Chapter III
TRADE DURING THE MAURYAN PERIOD

Introduction

The establishment of Nanda dynasty ushered an era of large empire and absorbed the petty states of Northern India. Northern India by virtue of its fertile soil, favourable climate and its magnificent waterways must have from the beginning enjoyed exceptional opportunities provided by nature for economic prosperity. The strong administration of Nandas and Mauryas advanced the trade and industry more rapidly.\(^1\) The commercial interests of Nandas in commercial development are perhaps indicated by their introduction of a new standard silver coins,\(^2\) namely the punch marked coins.

The effects of Alexander’s invasion did not affect adversely the economic condition of the territories subdued by his arms but his measure for laying the foundation of an extensive commerce between India and the Hellenistic World took root immediately. The conquest of Northwest India by Chandragupta Maurya and consequent victories over small principalities, gave a foundation of strong empire. For three generations the Mauryas ensured internal security and immunity from foreign aggressions. Ashoka’s vigorous propaganda further paved the way for the spread of Indian culture to distant Hellenistic states. It is not unreasonable to suppose that these favourable conditions were attended with a phenomenal development of industry as well as inland & foreign trade of the empire under Maurya rule.\(^3\)

His son maintained the wise policy of friendship with Hellenistic powers started by Chandragupta Maurya after the repulse of Seleucus and grandsons must have favoured the expansion of Indian trade with West Asia and Egypt.\(^4\) The main commerce between the West Asia and India was borne partly by land routes (the northern one passing through Bactria and southern though Gedrosia and Carmania, Persia and Susiana) and partly by the sea routes (though Gerrha on the west coast) of the Persian Gulf.\(^5\) Alexandria was the principal emporium of trade between India and the West.\(^6\) But these routes were not free from piracy
and some times the traders were taking the help of armed men in order to protect their goods.  

The trade during the Mauryan period had reached at a level of prosperity, which is witnessed from the systematic arrangement of Mauryan administration to regulate the trade. The active encouragement of commerce was contemplated as a duty of the state is illustrated by the measures included in Kautilya’s scheme of state colonization of rural areas; they included working of mines and forests, the construction and security of trade routes and the foundation of market towns. In order to facilitate the trade, the Arthasastra recommends the appointment the Superintendent of Shipping, Port Commissioner, Superintendent of Commerce, Superintendent of Tolls etc. They were entrusted with different duties to carry out the trade smoothly and stringent punishment was given to the people for the violation of trade rules and regulations. It is also assumed that the ship building industry was also controlled by the state, according to Megasthenes. These things point out the fact that there was a flourished trade during the Mauryan period.

Among the products of export, the most important things were timber, bamboo, dyes, food grains; which were highly praised in West Asian countries. A variety of livestock were exported from India were hunting dogs, elephants, peacocks, parrots, maina, pheasants and snakes. The western people were so fond of Indian animals that they were paraded in royal procession. Again spices, vegetable products, textiles were also exported to West Asian countries. The Indian list of imports was comparatively small against the list of exports. The goods of import were, fruits, wines, crude glass, asphalt and antimony etc. Therefore, it is presumed that the trade was in favour of India.

In the sphere of cultural contacts, Mauryan period opened up a new chapter. The art, architecture, sculpture, literature, all were influenced more or less by the contacts of West Asian countries. There are enough evidences, which supports the fact that Mauryan administration and ruling style of kings were under the due influence of western countries. On the basis of this cultural contact
it may deduced that there must be a trade relation of West Asian countries with India.

The reconstruction of Indian maritime history of the period of our study is not an easy job because we have limited source materials, both literary and archaeological.\textsuperscript{16} Large number of the literary sources of Ancient India is spiritual and religious in their contents. The important source materials of this period are Kautilya's Arthasastra and Megasthenes' Indica, in addition with Jatakas and other sources. The contents of Indica and Arthasastra throw more light on social, political and economic conditions of the people than the commercial contacts. But Jatakas, in this context provides valuable information about the trade routes, trading organization and trading activities. Therefore, Jataka sources are referred at different places to provide authenticity to the information. Foreign sources like Strabo's Geography, Arrian's Indica and others are more helpful to establish a contact between India and West Asia. But the archaeological sources have some limitations with regards to the foreign trade through sea.\textsuperscript{17} Ashokan inscriptions are not eloquent about this foreign trade except the rock Edict XIII, which gives the names of five contemporary Hellenistic monarchs.\textsuperscript{18} The mention of these five Kings has its own historical interest.\textsuperscript{19} The three major powers among there are, namely Antiochos of Syria, Alexander of Epirus and Ptolemy-II Philadelphus of Egypt. Antiochus-I, the son of Seleukus had relations with both Macedonians and Ptolemy. Due to the matrimonial ties among them three different dynasties, the hostility between the major powers of Hellenistic wings came to low ebb.\textsuperscript{20} The closeness of the Hopkines and Mauryas may have led to do with some trade relations. A version of the major Rock Edict of Ashoka has been found at Sopara, which identifies its importance as a great trading centre.\textsuperscript{21} The location at Sopara may point to a direct route to Southern Arabia or the Southern end of the Red Sea. Given the Ptolemaic interest in trade with East and establishing the ports of Lyos Hormus and Berenike in third C.B.C. such a possibility can’t be discounted the motive behind the attack of Ptolemy Philadelphos on the Nabateans was to capture the Wabatean trade.\textsuperscript{22} The maritime links between the west coast of India and Red
Sea might have been limited to the Southern Nabatean ports but extended North towards Gaza and Egypt under Ptolemies. If the ports of Southern Arabia had direct contacts with Sopara there would have been an interest on the part of Ptolemy to control these ports.\textsuperscript{23}

On the basis of mere mention of names of the Hellenistic rulers in Rock Edicts, it would be imprudent to think that we had good commercial contacts with themselves but the possibility of trade can’t be condoned. Again the excavation reports from different places like Pataliputra, Mathura and other places are indicating that there was a good cultural contact, which also in a round way establishes the fact that the trade relation was there in between these lands. The first authentic proof of Indian influence in the Mediterranean region is revealed by the excavation at Memphis dating back to 200 B.C. where an Indian figurine of an Aryan woman has been unearthed, reveals the proof of Indian influence in the Mediterranean region\textsuperscript{24}. The help of assumptions and presumptions, an effort has been made to present a clear picture.

**Trade Routes**

It is necessary to deal with topography of the region before going into the details of trade routes of West Asia with India. Persia which extended along the coast of Gulf and Assyria was contiguous to Persia and Susiana viz. Babylonia and a large tract of the country around\textsuperscript{25}. Strabo describes Syria bound on the east by Euphrates, on the south by Arabia Felix and Egypt on the west\textsuperscript{26}. Next he mentions Judaea, the ‘Persian Gulf and Arabia inhabited by Nabataeans whose capital was Petra and also by Sabaeans whose metropolis was Mariaba viz. Saba.\textsuperscript{27} According to Pliny;” Syria as once the greatest lands and distinguished by many names” occupying the coast of Phoenisian sea.\textsuperscript{28} Then Seleucus Nikator founded came Mesopotamia, which was at the confluence of Tigris. The banks of Euphrates were occupied by. “Nomad of Arabia” as far as the deserts of Syria from which it turned to south, leaving the solitary deserts of Palmyra.\textsuperscript{29}

When India became a part of Achemenid Empire, India’s isolation was broken and she had the chance to come into closer contact with the western
Again Alexander wished to improve and cheapen the means of communication by sea and thereby united the richest and most prominent parts of his empire, India, Balylon & Egypt. He sent Nearchus to explore the Persian Gulf and sea route from India to Balylone with an eye to secure the channel of trade between India and Mesopotamia. He intended to explore the south Arabian coast to connect India with Egypt. He had set up most of the colonies with an eye on economic value, which emerged as the great commercial centre of trade in the later phase.

The route from Taxila to Bactria crossed the river Indus at Udabhanda and proceeded towards Varsapura near Shahabazgarhi. From there the route passing through Hoti Mardan reached Pushkalavati. Then the route entering through the Khyber Pass entered into the region of Kapis. There were three routes across Hindukush into Bactria. Once an Indian trader had reached Bactria, he had a direct route before him for the West Asian markets through Seleucia and Babylon. Seleucia and Babylon, for long served as emporiums of Indian goods. Another route, which passed through Khawak pass and Bamyan, was very suitable for trade and transport between Kapisa and Bactria. The third route, which was diverted from Bamiyan and passed through Robat, Dandan, Shikan and Karakotal and then proceeding along the river Derra Yousuf, it went to Bactria from some place near Mazar-I-Sarif.

