsmen - carpenters, ~~black~~ blacksmiths, goldsmiths, potters etc. Dyeing was also a thriving craft in some south Indian cities. Coin-minting was also an important craft, various kinds of coins emerged during this period, such as coins made up of gold, silver, lead, bronze, copper etc. Handicrafts of ivory & different kinds of beads were also found in excavations.

iii) Emergence of organized guilds - Artisans & traders started organizing themselves in guilds. Various donative inscriptions mention these guilds. Pataka stories also mention about these guilds. Artisans & traders acquired greater

importance due to thriving trade with the Roman empire and thus started organizing themselves around these guilds. These guilds also issued some coins & scales

Thus, trade with the Roman empire led to greater urbanisation & monetisation of the Indian economy and also led to better organization of traders & artisans.