Chapter V
CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between India and Roman Empire had become a matter of discussion among the historians in the recent years. The commercial connection between the two lands is corroborated by many archaeological, literary and numismatic sources. But in our survey, India’s commercial relations with Western Asia has become a predominant factor which provides Indo-Roman commercial intercourse a suitable place because at that time of the west Asian regions were occupied by the Romans. But attempt has been made not to dilute the whole trade connections as Indo-Roman but as Indo-West Asian commercial intercourse by making threadbare discussions of trade with different regions. But the constraints are the lack of sufficient evidences to prop up our work. The paucity of archaeological evidences does not provide a clear picture of trade. In this connection, the contribution of foreign writers, geographers and historians are immense and are supported further by our internal literary evidences. Indian literary sources about this trade are quite inadequate because most of the literary sources were religious and Hindu religion was not permitting that type of foreign trade due to fear of losing caste. Again the wealth earned by the trade was regarded as the black wealth. The numismatic sources are quite helpful in this regard to construct the history. A large number of hoards of Roman coins, Persian coins provide a good idea about the trade and clearly symbolizes that the trade was in favour of India. Some of the recent excavations in West Asian regions like, Ostia, Pompeiopolis, Portus, Alexandria, Cana, Bernice etc have enriched our knowledge in this matter. The excavations at Arikamedu in India brought a complete revolutionary change in the Indo-Roman trade connections. The excavated materials indicate the exactness and reliability of the information furnished by Greek and Latin geographers. Excavations carried out at a number of places in Western and Southern India have yielded significant materials to show their affinity with the Mediterranean region. The places like Broach, Maheshawara, Navadatoli, Paithana, Nevasa, Naski,
Kondapur, Dwaraka, Yelleswaram etc. have given us the objects of West Asian origin to confirm the literary version of classical authors. The excavation reports and archaeological evidences were handicapped because most of the products, which were exported from India, were perishable and it is the reason which leave no trace of archaeological evidence of these products. Still then, with the help of foreign accounts, indigenous literary sources and epigraphic sources, an attempt has been made to construct the trade relations between two ancient lands, having a hoary past.

The archaeological remains in India are indicative of the fact of commercial relations between two sides, which was very close and prosperous. But one thing, which creates the greatest hurdle to draw conclusion, is the non-availability of Indian goods profusely in West Asian region. It has been explained by Warmington, who is of the view that the Roman subjects constantly visited India but Indians seldom visited the Roman Empire excepting Alexandria and Asia Minor. The Persian and Arab merchants were playing the role of intermediaries and were carrying the Indian goods to West Asian regions and Roman markets also. Again the perishable nature of Indian goods hardly leaves any trace. In this connection it may be expected that the further excavations in the West Asian region will add more facts to bridge up the gap in the relations.

It is usually observed that the trade relations between the two territories are largely dependent on the political relation. Unless and until a cordial political relation is not established between the two lands, the trade and commercial intercourse may not flourish well. From ancient times Indians have been accused of insularism, isolation, and utter lack of any contact with contemporary world. Through this statement does not contain much water but for the first time the wall of separation was broken by Cyrus who occupied Gandhara and collected the tribute. This political invasion opened the floodgates of trade opportunities. Though the trade relations between India and western Asia was continuing from the Indus
Valley Civilization, it got a boost with the establishment of political relations. Again Darius dispatched Skylax to explore lower Indus. In course of the voyage the fleet of Skylax touched the Egyptian ports on the Red Sea thus ensuring the safety of ports on the West Asian coast as well. In this set up, the trade relations between India and Western Asia increased in a considerable extent, which is clearly evident from Susa inscription. Herodotus observed that the Persians had a saying that Darius was a tradesman and in view of this admission, his real intention of discovering the sea-route to Indian may be well realized. Again the invasion of Alexander is claimed to have “laid open” to the Greeks “the passage of Hells Pont”. His one objective appears to have been to extend the Persian commerce to the Greeks of his generation, not only by discovering the arduous land routes but also by opening up the sea-ways,’ with the result the Greek commercial colonists penetrated almost every possible areas of world. With the coming of Mauryas, the trade relations attained a new height. The cultural contacts between India and West Asia symbolize the cordial commercial relations. Though literary sources, archeological evidences and numismatic sources don’t throw much light about the commerce of Mauryas but the elaborate official arrangement of Mauryas to control the trade clearly signals about the developed trade relations between India and West Asia. Ashoka’s good relations with the rulers of Syria, Egypt and Macedonia and Cyrene also acted as a boon for trade and commerce. His desire to spread Buddhism gave a boost to foreign trade and commerce.

