

## 8. FOREIGN TRADE AND CONTACTS

(100 BC to 300 AD)

Anjali and Raju went to the market before going to school. They met their teacher when they came out after buying a note book from the stationery shop. Three of them walked together to the school.

Teacher asked them - 'Your bags are very nice. From where did you buy them?

Anjali answered- 'Didi, our father got them from some shop in Raipur.'

Teacher looked at the bags carefully and said- "See, there is the label of the company which made it. Oh! it has come from Calcutta". Anjali and Raju were also surprised. Teacher pointed towards the shops and said, "See there are so many shops. Several things are sold here. People living in distant villages and cities make these things and businessmen bring the things here and sell.' Raju asked- 'Didi, are foreign goods also available here?'

Teacher said, "Yes, we get goods which are made not only in our country but even those which are made in China, Japan, America, Africa and Europe".

Anjali recalled her history lesson and asked- 'Did India have trade relations with foreign countries at the time of Ashoka?'" By this time they had reached school so the teacher said, "We shall discuss this with everyone in class."

The teacher began telling them about trade in early times- 'At the time of Ashoka there were big businessmen. They were called "shreshtti" or 'shetti'. The word 'seth' originated from this term. They would go to distant places and bring goods from there. For example, they would bring pearls, gold, precious stones, sandal, timber, animal skins etc. from the southern states, and sell beautiful pots, expensive cloth, copper etc. to them.'

**At that time there were no trains or buses. So how would they transport their goods ? Think about it and discuss.**

During that period several businessmen would go together for trading. They would load their goods on oxen, donkeys, horses and camels. As they would pass through villages and jungles they would travel by day and camp at a place in the night. But if they were crossing a desert, they would rest by day and travel at night. They had to be prepared to face the dangers of robbers, floods and storms during their journey. They would halt and stay either in the inns or the Buddhist monasteries. In this way they would sell their items in a city and buy good and cheap items from there. Some traders would chose the sea-route, and travel to Indonesia, China, the Arab countries, Iran, Africa etc.



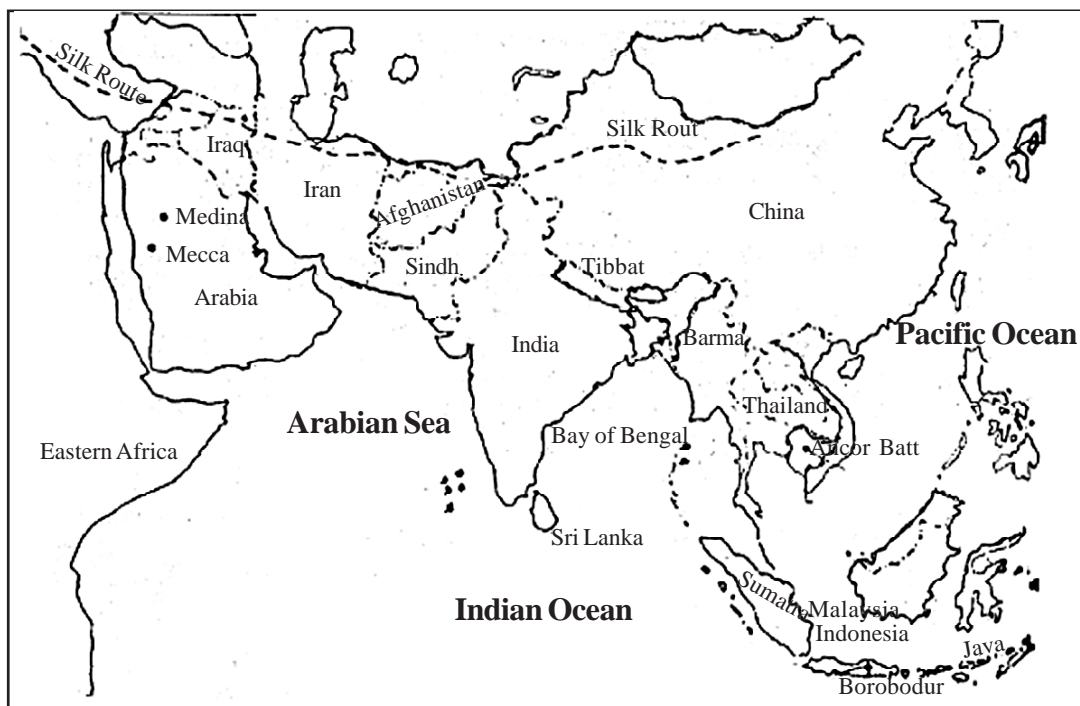
Even in those days rich people would pay a handsome price to possess imported items. The shettys earned a good profit. With the money earned they would construct huge houses and temples for their gods. They gave donations for Buddhist stupas and monasteries too.

Anjali again asked the teacher- ‘Did the people continue trade with other countries after Ashoka?’

The teacher answered- ‘Yes! this trade continued, in fact it increased later on. In the previous chapter you had read how the rulers of Greece and Iran had conquered some states in the north west. Their traders and messengers started coming here and Indian traders began going there.