Bactria was an important place for the trade between India and West Asia. Numismatic evidence suggests that the scale and volume of trade at Bactria was quite high. As a junction of land routes, it controlled Oxus trade with India and exercised a commanding position in the Indo-Syrian trade. The relations between India and Syria, in economic as well as cultural sphere were quite intimate and Asoka sent his philanthropical mission to Amtyioka (Antiochus II Theos) the king of Syria. The industrial development of Syria was primarily based on the supplies of Indian raw materials. It had many prosperous industrial centres such as Antioch, Palmyra and Damascus. Antioch was a significant city, second only to Alexandria in political importance and none in
wealth. There were several routes between Seleucia and Antioch but the normal one crossed the river Euphrate. Ashoka had relations with the neighbouring kings of Egypt, Magas, king of Macedonia and Alexander who ruled either Epirus, or Corinth. To most of these places the routes went from Antioch, either through Asia Minor or along the cost of Mediterranean touching the famous markets of Sidon, Tyre, and Gaza to Alexandria.

King Ptolemy Philadelphus who had commercial intercourse with Ashoka had founded the city of Alexandria, which became the principal emporium of trade between India and West. The coastal voyage from Indian ports such as Tamralipti, Barygaza, Patala etc. to Alexandria was very tedious and fraught with recurrent danger of piracy. According to E.H. Warmington, the routes lay from Arabian Euadaemon following round all the gulf coasted along Arabia and then along Asiatic coast of Carminia and Gedrosia to the India and then Southward. Again the traders started from Arabia Eudaemon or from Cane, from there they went directly to Patala. The traders who were not desiring to go to Indus directly sailed from Arabia or from Cane proceeded to Sigerus or Melizigara some where near Bombay. Because Barygaza was suitable place for this trade. Those who were intending to go direct to Tamil land after leaving Ocelis, of Arabia. Eudaemon, Cane or Cape of Gurdafui in July and they go across the Malabar marts.

Traders usually preferred the sea routes. It was not only convenient to carry goods with less transportation cost but also time saving. The Arthasastra in one section compares the relative importance of the land route and sea route. Quoting the ancient authorities Kautilya observes that according to them, the sea and river routes were more profitable than the land routes, because the cost of water transport was cheaper than the land routes. But Kautilya was not ready to accept this theory. According to him. the sea routes were full of dangers like attack of pirates, hurricane, storm etc. While pointing out the dangers of sea route Kautilya observes that open sea routes were more difficult than the coastal sea routes because on coastal routes there were ports
where the goods were sold and bought easily. In the same way, the river route in comparison with sea routes was much easier. If any difficulty arose, it could easily be manipulated. According to Moti Chandra, Kautilya, was an orthodox Brahmin and that was the reason why Kautilya did not prefer the sea voyage. But the concept of Moti Chandra is however may not be acceptable in this context because Kautilya has pointed out the inherent difficulties of the traders while they were traveling through the sea routes. Again Buddhist texts also refer about shipwrecks and sea dangers. The ships during this period were not strong enough to withstand the hurricanes in the mid sea and other natural calamities.

**Commodities of Export and Import During the Mauryan period**

**Export**

Mauryan period does not provide much evidence about the goods of export and import. Scanty evidence provided by Kautilya's Arthasastra, Megsthenes' Indica and Jataka stories, are not sufficient enough to bring a clear picture of goods of export and import. The chief exports from India were ivory, tortoise shells, pearls, pigments and dyes (especially indigo), rice, various medicinal substances, cotton and silk fabric. Timber was greatly demanded in West Asian countries and Indian timber was found in the temple of Ur also proves the fact. Kautilya refers, among others, to the following kinds of strong timber (Saradaruvarga) viz. Sala (teak-Taelona Grandis) Simsupa (black wood-Salbergia Sissue) and 16 kinds of sandal trees. Another celebrated Indian timber was ebony (Diospyrus) mentioned by Megasthenes. About this, Herodotus had also mentioned that the Indians and Ethiopians brought the logs of ebony among other gifts to the Persian King Darius I as tribute. As such ebony tribute was continuing from the days of Herodotus; it may be justly inferred that Indian ebony was exported from India to Persia from 6th C.B.C. to 3rd C.B.C. Megasthenes who had noted that ebony grew in the land of Prassi viz. Prayças or the Esterners, implying that ebony must have been cultivated in the Eastern part of India during that period. Again
the Indian bamboo, which highly praised by Pliny, also finds mention in the Arthasastra. Kautilya mentions 8 kinds of bamboos, which he calls by general name of Venu. Utaia, Cimiya, Cava, Vamsa, Satina, Kanaka and Bhalluka. Pliny, comparing the virtues of Indian reed admits that advantages possessed by India reeds however possessed by most of the approved kinds of bamboos found in Crete, although those of India are preferred. This statement implies that the Indian bamboo must have been definitely exported to West Asian ports. The question of preferring the Indian bamboo to those from Crete or from Italy itself could hardly have arisen.

During the days of Mauryas the goods, which were exported from India the most prominent were Indian copal, indigo and lac. It is very clear that various kinds of dyes must have been prepared in India from very early times. From the Jatakas, we come to know that yellow dye was prepared from the sunflower (Kusumbha) which grown in the king’s conservatories. Kautilya mentions, this flower along with certain other flowers, which were used for dyeing purposes. Another ingredient, which Kautilya calls Varnadhatu employed for colouring purposes, was the lac or lakasa, which seems to have been well known to him.

The Periplus reveals that “coloured lac” was exported from northwestern India to the east African ports, Adulius and Egypt. Apart from its use as a dye, lac appears to have been used to paint the lips and the feet in specific lines. It seems to have been used to colour the tips of the fingers, the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It was also used to colour the leather, wool and silk etc.

Another dye exported from India was the purple, which in its own right became celebrated among the Persians. The Indian purple at that time had to face the commercial competitions with other varieties; from the Caucasus (Hindu Kush) and Phoenicia. The Persians used the purple dye for their tunics, which several Greek writers had observed. Alexander found a “multitude of purple fishers came to him from Phoenicia. This gives an indication that at
that time Phoenicians also traded in dyes. Neither Herodotus, nor Strabo, nor Pliny refers to Indian dyes. Strabo's reference from Megasthenes to Indian dyes and Pliny's mention of the indicum are understood as allusion.

It should not be interpreted that there was no historical evidence of dyes. Megasthenes saw how Indians had arrayed "themselves in garments dyed of bright colours" and he also noted that dressing in "grey-coloured clothes" among them was also a custom. Various colours like the yellow, blue, golden and saffron dyes are mentioned in the Jatakas. Kautilya also knew the saffron flower. The Cyrens came to the Mauryan Empire and probably came to know about the dyes. Cyrene was renowned for the production of a special herb, the silphium plant, used in a variety of ways and exported to various parts of the then known world which could have included India.

About the export of food grains, Kautilya refers to the purchase, sale, barter and manufacture of grains through state agency, their storage and use in periods of scarcity. But we hardly find any specific reference to the export of these commodities. Although it would not unreasonable if we presume that during the period of Mauryas, the food grains were exported to Egypt from Barygaza (Broach) by ships, "the food products were - wheat, rice, clarified butter and sea same oil" and other goods. Kautilya also refers about these products and he clearly notes the oil seeds from which the edible oils were extract for consumable purposes.

A variety of livestocks were exported from India including a number of Indian animals and birds. The animals were Indian hunting dogs, elephants and peacocks were undoubtedly most celebrated. Tropical beasts like tiger, bull, cattle and birds like parrot, maina, pheasant and even snakes were also exported. Peacock was highly praised in western society, which is clearly evident from the Book of Kings (6th C.B.C.). The export of Indian peacocks can be traced with greater certainly from the Baveru Jataka. The Indian peacock also reached Greece in 5th century B.C. and this must have been through commercial contacts with Persia. During Pericles (498-429 B.C.)
Pyrilampes, his friend and his son had a famous zoo in which the peacock was exhibited to the public. Still, when Alexander saw it in India, according to Allien, he was “struck with astonishment and so charmed with its beauty that he threatened the severest penalties against any one who would kill a peacock." The Indian peacock lastly reached in Rome as a commercial commodity in 1st C.B.C. Aufidius Lucro (a glutton) and a maternal grand farther of the Empress Livia, in 61 B.C., was the first Roman who taught the Romans the art of flattening peacocks. He had made it a business to sell his flattened peacocks and from the source of the profit he acquired an income of 60,000 sesterces (about 12,770 francs). Thus the peacock, which, in the early centuries before Christ, had been exported to Rome only by first century B.C. and positively by 61 B.C., it became an article of commerce. Among the other birds that were exported to West Asian countries were parrot, black grouse, guinea hens and pheasants.