The migration of Sakas, Hunas and Kushanas changed the chemistry of relations. Peace and stability brought by Satavahanas, Kushanas and Augustus to Rome was primarily responsible for commercial contacts, which touched its peak. The exchange of embassies further improved the political as well as commercial relations. The peaceful rule of Cholas, and Pandyas in south Indian region created a conducive atmosphere for trade and commerce. Analyzing these things it may clearly be concluded that a good political relation, peace and stability in the region

297
provided a helping hand to trade and commercial relations. In a bad political atmosphere, the trade relations may not prosper well without the political backings, which is an essential ingredient for a developed commercial intercourse.

The trade and commercial interactions between India and West Asia facilitated the cultural intermingling and enriched the mosaic culture of India. The traders were the cultural ambassadors who carried the cultural elements to distant lands in addition to their commercial goods. And this is clearly visible in Ancient Indian administration, culture, way of living, art, architecture etc. In the sphere of administration, Mauryan administration bears close resemblance with Greeks, and Iranian counterparts. The impacts on art and architecture are widely felt in different spheres but it creates confusion among the to trace out the origin of every part. Religion and rituals practised by Indians have a close nexus with West Asian counterpart and the possible reason of this close connection may be they were the two branches of Indo-European stock. If a microscopic study will be made, it may be found that there is no such area in Indian culture where the impacts of West Asian people were not found in ancient period. So, it symbolizes again that there was a close commercial connection between the two lands in different periods despite unsteady political connections. The cultural immigration took a new turn with the foreign invasions and Ashoka's new initiative to spread the Buddhism in distant lands. A fertile ground was prepared by these political interactions and commercial intercourse on which the seeds of foreign cultural elements sprouted freely.

In this connection it is very difficult to decide the extent of cultural mobilization because not only West Asian region contributed a lot to the Indian culture but also India had enriched their culture in different dimensions. The Indian philosophies, drama, literature had created a stir among the intellectuals to explore the cultural horizon of India. Therefore, the flow of cultural elements was a two way process and it is difficult to determine who had contributed how much.
Sometimes the historians get confused to decide the origin of archaeological products excavated at different places. This confusion became strong, when the Indian people started to produce the Roman goods in imitation, which creates difficulty to segregate the original Roman products from the Indian imitation of Roman products. For an example, from a series of recent studies it is becoming increasingly clear that many of the supposed finds of Roman pottery are in fact indigenous Indian ceramic products. The Red Polished Ware (RPW), once considered a Roman import is in fact an Indian product that was originated in Gujarat. At Amreli, Black Polished Ware precedes RPW in the First Century B.C., identical with RPW in composition and technique and differing from it only in colour. As the technique of production, which was used in Gujarat, was prior to the Roman imports in the region, it is reasonable to conclude that RPW is not a direct imitation of Roman Samarian 'ware which it superficially resembles. The Rouletted ware found in India is a regional product of South-East and has been dated from the second century B.C. to First Century A.D. at Arikamedu, as Vimla Begley’s excavation report points out. Mould Made ware of the Western Deccan has clear analogies in shape and decoration with Hellenistic pottery and metal work. The Mould Made ware from Nevesa is dated to first century B.C. So the foreign prototypes must be earlier and antedate Roman imports. Therefore, it may be concluded that MW is itself a local product made in Western India. Similarly the Roman coins, Roman bronze have been questioned about the origin.