When the Mauryan empire declined, the Shunga dynasty started ruling Magadha and in the south the Sattavahanas came to power. During this period several Greek rulers came and established their rule in the north west. Of these Shakas and Kushans were the prominent ones. The greatest Kushan ruler was Kanishka. His empire extended from Aamu Dariya in Central Asia to Mathura in India. Several central Asian tribes invaded from the north west. Their empire was very large- it included parts of India, Afghanistan, Iran, Ujbekistan etc. All these happenings led to an increase in trade with these countries. Indian traders could go to all these countries without any problem. Several monasteries were established there by the monks.

There was a route from China to the Mediterranean Sea across Central Asia. This route was used for trading the silk of China. Therefore it was called the Silk Route. Remains of the centres of Indian traders and Buddhist monasteries have been



**Map 8.1 EASTERN, MIDDLE AND SOUTH-EASTERN ASIA**



found here. This shows that people here used to travel far and wide for trade and to preach their religion.

Indian traders did not stop here. They went further ahead upto China and in the west upto Alexandria in Egypt, and also to Greece and Rome. Indian traders usually took the sea route and transported their goods upto Alexandria; from there Greek and other European traders would take those goods to their countries.

### **Locate Alexandria, Greece, Iran and Iraq on the Silk route on map number 8.1**

Several children asked- “What things did the Indian traders sell and what would they buy from those countries ?”

The teacher answered- “In our country we get several spices like pepper, cardomom, cinnamon etc. They are not found in Europe. But it is used a lot in their cooking. Indian traders would take spices there. Then there was a great demand for silk fabric, sandal wood, ornaments made of precious stones, ivory, peacocks, monkeys etc. In return traders brought gold, coral etc. to India.

Find out which items are sent abroad for sale these days ?

Now Raju questioned- “Did the traders of those countries come to India ?”

The teacher explained- “Yes, in India there were settlements of Roman traders. They would come and stay there and carry on their business. As people of Greece, Iran and Central Asia had made states in India, Indians also had their states in countries of South Eastern Asia like Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia etc.

## **IMPACT OF FOREIGN CONTACTS**

In the previous section we had read how Indians came in contact with people of other countries by establishing states in each others countries; having trade; spreading their religion etc. In this manner several people from Greece and Central Asia had settled in India. Several Indians too had settl-ed in other countries. This had a great impact on the life styles and thinking of the people. Let us see what were the influences.

## **COINS**

Coins were very important in trading. At the time of Ajatashatru and Ashoka coins were made by punching marks on the copper and silver pieces. But, the coins of the Indo Greeks were made by casting them in moulds. The king’s picture and his name were imprinted on them. Indian kings were influenced by this and they also started getting the coins moulded.

**Look at the picture of coins and find out which coins are punch marked and which are moulded? Also think about the coins of today.**



Pic. 8.1 Hind Yavan Coins



Pic. 8.2 Strcture of Kanishk Coins

## SCULPTURE

This period also saw the emergence of two schools of art- the Gandhara School and the Mathura school. Gandhara is situated in the north west. It was ruled by the Greeks and the Kushans. We can see the influence of Greek style in the sculptures of Gandhara. These statues have numerous folds in the dresses which is typical of the Greek style.

The statues made in Mathura do not have this influence. Sculptors of Mathura gave more importance to the healthy physical shape than the folds. This can be understood by comparing the pictures given here.



Pic. 8.3 Buddha image in Gandhara style



Pic. 8.4 Mahaveer swami image in the Mathura style

## RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

There was exchange of knowledge with Romans and Greeks on subjects like mathematics, astronomy and astrology. Greek literature related with these subjects was translated in Sanskrit. Indian scholars adopted things like seven days in a week, twelve zodiac signs etc. whereas the others adopted the Indian concept of zero and decimal.

Greek travellers have written about Indian religion and philosophy in their history and geography books. The Buddhist monks and followers who had gone to China, Asia and South East Asia, left a great impact on the religion and philosophy of the people residing there. Temples were constructed in the south eastern countries like the grand temples in India- for example Ankorvat temple of Cambodia and the Buddhist temple 'Brobodur' in Java, which is the biggest of the region even today. Similarly, Ramayana is very popular in Indonesia.

In this period medical science developed a lot. Charak Samhita and Sushrutha Samhita are the two world famous manuscripts on medicine. This was an important period in the history of India.



## EXERCISE

### I. Fill in the blanks with the following words (moulds, label, medical, gandhara)

1. Sushruta Samhita has \_\_\_\_\_ information.
2. Coins were moulded in \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is situated in the north west of India.
4. For identification companies put a \_\_\_\_\_ on the goods manufactured by them.

### II. Give answer in one sentence:

1. Which route was taken by Indian traders to take their goods to Alexandria?
2. Name the famous king of the Kushans?.
3. With which countries did India have trade relations?
4. Name the spices grown in India?

### III. Answer the questions:

1. What is the 'Silk route'?
2. Besides conducting their business, what other works were done by the traders?
3. Name the things which were in great demand in foreign countries at that time.
4. What are the specialities of sculptures of the Gandhara school?
5. Give examples of the influence of Indian religion and philosophy on the South East Asian countries.
6. Why were coins made?
7. Why were the traders called 'Shetty'?

### IV. Eligibility extension

Visit the main museum of our state to observe the statues of Buddha and write down their special features.