In addition to the birds, the animals were also exported to Rome and other West Asian countries. In the grand procession organized by Antiocuhus IV (215-163 B.C.) it is known certainly that some Indian animals were seen in the capital at Antioch. In a representation of the return of “Dionysius from India”, it was shown as Dionysius measuring eighteen feet reclining upon an elephant’s back, clad in a purple coat and wearing a gold – would lace and his feet shod with shoes fastened by gold straps. The elephant had trappings of gold and round its head was, “an ivory crown in gold”. Many interesting objects among which were, “an ivory crown in gold”, followed the cart. The cart was followed by many interesting objects among which were “twenty six Indian oxen entirely white” a chariot drawn by elephants and there were also Indian women in that precession, the elephants too must have been from India itself. The tiger was another animal exported from India to West Asian countries. The Greeks were well aware of Indian wild beasts like tigers. Strabo relates how, according Megasthenes, “the largest tigers were found in the western part of India, almost twice the size of lion and of such strength that a tame one led by four persons, seized a mule by its hind leg, over powered it.
and dragged it to him.\textsuperscript{86} This indicates that Indian tiger must have been exported to Rome. Again the Indian elephants were not only exported to Asyria but also to Egypt during the Ptolemies. In the battle of Raphia, between Ptolemy and Antiochus (217 B.C) the Indian elephants had participated.\textsuperscript{87} In Italy, the Indian elephants were sent for the first time in the war with kings Pyrrhus in the year 281 B.C. these elephants were called Lucian oxen because they were seen for the first time in Luciania.\textsuperscript{88} The first harnessed elephants seen in Rome were in triumph of Pompeius Magus over Africa (65 B.C.) when they drew his chariot. The Hellenistic Kings required the Indian elephants to fight against enemies. Seleucus received 500 elephants as a part of his treaty with Chandragupta.\textsuperscript{89} The elephants were prized commodity is indicated by their use in the war field fought by Pyres of Epirus against the Romans in Southern Italy.\textsuperscript{90} The Ptolemies were also have been anxious to import Indian elephants into Egypt, even though they had access to African elephants because it was widely believed that Indian elephants were stronger and tougher and therefore superior in battle particularly those from Taprobane or Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{91} The description left by Arrian of the grand procession in honour of Ptolemy Philadelphus, in 270 B.C. mentions Indian women sitting in carts and elephants from India.\textsuperscript{92}

Another most important item, which was exported to Assyria and Egypt, was ivory. From ivory the Assyrians manufactured luxurious couches. This can be seen from the \textit{Book of the Prophet Ezekiel} (Sixth century B.C.) where in Tyrus (Tyre) in thus addressed; “The Company of the Ashurites have made by benches of ivory”.\textsuperscript{93} This ivory was probably exported from India, which continued up to the days of Kautilya. He has provided certain directives how to cut the tusk of the elephants. According to him, the elephants were bred in the countries like, Kalinga (Southern Orissa), Anga (South-East Bengal), Karusa (Shahabad district of Bihar), Vidisa (Besnagar).\textsuperscript{94} Kautilya’s reference about the tusk of elephants and the centers of highbred elephants indicates that the trade of ivory was also in the same pace during the Mauryan period. In the later phase, Pliny also refers about the export of the Indian ivory to Western
countries. In addition with these things, the Indian hunting dogs were probably exported to Rome because there are enough evidence about this in Pre-Mauryan and Post Mauryan period. Darius had granted his Assyrian governor revenue free villages for the purpose of maintaining numerous Indian hunting dogs. These hunting dogs were very favourite items of import of Assyria, Persia and Greece.

India was another country where spices were also cultivated and exported to foreign countries like Assyria Egypt, Rome etc. Their commercial prospects and possibilities can be seen from the observations of Kautilya who refers to many of them in the preparations of strong liquors, which were also patronized by foreigners. He calls them by the general name of jatisambhara or bijottara. In the preparation of wines medaka and prasanna the ingredients are lodhra (symplocos Racemosa) tejovati (Piper chaba), elavaluka (Solanum Melongena), daruharida (Amonumxanthorrhizon) a species of turmeric, black and long pepper which were added as the requisite species or sambhara. He cites several other types of spices used to make the drink pleasant. It is quite possible that the foreigners, who frequented Indian markets during the 4th B.C. as specially mentioned by Kautilya, must have also included the Arabs from south Arabia who had practically monopolized the trade in spices, carrying them to various countries like Phoenicia, Israel and Egypt. When the control of the seas passed on to the Romans it is not surprising that the Romans in their turn became the carriers of the spice trade in the various markets of their age. Indian spices continued to be exported to Egypt during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (C215-163 B.C.). Along with Indian oxen, Indian women, elephants, thrones of ivory and “eight hundred cart loads of spices were in the procession”. This could not have been from any other country except India, which was so largely represented, in that grand procession. This export trade continued for one century after the death of Kautilya.

Among other food products exported from from India, were possibly the palm wine, castor and sugarcane. Kautilya’s reference about the family of
sveta-sura\textsuperscript{104} who were specially the manufacturer of this kind of sura in allusion to coconut, palm juice. Kautilya also refers to the production of sugar from sugarcane. About the food products and vegetable products during the Mauryan period, Kautilya and Megasthenes do not provide much ideas.

The pepper was exported to western countries in ancient times is definite but when this export trade began it is difficult to know. There are various controversial versions about it, of course some scholars give a greater antiquity to this trade by advancing the view that the Indian pepper packed in small packets found in its way to Greece as early as fifth century B.C.\textsuperscript{105} It was used there as a medicinal drug. But certain other authorities do not confirm this view of ancient foreign trade in pepper. For example we find no mention of it in the Papyri and from this it may be deduced that it was definitely not exported to Egypt on any scale in Third or Second century BC. Tarn on other hand assigns a rather later beginning to this trade by asserting that, “the export of pepper from India on any scale certainly began in the period of Greek rule.”\textsuperscript{106} A further support to the verdict of Tarn is provided by the fact that plenty of pepper was found in the house of an Athenian tyrant, Aristion (88 B.C.). So to be on the safe side we may conclude that export of pepper from India very probably began about C100 B.C. but definitely not later).\textsuperscript{107} As early as 4th Century B.C., the Egyptians brought back cinnamon believing it to be a product of Southern Arabia where as it came from India.\textsuperscript{108}

Now we may see how far textiles of India were exported to foreign countries. If we look into the Book of Ezekiel (6\textsuperscript{th} CBC) we find that Syrian merchants traded, in the fairs of Tyre (Phoenicia), with embroidery work and precious stones like emeralds and purple. It is also seen on the authority of Chinese texts that Syria had commercial relations with India and Parthia from the first century B.C. and it imported the Medicinal plants during Ashoka. There must have been such relations between India and Syria not only in the third CBC but also during Kautilya in 4\textsuperscript{th} CBC.\textsuperscript{109} It may be assumed that the trade on textiles was continuing from early times but accidentally it was not referred
in Ezekiel. But hardly it can be explained why and how the Syrian merchants were able to procure the embroidered work and the linen of finer variety because we don’t have enough evidences about this.\textsuperscript{110}

The goods, which were exported from India to West Asian country, were mainly perishable. Therefore, except literary evidences, there are a few such archaeological evidences about the trading goods. Again during the Mauryan period, the Arthasastra of Kautilya and India of Megasthenes are main sources of our information from Indian side which don’t throw much light on the trade relations. Therefore most of the items, which are included in the list of export, are mainly based on assumption. The goods, which were exported during the Pre-Mauryan period as well as Post Mauryan period, can be: included in the list of export items during the Mauryan period.

**Import**

It is already seen that Asoka sent his famous mission to certain countries so that, wherever, medicinal herbs, needed for men and animals were found, they had been caused to be imported and planted. Ashoka had sent his missions to Syria, Egypt, Macedonia and Cyranaica.\textsuperscript{111} There is no such direct evidence that Ashoka had brought different medicinal herbs from different countries. Therefore, we have to rely on the literary accounts of foreign authors about the different herbs which were famous in different countries. On the basis of this we can presume that Ashoka might have brought these products from different countries. In Syria, according to Pliny, were found certain plants, which were beneficial for medicinal purpose. One of them was pistachio which was taken with food or drink against the bite of snake.\textsuperscript{112} The pistachio which had been found in Syria, Damascus, Mesopotamia, is now cultivated in Punjab and North Western Himalayan region. Again Syria was also known from certain types of figs, which was known as carie.\textsuperscript{113} It was called ‘anjira’ in Sanskrit and it destroys warts. It has since been cultivated in Rajputna, Madhya pradesh and Bihar. Other medicinal herbs which were famous in Syria were, Myxaplums, storax, Imphecium and Oenanthe. Some of these like storax and
Oenanthe were particularly beneficial in curing running sores on all parts of the body, both in human beings as well as animals. From Egypt came the Cypros (Cyprus) zizyphus., adioposis, figs (ficus), the sarcocolla, all of which were utilized in a variety of ways in view of their healing properties. Though they were claimed to have proved beneficial chiefly in treating the ailments of human beings, some of them appear to have been capable of effecting cures in cases of animals also. This was specially in case in regard to laspertium or silphium, a product of Cyrene which was highly useful not only for human beings but also in effecting cures of various distempers of cattle, which was also found as a palatable food. It was one of the most celebrated medicines of the ages. Probably, all such plants and roots were started to be imported during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya and not necessarily it started during the reign of Ashoka.