The Indian coins were also not left untouched by the foreign influence. Until the beginning of 2nd century B.C., the extensive modification of Indian coinage was caused by the foreign influence. Although foreign influences can’t be said to have affected Indian coinage very extensively even from that date still its faint influences can be traced in some respects from much earlier times on certain though not on all types of Indian coins. The main alien influences, which affected the Indian currencies, were Greek, Greco-Bactrian, Persian, Parthian. Roman and Sassanion.
Among them the impact of Roman and Greek currencies are largely felt on Indian currencies. Sometimes there coins were brought from the respective countries in exchange of goods and sometimes these types of coins were produced in India, imitating the foreign coins. It may be concluded that the Indian coin was greatly modified by coming in contacts with the coins of West Asian Countries in general and Roman coins in particular.

India’s trade with West Asian countries provided an ample opportunity to the traders to earn their fortune by exporting various goods which these countries desperately requiring due to their geographical compulsions. The unfavourable climate, barren lands of West Asian countries made the hard working people handicapped to meet their needs. But in contrary, the fertile soil, the suitable climate, rich flora; and fauna and strong centralized peaceful govts, under different dynasties in India provided a conducive climate for India’s trade with West Asian Countries. The natural harbours and the geographical continuity with West Asian countries became an added advantage in this connection. Inspite of so many advantages, the Indian trading systems was crippled under heavy cultural scrutiny. The Indian caste system put a stigma on trade, fearing the loosing of caste system by coming in contact with foreigners. Again the fearful Brahmins were casting aspersions on Vaishyas by depicting the wealth accumulated through trade as black wealth.

The Indian caste system did not permit the other castes except the Vaishyas to conduct the trading activities. Hence the trading activities did not get a proper boost from the cultural set up instead of geographical advantages. These cultural barriers became the stumbling blocks on the path of trade and commerce.

Various economic organizations sprang up to cater the needs of trading communities. Among them the guild was an important organization, which played its pivotal role in the commercial transactions. It fixed the prices of goods not providing an opportunity to the unscrupulous traders to manipulate the prices in
internal as well as international markets. It’s function like banks i.e. giving loans to
the businessman, taking mortgage etc., facilitated the transactions in trade. The
spread of technical know-how to the coming generation in the caste line is regarded
another advantage in the guild system. But the most important contribution of guild
was – it was producing huge quantity of qualitative luxurious goods to satiate the
needs of foreign people as well as rulers who were demanding these goods in a vast
quantity. In the absence of guilds, to meet the needs of these people might be a
difficult problem. Again it provided an opportunity to prepare qualitative goods in
an organized way, which might be impossible for the individual worker.

The products which were mainly exported from India to West Asian
countries were-food products, textiles, copal, indigo, lac, animal stock etc.. But the
goods, which were mainly demanded by India from Western Asia, were quite less
in comparison to goods exported in quantity. Arabian incense, storax, sweet clover,
figs, dates, wine, tin, lead, glass, orpiment etc. were the main products, which were
imported into India. Again the horses of West Asian countries and slaves were also
imported into India. Taking these goods into account it can be presumed that the
trade was in favour of India. The hoards of coins found at different places in India
substantiate the fact that the west Asian countries were paying heavy prices for their
exorbitant needs for Indian luxurious goods. And that is the only reason why Pliny
wailed for the drain of Roman wealth in exchange of Indian luxury products. But
the Arabs, Parthians, Jews, Indo-Greeks and Persians took a large chunk of the
profit of this transaction because they were the intermediaries of this trade. These
unscrupulous traders took the advantage of lack of price controlling mechanism in
the West Asian markets and dictated the price of luxurious goods which were in
heavy demands in their markets. Again Pliny did not take into account the market
prices of their goods in their respective countries and the difficulties of traders who
were traversing a long distance braving the dangers in the long routes. Whatever
may be the situation, it clearly establishes the fact that the trade was in favour of
India. Sometimes the barter system was prevalent inspite of money economy though Kautilya refers it as a despicable thing. It was a prevalent from of exchange of goods. In internal as well as external trade this practice was followed though it was rare in its occurrence. During the Mauryan period, the Superintendent of Commerce was scrutinizing and ascertaining the value of local goods before an exchange with foreign goods. Otherwise the money economy was the widely prevalent form of exchange. And that's why India had accumulated huge amount of foreign coins in exchange of its goods in the foreign markets.