Among the consumer goods, which were imported to India, were fruits like grapes, figs, dates, and beverages and wines. Onescritus has referred to Indians in market places, probably of Taxila, "carrying figs or bunches of grapes". Grapes were certainly no novelty in India, for Kautilya clearly refers to lands frequently overflown by water as suitable for cultivation of long pepper, grapes and sugarcane. He also refers to the countries of origin of grapes as Kapisayana (Kafirstan). It represents Kandahar region. But according to Pliny, the grapes were widely grown in the areas like Italy, Egypt Syria, Persia and Kandahar also. The grapes from these countries couldn’t be imported because it is difficult to preserve in the long journey, but the juice of grapes wine can be imported from these lands.

The import of foreign wines and liquors from early times into India can be traced from Kautilya’s Arthasastra, it refers to foreign customers in liquor shops lying with their beautiful mistresses in intoxication. That such a liquor must have been sold as one of the kinds of beverages in the liquor traffic. It can be seen in the directive that the Superintendent of liquor had to fix the amount of compensation determining the daily sales of liquor and the difference
between the royal and public measure.\textsuperscript{121} We have no means of ascertaining, whether during Kautilya, there were imports of foreign wines other than those he has specifically mentioned.\textsuperscript{122} It is also referred by Megasthenes and he points out that the elephants were provided black wine in order to cure certain diseases.\textsuperscript{123} But it can't be said with certainly that these wines were brought from foreign countries. In the post Mauryan period, there are enough evidences about the import of wine from Greek, Arab and Italy.\textsuperscript{124} In Vedic period the soma was the intoxicating drink, which was prepared by Indians indigenously.\textsuperscript{125} So about the wine in the Mauryan period nothing could be said with authenticity.

Among other products which were imported into India were, asphalt, glass, antimony etc. though Kautilya refers about the presence of these products in India, he did not clarify whether these things were imported into India or not. Pliny refers about asphalt, which was exported from Babylon, Syria, to Rome.\textsuperscript{126} Surprisingly Strobo, Pliny, do not refer about its export to India. But in view of its commercial and medicinal use for man and beast, its import into India may well be taken.\textsuperscript{127} Asphalt was certainly known in India in 4th CBC for Kautilya calls silajatu or bitumen. He tells us that it had a piercing smell and bitter taste. But he does not refer whether this was produced in India or not. Therefore, about asphalt, nothing can be said with guarantee but the probability of its importan into India was there.

Here is enough evidence that the rude glass was imported into India in first century A.D.\textsuperscript{128} but it must not be inferred that glass was not known in India earlier. Kautilya,( during 321 – 296 B.C). refers about three types of ornamental works made up with gold and glass.\textsuperscript{129} Again he points out that the merchants dealing with glass were bound to pay the tax. So it is conceivable that either glass was manufactured in India or it was brought from outside. But the probability of from outside is more because Pliny refers, in 1st CAD, it was imported from Rome.
About antimony, there is also no clear-cut proof of its import. The Periplus is our best authority for inferring that antimony was imported into India in 1st CAD. Kautilya mentions it is an ore, which exists in combination with lead or silver. Again it was also used for medicinal purposes like beautifying the eyebrows, dilating the eyes, healing burns. Taking these things into consideration it may be presumed that antimony might be imported into India during the Mauryan period.

The goods, which were imported during the Mauryan period, are not mentioned in literary sources clearly. Again archaeological excavations do not outline the commodities of import because most of the goods were perishable. Kautilya and Megasthenes don't give a very good idea about the imported items. Kautilya's reference about various goods in the Mauryan period gives a way to presume many things without any authenticity. Therefore, to get a list of items of import as well as export during the Mauyran period is undoubtedly difficult and controversial.

**Barter and Exchange in 4th century B.C.**

Though there are enough evidences about the currency system during the Mauryan period, the barter system was also prevalent. But Kautilya strongly condemned the barter as one of the causes contributing towards the depletion of public treasury. In the view of Kautilya some factors which were responsible for the growth of the economy were: public prosperity (pracarasamriddhih) rewards for good conduct (Cari tranugrahah) capture of thieves (coranigrahah) dispensing with the services of too many viz. retrenchment of surplus staff, abundance of harvest, prosperity of commerce, and income in gold as against these the factors which tended to deplete a public treasury, were barter, loan, fabrication of accounts and defalcation. Kautilya defined barter (parivartana) by stating that it was an act of exchanging government articles for similar goods of others. Thus commodities of same type must have been manufactured through the state as well as private agencies and both of these varieties were available in the open.
market for sale or for other commercial purpose like exchange with other countries in the shape of barter. He amplifies this operation further by stating that such an offence was explained by enjoyment. 133

All type of barters was not considered illegal. The barters like, the commodities of greater value could be bartered for those of smaller value and vice verse. What was of lesser value that could be interchanged for some thing of greater value and in such deals prices could be raised or lowered, were considered illegal. 134 Severe penalties were prescribed for offenders for enjoying gems, the death sentences, for enjoying valuable articles, the middle most punishment viz. 200 to 500 panas fine and for enjoying articles of inferior value, a fine equal to their value, were imposed. 135

Kautilya had noted the utility of the barter in the sphere of foreign trade. 136 He distinguished between the kings (state) merchandise of local manufacture, which was centralized and imported goods, which were to be distributed in several markets for sale. In sale of such goods no discriminations would be made towards any goods but such merchandise of the king was to be sold in the foreign countries on a barter basis. The Superintendent of Commerce after scrutinizing and ascertaining the values of local produce as compared with that of foreign goods which could be obtained in barter had to find out whether there was any money left as margin of profit after deducting the different taxes. 137 From the above regulations it may be seen that the Superintendent of Commerce, after comparing the local products with foreign products obtainable in barter and meeting all the incidental charges, had to determine whether such a transaction yielded any margin of profit or not. If no such profit was realized first by the sale of king’s own local produce, he had to examine the question whether such merchandise could profitably be bartered for the other products. Here it is important to note that such transactions had to be made only if they were expected to be profitable and not otherwise. 138

In spite of the existence of currency, Jataka provides many stories related to barter. In Vessantara Jataka, a Brahman who had given a loan of 500
Kahapanas to a Brahmin family but the Brahmin family could not repay the
money and in exchange he gave his daughter to the lender. Rhys Davids
contended that in the Jatakas, barter “emerges in certain contingencies” and was
not normal. In the Jatakas, we find that barter, which was certainly not
exceptional, depended on the circumstances of each case. If a person wanted a
particular article and if he had not cash at the moment or was to able to procure
it for effecting an immediate exchange, he offered another commodity which
he considered equivalent in value to the goods he required. If the seller was
satisfied with the article offered, the exchange was effected. With the presence
of money economy, barter indicates towards exceptional situations. Again it
became effective when the prices of two commodities, which were to be
exchanged, became equal.

India’s Important Markets

The important ports of India from where the Indian traders were carrying
the goods were Barbaricum, Baryaza, Suppara, Muzris, and Patala etc.
Barbaricum had been identified with “Alexander’s heaven”. Kautilya
mentions of two varieties of coral, which were available in Barbaricum. Tara
speaks of pepper trade, pepper being exported from India in large scale in this
period of Greek rule. Indian vessels used to ply first coasting along Gedrosia to
Arabia and then to Persian Gulf. The Arabs had then a monopoly in trade in
Indian spices and they sold the Indian spice with their own spice in the western
world. When the Greek Eduoxus of Cyzicus first sailed from Egypt to India in
120 B.C., he returned with in the ships loaded with spices and precious
stones. Plutarch says that in 88 B.C. Ariston of Athenes had amassed large
quantities of pepper in his house and this fixes the beginning of substantial
export of Indian pepper not later than 100 B.C.

According to Strabo, “Pataliputra was one of the finest & best organized
markets in India in 4th B.C. Patala had no doubt a market of considerable
importance but as a commercial centre it was not mentioned. The next
important town was Baryagaza, which was mentioned as the chief distributing
centre of western India. It is however, interesting to note that Barygaza became more important than Barbaricum in the beginning of Christian era.\textsuperscript{149} Pushkalavati was the first important station of Royal Road of Mauryas. Its importance in the first century A.D. does not seem to have faded. It was the enter pot for spikenard, costs and bdellium. After Barygaza, according to the Periplus, the most important port was Supara.\textsuperscript{150} The name of Suppara is founding one of the edicts of Ashoka. Horse dealing was an important trade of this locality. These were most important trade centers in India.

\textbf{India's overseas and International markets}

With regard to India’s over seas and external exchanges, it is difficult to obtain any satisfactory details of international markets. India’s commercial interaction had spread to the regions like Assyria, Egypt, Israel, Syria, Parthia and Persia etc. The Phoenicians had their chief markets at Sidon and Tyre whose kings had commercial relations with Persian Kings.\textsuperscript{151} The Babylonian principal mart was at Babylon, the Egyptian at Memphis\textsuperscript{152} and Avaris, the Judaean at Jerusalem, Caesaria and Ezion Gebir but a few particulars about them are available to us. The Greek market at Alexander in Egypt was a storehouse of “The superfluities of native products” which were distributed though every quarter of world.\textsuperscript{153} Its greatest advantage according to Strabo, arose from its being the only place in Egypt, situated by nature for communication with the sea by its excellent harbour. Therefore, Alexandria seems to have remained the most important market of the world.\textsuperscript{154} It was connected with all other marts namely the Bolbitine, Sebbenytic, Phanitic, Tanitic and Pelusiae by the canals.\textsuperscript{155} Of the Seleucid (Syrian markets) the most important was Antioch, during 174-172 B.C, it was famous for gold smith and silver smith’s workshop.\textsuperscript{156} The market at Palmyra was connected with India and formed a link with Arabia and Persia. The goods, which were bought from Persia, Arabia and Indian commodities, were disposed to the Romans\textsuperscript{157} from here. After its destruction, Batra became the intermediary of Indian trade with Persian Gulf. In Parthian the central market was
Hecatampylos, which derived its name from the fact that it was the "meeting place of all roads leading to the surrounding districts." From Strabo, we learn that Erotosthenes whom he followed the trade route from Caspian sea to Hecatampylos, thence to Alexandria, Prophthasia, Arachotus until the traders came to Ortospanal (Kabul) and thence to India. Hecatampylos was the meeting place of nations where according Curtius and Diodorus, Alexander halted for a long time but curiously enough Arrian does not refer to this halt.

West Asian markets were the most attractive places of Indian goods. The luxury goods of India and the east were sold in the special markets like Campus Martins round the Saepta Julia and the Portus Argonauturum. The trade between India and Egypt was mainly carried from Egyptian sides from the ports of Red sea or Mediterranean Sea. The Arabs brought goods from the caravans of Indian and the Egyptians brought them from the Arabs. One day, a startling news was received that a strong Indian man who had sailed straight from India and had lost his shipmates (200 B.C.) was found in a boat on the Red sea coast. Eudoxus of Cyricus in Asia Minor persuaded Eueregetes to give him the command of a vessel from the voyage of discovery with the guidance of this Indian. He reached India by sea and brought back a cargo of spices and precious stones. In the same way the Greek sailors of Eueregetes made a settlement in the Island of Socotra in the Indian Ocean and there met the trading vessels from India and Ceylon.

Guilds:

The Mauryan empire, a vast and fairly well knit empire, had developed an efficient system of administration. The long distance highways, constructed and maintained largely by the state, facilitated greater mobility of the people and easy transportation of goods from one region to another. The Mauryan state regulated trade and commerce and brought under its monopoly the mineral resources of the land and controlled to quite some extent the economic activities of production and distribution. Megasthenes had recorded that in the municipal administration of Mauryas, one committee was dealing with
management and control of industries. The Arthasastra fixes rates of profits on indigenous and foreign goods, meticulously. It also mentions the lists of dutiable articles and prescribes punishment for violation of rules including artisans, default in delivery of goods in time. It was the duty of govt. officials to keep all the records regarding traders and crafts and related transactions and conventions of the guilds. In addition to taxes in cash, the artisans many of whom must have been members of the guilds also paid taxes in the form of labour. Though state had some stringent restrictions on the guilds it had given some concessions and facilities. Separate areas were provided by the state to the guilds to run their trade and crafts. The guilds could make deposits with competent agencies, which they got back in time of financial stress and they also advanced loans to merchants. The revenue was usually collected in cash and in kind as per the evidence of Arthasastra, and paid the salaries of the employees ranging from 60 to 48,000 panas. It indicates that the greater circulation of money was favourable for trade and commerce.

When Mauryan Empire extended its territory, a number of tribal republics lost their ancestral economic activities. Some of them formed the economic organizations like guilds for their livelihood. Kautilya refers to the Kshatriya Srenis of Kamboja and Saurastra earning livelihood by Varta (agriculture and trade) and the Sastras. As he was a strong protagonist of centralized state, he never liked the activities of guilds, which were behaving like a state within a state. Therefore, he followed the policy of divide and rule and promoted the quarrels among different guilds. There are qualms in the use of unscrupulous means for undermining the authority of the heads of guilds. He distrusted the artisans whom he referred as “thorns”. However it is true that despite of step motherly treatment of Kautilya, a large number of guilds were involved in trading activities.

In Kautilya’s scheme of town planning (to which he devotes a whole chapter in the Arthasastra), proper care was taken to allot quarters and streets
to different craftsmen. Merchants, trading in scents, garlands, grains and liquids etc. were to settle in eastern quarters of a town; traders in cooked rice, liquor and flesh etc. in the southern quarters, artisans manufacturing wrested threads, cotton threads, bamboo mats, skins, amours, weapons and gloves as well as the people sudra caste in the western quarters, and smiths workers in precious stones and Brahmans in northern quarters. It clearly states that within a town, separate areas were earmarked for the people following different trades and the scheme of placing differs from each other in different times and also in different places; it is known from that of Arthasastra.

Sometimes other artisans and handicraftsmen were residing in guilds. Therefore, Kautilya enjoins, “Artisans and other handicraftsmen may on their own responsibility, allow other merchants to own their profession. Similarly merchants may, on their own responsibility, allow other merchants to reside where they themselves carry on their mercantile work”...

The localization of industries and trade in different streets within the city was convenient to different parties and the consumers for making purchases and to the govt. for regulating state laws related to craftsmen and collection of state taxes. Again it was quite convenient for the people living in one area to discuss and debate on any new ideas related to invention and improvement in the machinery.

Guilds, not only provided training to the workers and work to the workmen but also some social status to the workers of the guild. Again the guilds ensured the supply of sufficient good quality new materials and finished products and located markets for their sale. They provided a modicum of safety to the members of guild and also to merchandise. They employed armed guards for the safety of goods carried by the caravans in their long journey against the attacks for wild tribes, robbers plunderers, marauders and wild animals.

It is clear from the Arthasastra that the guilds made use of some agency for making their deposits and could get them back when needed. The term adesa occurring in this context in the Arthasastra probably means “a letter of
credit” which was some what like a modern bill of exchange, an order to a third person to pay up a sum of money on behalf of the sender of the order.\textsuperscript{185} A passage in this work deals with upanidhi (deposits) of guilds runs thus.

"Those who can be expected to retrieve in misery, who can give instructions to artisans, who can be trusted with deposit, who can be relied upon by guilds of artisans many receive the deposits of guilds. The guilds (sreni) shall receive their deposits back in time of distress."\textsuperscript{186}

A Machiavelian plan was devised by Kautilya to use the guilds to the advantages of the state. In order to resort the ruse, the kings spies disguised as merchants were to borrow from guilds, gold, bar gold, and coined gold for various kinds of merchandise to be procured from abroad and thereafter get themselves robbed of them.\textsuperscript{187} However it is clear that guilds were providing money as loans for trade. But there is no evidence in the Arthasastra, of guilds providing credit and banking facilities to the public general.\textsuperscript{188} But once the guild had entered the field of credit and banking services, it howsoever limited way, it did not take long for them to provide such facilities to the general public as well.