The trade routes followed by the traders were not always smooth. In the land routes they were facing the dangers from the tribal people, pirates, and jungle animals. They were paying heavy taxes at different places and constantly getting harassed under different rulers. Again the Indian traders were carrying their goods through the traditional carts and chariots dragged by oxen, camels etc. This traditional mode of transportation encumbered the traders to carry a huge amount of goods for a long distance. The caravan traders, therefore, moving united with armed guards and taking the help of experienced men to guide in the routes. The sea-routes were not totally trouble free because the unruly behaviour of monsoon and dangers posed by the pirates. The greatest obstacle of the traders who were carrying the goods through sea routes was the ship that was not capable enough to bear the brunt of storms and winds. But in contrast, the ships and boats of Arabs & Romans were strong enough in comparison to Indian ships. Therefore, the Indian merchants were carrying the goods up to the port of Alexandria from which the Arabs, Parthians, Greeks carried the goods to west Asian as well as Roman markets. Through the Indian merchants had a good knowledge of monsoon; their inferior quality of shipbuilding did not permit them to traverse a long distance to earn the better fortunes. Usually the traders preferred the land routes than the sea routes to carry their goods to distant lands.
The traders followed different routes taking their convenience into consideration. These traders often exchanged their goods and buy the local products on the routes to sell in the distant lands. Again peace and stability in the region attracts the Caravan traders to pass through that regions where they were provided with all types of opportunities and facilities. The peace, stability and prosperity of the region stimulated their business transactions and that is the reason why they prefer the routes, which passed through the prosperous regions with political stability. And it was the duty of rulers to maintain the law and order situation in the region and to provide security to traders who were giving a large sum of money as tax to their exchequer. During the reigns of Mauryas, Kushanas, Satavahanas, they took the utmost care of traders and provided every opportunity to flourish the commercial activities to a great extent. The south Indian rulers like Cholas, Pandyas and Chalukyas were many steps ahead in this direction. They not only provided active support to the trading activities but also participated in these commercial activities. The huge profits amassed out of trade attracted even some Brahmins throwing the stigma attached behind this. It clearly represents that the trading activities and the wealth accumulated out of this trading activities was not considered reprehensible equally in all parts of India.

India’s trade with West Asian countries passed through many ups and downs under different rulers, and in different circumstances. In the cultural front, the Mauryan rulers took the greatest advantage by mingling the western culture with traditional Indian culture and it produced a composite culture, which continued forever. But in the economic front the Kushanas extracted much more benefits than any other regimes. The Kushanas by their unifying conquests helped to open commerce by land between Western Asia and India and gained due prominence in this trade for north-west of India within easy reach from several directions.

The decline of trade initiated during the second century A.D. when the Roman Empire started to disintegrate and Parthians rose their monstrous head.
Again the Chinese traders established the direct link with the Roman people by ending the intermediary role of Indian traders. In the third century A.D., there was a falling off in the trade and for a time India, though much written about it in the west, faded away into a land of fancy and fables. The changed scenario of trade compelled the Indian traders to divert their attention towards South East Asia, which provided much greener pastures. The Indo-West Asian trade though passed into oblivion for a short period, again it revived with the upcoming of Sindh merchants in the 11th century A.D.