Ship building and Administrative Organization of Maurya to control Trade

The shipbuilding industry was a flourishing industry during the Mauryan period because the trade and commerce received a boost. The river as well as ocean routes were used for trade and commerce in addition with movement of people from one place to another. When Alexander was preparing to cross the rive Indus, he made a flotilla of boats with the help of Indians.\textsuperscript{189} For the purpose of famous voyage of Nearchus\textsuperscript{190} down the rivers and to the Persian Gulf, all available country boats were impressed for the services and a stupendous fleet was formed numbering, according to Arrian,\textsuperscript{191} about 800 vessels, according to Curtius and Didorus about 1000 vessels but according to the more reliable estimate of Ptolemy, nearly 2000 which accommodated 8000 troops several thousands horses and vast quantity of supplies.\textsuperscript{192} It indicates
that the Indians had the capability to build so large vessels entirely by Indian woods. But this view was contradicted by some scholars like Vincent Smith and Robertson. According to them as Arraian informs that “Alexander, in the country of Assconi and before he reached Indus, had already built the vessels which he sent down the Koppenes to Taxila.” And later on he used this flotilla, which was suspected that it was the creation of Indians. Robertson also expressed the same opinion. According to him, “that a fleet so numerous, it appears at first sight incredible. But as the Punjab country was full of navigable rivers on which all the intercourse among the natives was carried on, it abounded with vessels. Probably, these fleets came to the hands of Alexander after his conquest of Punjab so that it might easily he collected that number.”

But Arrain makes a clear mention of the construction of dockyards and the supply of transport vessels of thirty oars by tribal people called Xanthori.

All these things clearly indicate that a regular and flourishing industry of shipbuilding was there in the Mauryan Empire. So far, the Yuktikalpataru is the only work available, which deals with the technical details of shipbuilding. It is not an authority of ship building technology. According to Megasthenes this industry was however in the hands of state and it was a Government monopoly. There was a special class to ship builders among the artisans and they were salaried public servants and were not permitted to work for any private person. About shipping and navigation of this period, Pliny gives a very interesting account. According to him “The ships are built with prows at each end.” He also indicates the tonnage of these ancient vessels, which is said to be 3000 amphorae, the amphora being regarded as weighing about a fortieth of a ton.

The advancement of ship building industries probably compelled the Mauryan ruler, Chandragupta, to create a special organization named as board of Admiralty. The head of the organization was called as the Navadhyaksha or the Superintendent of Ships. It was his duty to deal with all matters
relating to navigation in ocean as well as in rivers and lakes. He was like a modern day Port commissioner and his duty was to see all the dues of his port were paid and not one evaded.\textsuperscript{203} Besides seeing to the realization and collection of all proper taxes and dues, the Superintendent of Ships was also entrusted with the duty of enforcing many humane harbour regulations. Thus whenever any weather beaten tempest tossed ships arrived at the port, his first duty was to lend her the protecting hand of a father.\textsuperscript{204} It was also his power that he could exempt toll of any ship laden with merchandise that was damaged or spoiled by water. Sometimes he might impose half of the due toll and then allow sailing. Again whenever a ship laden with merchandise found drowned owing to want of hands or on account of ill repair, it was the duty of Superintendent of Ships to make goods to the loss of merchandise in part or full, as the case might be because presumably the loss was due to not to any fault of the merchants but to defect to state vessels and therefore, state must provide goods from state funds.\textsuperscript{205}

To ensure safety of traders, the superintendent of ship sometimes took preventive measures during the period from the 7\textsuperscript{th} day of Ashadha till the month of Kartika i.e. when the rivers were swollen owing to the rains, the crossing of rivers by state or licensed ferries was strictly enforced.\textsuperscript{206} Again in those large rivers which could not be forded during the winter and summer seasons, the Superintendent of ships had to see that large and perfectly safe vessels were launched and manned with all necessary officers and hands viz. a captain, a steers man and a number of servants who would hold the oars, ropes and bale out water.\textsuperscript{207} Small boats were launched only in small rives that overflowed during rainy seasons. Some strict regulations were enforced to ensure safety to river crossing. Fording or crossing of rivers without permission was prohibited in order to ensure that no traitor or enemy could escape.\textsuperscript{208} The time and even the place for fording and crossing rivers were definitely fixed so that person fording or crossing rivers outside the proper place and in unusual times was punished.\textsuperscript{209} Exemptions to these stringent rules were however, allowed to lax in the interest of trade and public good.
Brahmanas, ascetics, children, royal messengers and pregnant women were provided free passes to cross rivers by the Superintendent. There was also another regulation permitting foreign merchants who had often been visiting the country, as also freely in port towns. Finally it was the responsibility of the Superintendent of ships to punish all violations of harbour regulations and miscreants those were dangerous to public peace.

The Mauryas had created a large number of departments to control the trading activities. The king had the sole right to impose various types of taxes from time to time. The village on sea shores, on the banks of rivers or lakes had to pay regularly a fixed amount of tax. To get the fishing license, the fishermen were paying one sixth of their haul as fees. The merchants were paying the customary tax levied in port towns. State boats were also let out to those who wanted to use them for pearl fishery or fishing for conch shells and they had to pay the required amount of hire but they were also free to use their own boats. The taxes were payable to the Port Commissioner. There were various sorts of ferry fees, which are also very interesting and equally indicative of a brisk trade and a throbbing commercial life. A man with minor quadruped carrying some load had to pay a ferry fee of one masha. A person who is carrying a load of cow or horse had to pay two mashas, load of a small cart- six mashas for a cart of medium size and that was drawn by bulls-seven mashas. These conveyances and beasts of burden as well as loads of merchandise were subject to ferry fees.

There was a Superintendent of Commerce whose primary duty was to ascertain demand or absence of demands. Again it was his duty to check the rise and fall of prices of different commodities coming through either of land or water routes. He centralized the locally manufactured merchandise forming the part of monopoly of the king. It was also his duty to distribute the imported merchandise in several markets for sale. He was also entrusted with the responsibility to encourage the trade by giving various concessions to merchants and mariners. He usually showed the favour to mariners. The
foreign merchants \(^{219}\) were provided special facilities that they were exempted from being sued for debts.\(^ {220}\) This officer had to be particularly clever, for he had to look after the sale of foreign merchandise in the following manner:

"Having ascertained the value of local produces as compared with that of foreign produce that can be obtained by barter, the Superintendent will find out whether there is any margin left for profit after meeting the payments (to the foreign king) such as toll, road cess, conveyance cess, tax payable at military stations, ferry charges, subsistence to the merchant and his followers and the portion of merchandise payable to the foreign king. If no profit could be realized by selling local produce in foreign countries, he had to consider whether any local produce could be profitable bartered for any foreign produce. Then he might send one quarter of his valuable merchandise through safe roads to different markets on land or he might take his merchandise to other countries through rivers."\(^ {221}\)

There was the Superintendent of Tolls, whose duty was to erect near the large gate of the city a tollhouse with a flag, facing either, the north or the south. When merchants reached at the tollgate their goods were sealed properly. Strict rules and regulations regarding imported and exported merchandise were practiced.\(^ {222}\) There were three kinds of merchandise viz. External, (arriving from the country) internal (manufactured inside forts) and foreign (imported from foreign countries). Seal marks had to be used by all and those who failed, had to pay twice the amount of toll. Attempts were made to prevent counterfeit seals.\(^ {223}\) Undue attempts to increase the prices of commodities were checked. Commodities had to be precisely weighed, measured or numbered. Commodities for presentation or sacrificed performance or gifts were let off without toll. The Arthasastra expects the panyadhyaksha to chose between a wide distribution (viksepa) and a single channel centralized distribution (Sanksepa) policy depending on the conditions of glut or scarcity of exchangeable commodities. It was the duty of Panyadhyaksha to strike a balance between the economic interests of the
producer and those of the consumer by directly intervening in transactions.\textsuperscript{224} One of duties is also to arrange the sale of royal item (rajapanya) produced in royal farms (sita). Though Kautilya had a very distrust attitude towards merchants, he seems to have promoted the foreign trade. Imported goods are liberally encouraged literally with favourable invitation (parallumejam parya mancegrahea vahayet).\textsuperscript{225} Moreover, certain fiscal remissions granted to the merchants who were coming from abroad. The same spirit is displayed when the text recommends (IV-2.28-30) 10\% profit for the foreign commodities and only 5\% for the indigenous commodities perhaps the most interesting concession granted to the foreign merchants is that he should not be sued in a court of law for dispute in money matters (anabliyogas earthesvagatunan).

According to Kautiya, it was the duty of Panyadhyaaksha to explore the profit potentials from both export and import trade. If in any case, no profit is earned out of this trade, he should assess the possibilities of economic advantages of barter trade. Kautilya advises the Panyadhyaaksha to go wherever there is profit and to avoid a situatuion of no profit.\textsuperscript{226}

The interest of Mauryas on sea born trade is difficult to define. The appointment of Navadhyaksha, Panyadhyaaksha and Shulkadhyaksha etc. and the interest of the stats the to control the ship building activity clearly defines the interest of Mauryas to take the advantage out of inland and foreign trade. Again the edits of Ashoka, which are found in places like Sopara in Konkan, in Girnar, in Kathiawad and Dhauli and Jaugada in Orissa, which are situated on or near the sea coast. And all these facts points out to the interest of Mauryas in sea trade\textsuperscript{227}.

The officers who were in charge of boundaries were helping the superintendent of tolls regarding imported commodities. This envisages that the Mauryan rulers were careful about the import but there is no such record about the export, which was discouraged.\textsuperscript{228}

Megasthenes, speaking on the administration of public affairs refers to the second Board, which attended to the entertainment of foreigners.\textsuperscript{229} "To these
they assign lodging and keep watch over their modes of life by means. They escort them on the way when they move to their country or in the event of their death, forward their property to their relatives. They take care of them when they were sick and if they die bury them.\textsuperscript{230} According to Smith “the existence of these conclusively prove that Mauryan Empire in 3\textsuperscript{rd} C.B.C. was in constant intercourse with foreign states and that large number of strangers visited the capitals for business purposes.\textsuperscript{231} And it was for this purpose the “Private ships,” which were bound for the country of an enemy as well as those violated the custom and the rules forced in port, were to be destroyed.\textsuperscript{232} Arrian's testimony points out that “ship builders” and sailors employed in navigation” enjoyed special privileges is an excellent testimony to the attention paid to commerce in those days.\textsuperscript{233} Dr. Seal acclaim, “one broad historical generalization stands out clearly and convincingly for which all histories of world culture will do well to take note, viz. the central position of India in the Orient world well nigh two thousand years not merely in a social, a moral, a spiritual or an artistic reference but also an equally in respect of colonizing and maritime activity and of commercial and manufacturing interests.\textsuperscript{234}

Brief and tantalizing references regarding the duties of various officers under imperial Mauryas gives a thorough idea that there were various industries and trades which were organized by the state, which enjoyed monopolies in many of them and also foreign commerce was duly encouraged. Much care had been taken to prevent the smuggling and spies were appointed to check it.\textsuperscript{235} They had particular instructions regarding foreign merchandise of superior or inferior quality arriving by land or water and to ascertain the amount of toll, road cess, conveyance cess, ferry-fare and one sixth portion (paid or payable by the merchants) the charges incurred by them for their own subsistence and for the accommodation of their merchandise in the warehouse.\textsuperscript{236}

Due importance was to trade and commerce by Mauryan rulers. Kautilya said, “Prosperity of commerce led to financial prosperity”.\textsuperscript{237} To maintain the
trade and commerce smoothly, the Mauryan kings paid importance to the
construction of roads for traffic both by land and water. Eratosthenes (275-
194 B.C.) a junior contemporary of Ashoka, was aware of a royal road which
connected West Asia with Pataliputra. Arrian too speaks of such road.
Attention may also be given to the observation of Megasthenes that the officers
in charge of countryside (agoranomoi) were entrusted, among other things the
construction of roads and with the setting up of pillars after every ten stadia
(1 stadium = 606 ¾ feet) to show the roads and distance. This account of
Megasthenes is strikingly confirmed by the evidence of royal road (Karapathi)
in Laghman area in Afghanistan. Two Aramaic edicts of Ashoka from
Langman, which speak of the royal road, also contain some information about
the distance of several places from Laghman. This was the duty of
Superintendent of Tolls to make goods whatever merchants in his journey lost.
And he carefully examines the foreign commodities as to their superior or
inferior quality. Foreign merchants often visited the ports of India with the
help of local merchants.

The rules, regulations and departments to organize the trade which were
created by Chandragupta Maurya, probably remained in force under Ashoka
also. It may be assumed that Ashoka made very effort to advance the trade. In
the words of V.A. Smith, "when we remember Ashoka’s relation with Ceylon
and even more distant powers, we may credit him with a sea going fleet as well
as an army" and perhaps we would not be going far if we say that the
religious missions to Syria, Egypt, Cyrene, Macedonia and Epirus also led to
the establishment of commercial relations.

A story in the monumental work called, "Bodhisattva Vadana Kalpalata"
by the Kasmirian Kshemendra of 10th century A.D. indicates the progress of
foreign intercourse and naval activity of India during the days of
Chandragupta, which also continued in the days of Ashoka. Once Ashoka was
seated on the throne in the city of Pataliputra, while holding his court, did
some India merchants who traded approach one day to the distant islands. They
informed him of their losses and complete ruin brought about by sea pirates called Nagas (Probably Chinese who were worshippers of Dragon) who destroyed all their ships and plundered their treasures. They said that if the emperor was disposed to be indifferent to them, they would to be forced to take to other ways of earning of their livelihood. But the imperial exchequer in that case was liable to be emptied owing to the absence of sea voyages. Then the story goes on to relate, how Ashoka, after bestowing some thoughts on the sea faring Nagas, he was persuaded by a Buddhist priest to issue a sort of edict (which we may call Ashoka’s Marine Edict). It was only when Ashoka become a devout Buddhist that he was able to make the Nagas respect his edict and give up all their booty, which was afterwards distributed among the merchants robbed.

These evidences point out that there was a flourishing foreign trade during the Mauryan period. Therefore, Mauryan had created so many departments to take care of trade and had framed so many regulations to carry out trade smoothly. Both inland and external trade were given due importance.

Cultural Contacts

The cultural contacts, which were continuing from pre-Mauryan periods, got a boost during the Mauryan period. The exchange of embassies and smooth flow of trade strengthened the cultural relations. Again Ashoka’s missionary zeal to propagate Dhamma, expanded the cultural relations further. The caravans from India included mercenaries to protect against piracy, priests to propitiate the gods for safe journey and astrologers to guide the caravans. These people became helpful to spread he knowledge in foreign lands. From the very beginning India was famous as a repository of knowledge which attracted many scholars to India. These people also became agent for the spread of Indian culture in distant lands.

Therefore, the Mauryan period is marked as the new chapter in India’s relations with other countries. Four major tools brought about the directional changes in this relationship: exchange of embassies, the outgoing missionaries,
the enterprising traders, devout pilgrims and casual travelers. Mauryas not only established a vast empire bordering the Persian Empire but also maintained peace and tranquility throughout the empire.\(^{250}\) Due to this conducive atmosphere, the trade and cultural transmigration continued smoothly. India’s cultural contacts with different West Asian countries were not uniform. While some countries were influenced more by Indian and other had influenced India more. Again the lack of proper evidences keeps us always in dark about the proper cultural contacts.

**Egypt**

India’s contact with Egypt during the third and second millennium B.C. was indirect and limited. We have very little evidences of intercourse between the two regions in post chalcolithic and pre-Mauryan period (i.e.between late second millennium B.C. and the late 1\(^{st}\) millennium B.C). But the emergence of Mauryan Empire brought a drastic change of these relations in sixth and fifth century B.C. The northwestern part of India came in contact with Egypt, although indirectly, as both regions formed the part of the great Persian Empire.\(^{251}\) However, different historical evidences point out the existence of political relations as well as diplomatic relations between the two countries during Mauryan period.\(^{252}\) According to Pliny\(^{253}\) Dionysius, an ambassador from Egyptian King Philadelphus (Ptolemy II 258 B.C.)\(^{254}\) visited the Mauryan court. The identification of King Philadelphus as Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt is accepted by all historians.\(^{255}\) However, the name of the India King who had received the ambassador is not mentioned. So there is controversy regarding the identity of Mauryan King.\(^{256}\) The Same Egyptian king had also sent an embassy to Rome in the year 273 B.C. So it is expected that he might have sent embassy to India at the same time and Bindusra was the ruler of Mauryan India. The intention behind the mission is not known properly but it is presumed that it marked the beginning of diplomatic relationship between India and Egypt in the historical period.\(^{257}\)
Ashoka further extended the relations between India and West Asia. Though he was motivated by missionary spirit of Buddhism, it fostered the diplomatic contacts. Ashoka’s Rock Edict XIII reveals the expansion of his missionary activities in Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Cyrene and Epirus. These missions helped to spread Dhamma but with the exchange of missions, a regular intercourse developed two regions of the ancient world.

Athanaeus had given an interesting fact about this that the presence of Indian women, Indian hunting dogs, Indian Cows, and Camels in the royal procession of Ptolemy Philadehuys of Egypt. The source categorically informs us about a saloon lined with Indian stone in the yacht of Ptolemy II Philopator. At Memphis, these excavators have found female figurines in terracotta (2nd century B.C.) whose facial features and dress and completely Indian. Wheel is a known motif in India and it was quietly popular in Egypt. This creates a lot of controversies about the origin of wheel. The representations of wheels between animals on the abacus of Ashoka pillar at Sarnath recalls the sun emblem of Egyptian Obesilks at Alexandria. But according to Davar, it was an Iranian symbol. Since both the countries were using the symbols randomly, so it is difficult to determine which country at first originated this. But it seems that India is the first country where it first originated and this spread to Egypt. Because it was continuing in India through ages and Egypt borrowed by symbol from India. In this context, another piece of evidence is equally worthy. On the desert route to the Red Sea a temple has been recently discovered at Redesiya. It was dedicated by an Indian to the Greek God Pan. This points out that a close intercourse between Indians and Greeks living in Egypt.

Some Greek historian point out that Indian articles, especially ivory, shells, pearls nard, clothing pigments, malabathrum and rare woods quite popular in Egypt and these were imported from India. Alexandria, the city founded by Alexander on Isthmus, was a great centre of trade between India and West. From Alexandria the traders followed by the route which passed
through the old Suez Canal and along the Makara coast, finally reached the western shores of India. \(^{271}\) Strabo informs us about the arrival of a few traders in India from Egypt. \(^{272}\) The establishment of seaports normally Bernice and Myos Hormos on the Egyptian coast was aimed at facilitating the trade with India. \(^{273}\)

According to Rostovezefff, \(^{274}\) the financial and economic organizations of Ptolemaic Egypt bear close similarity to the organizations under Chandragupta Maurya and his successors. For instances, the organization of state monopolies in oil and salt and mining as well as what may perhaps be called “state socialism” under the rule of enlightened monarch”, were common to both Mauryan Indian and Ptolemaic, Egypt. \(^{275}\) The main points of similarity between the Kautilyan and Greek civil institution are (I) contract of mines (2) The designation and functions of financial directors (3) Indian land organization and Ptolemaic Agrarian system (4) Complete control of govt. in certain articles of trade. (5) The Organization of salt trade.

Again there are some close similarities between the Egyptian and Indian astronomical theories. \(^{276}\) These relations might have been established due to close commercial intercourse between two lands.

The above-mentioned evidences though don’t provide a clear picture of indo-Egyptian trade; it proves the close commercial contacts beyond doubt. The exchange of embassies, the participation of Indian men and women in the royal procession, are sufficient enough to conclude that India had close commercial contacts with Egypt in the Mauryan period.

**Iran:**

A part of India was brought to Iranian rule by the Aechaemenian invasion. Bu the invasion of Alexander, could not give an opportunity for the Iranians to leave any permanent impact on Indian administration. \(^{277}\) But the rise of Mauryan empire in third century B.C. extending its border upto Iran, the Indio-Iranian contact became wide ranging. The main features of the contact
may be seen in the following sphere like, art architecture, town, planning, court life, administration, script, edicts and numismatics and customs and manners.

There is a long controversy among the scholars about the stone use in art and architecture of India. For the first time, Mauryans employed stone for their art architecture. Some scholars point out that it was borrowed from Iranians because these types of art and crafts on stone had been long used in Iran. In the Pre-Mauryan phase, the long use of wooden structures in house as well as palaces clearly proves this fact. Again the capitals of Ashokan pillars, which bears close resemblance to Iranian examples. Scholars are again facing the same problem identifying the origin of these types of architecture. But Barbar cave excavated and embellished under the patronage of Ashoka do exhibit a purely Indian tradition of working on stone. Mauryan art and architecture bears a close similarity with Iranian counter part and creates confusion among the scholars to trace out the origin of these styles. There are however two theories running side by side; one is indigenous style of architecture developed and matured in India. Second is that it was borrowed from Iranian and other West Asian sources. Though it is difficult to determine the exact amount of Iranian contribution to the development of Mauryan art and architecture, the possibility of Iranian influence on Indian art and architecture can’t be ruled out.

Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta Maurya has spoken highly on the Grand Trunk Roads (Royal Road) connecting Pataliputra, the Mauryan capital town in Bihar, with great cities of northwestern India. He gives a vivid description of the roads. It creates an impression that Megasthenes was acquainted with these types of road before coming to India. Probably Iranian roads and Indian roads in Mauryan Empire were similar in some way, which attracted the attention of Megasthenes. It may be viewed in other way also that probably Megasthenes became astonished by seeing such wide Grand Trunk Roads of India. This was the reason why he described a lot about the roads of India.
The town planning of Magadha had equally impressed Mehatshen. He compares it with the town planning of Susa and Ecbatana of Iran. He also tells that Pataliputra was far more beautiful than these two cities. It is very difficult to say how far the town planning of Pataliputra was influenced by the Iranian pattern of town planning. Archaeological excavation at Pataliputra has yielded the great pillared hall in the palace complex which as some scholars hold was planned or Iranian pattern. But this view was not accepted by V.S. Agarawala. The rest of town was not planned on the grid pattern of Iran style. However, Spooner, and Wheeler mention that square pillared hall of Mauryan palace was designed on the pattern of Achaemenid Hall of Hundred Columns, built by Darius Hystaspes at Persepolis. Wadell the excavator of Pataliputra, points out that the ground floor of the palace was made on the model of Persepolis. But this view is unacceptable for Chanada. Some of the Greek writers, however, praise the Mauryan place which was much superior than the place of Susa and Ecbatana in their views. But Ray finds indigenous style of Mauryan place. According to him, Darius, himself, in his foundation characters of building at Susa and Persepolis, has imported skilled Indian workman. Again the polished character of stone pillars is very old than Iranian counterpart. Further excavations and research may clarify this controversy.

Ashokan monolithic columns characterized by a unique luster. Some scholars believe that Ashoka had followed the Persian examples. Similarly, according to them the capitals on these columns do show unmistakable evidence of Persian traits viz. Bell shaped top, the seated lions on the famous capital at Saranath and Lauriya Nandagarh. But some scholars don’t accept this theory and opine the indigenous origin of these creations. It is very difficult to determine the country that had influenced other in this style of architecture.

It is again a moot point that the style of Indian rock-cut caves had also been traced to Persian rock-cut tombs of Darius and others located at
Persepolis and Naksh-I – Rustan. But according to Buddhist sources the First Buddhist council was held a Sataparni cave, which is oldest cave. on the basis of this Indian cave structure can be traced back from 5th century B.C. however, it is said that Sataparni cave has not been identified yet.

The resemblance of Ashokan Rock Inscription and Darius’ Edict, compels to believe that Ashoka could have influenced by the Achaemenid model of inscriptions. The Aramaic script of the Iranian empire and the Kharosthi script (which was derived from the former) used widely in northwestern India, central Asia and other regions. The scripts were prevalent in India side by side during this period. Again the Aramaic inscription has been found at Sirkap. It indicates that the Iranian influence in the region since it presupposes the existence of some people in the city who knew this script.

Goyal has summarized the main characteristic of Asokan and Achaemenid edicts. Obviously they are similar and Asokan edicts are believed to be originated from Achaemenid edicts. This clearly establishes the fact that there was close commercial contact between Indian and Persian world. The similarities have been compared in this way. (1) The opening formula of Asokan edicts is same as that of Achaemenids. (2) Ashoka had used their term lipi in his Brahmi inscription of dipi in the khorosti edicts which was certainly taken from the Iranian inscriptions. Here it is interesting to note that the terms lipi and Lipikara were known to Panini, who lived in an area which was or had been under the Iranian hegemony but do not occur anywhere in the Buddhist record. In the Shashbazgarhi edict, Ashoka used the principals of likhita, lekhita and lekhapita which are supposedly derived from the ancient Persian nipish to write (3) the kharosti script which was prevalent in northwest India even in Pre-Asokan period, and lastly (4) many of the scribes like Ghapada employed by Ashoka to engrave his records were the person who hailed from the north western region.

We see much common customs were prevalent in both India and Iran. The Arthasastra informs us that the shaving of hair was a common kind of
punishment in India and a similar practice was also found in Iran too. Another custom which was also common in both Indian and Iran – the hair washing ceremony of the king on his birth day.

Indians borrowed the measure of money, a talent from Iran. According to Rawlinson, the Mauryas did not have regular coinage of their own. So the Persian coins were in free circulation in their domination. Some recent excavations provide fact that at several sites the coins were minted in the period, earlier than Mauryas, going back to fifth century B.C. But in Mauryan period, the minting of coins was more or less influenced by Persian coinage. The Persian sigloii most have been the legal tender in the Persian satrapies in India.

Persian influence may also be seen on the system of administration, court manners and etiquette etc. just like the Persian style of Satrapies, the Mauryan governors bore the title “satrap”. It may be assumed that under the Achaemenid rule the local people were following this system. When Mauryas came to power, they did not attempt to ban this system and they also followed this. Though it is controversial, Yavanraja- Taushapa who was the governor of western part of India under Ashoka, was accepted by most of the historians as Iranian. It clearly proves that the foreigners were occupying high posts in Ancient India without any discrimination. The Mauryan emperors, as recorded by Megasthenes, held the court like Persian kings. There was tradition of taking out royal procession on festivals. They were arranged in the following manner-first there were elephants decorated with gold and silver ornaments, after them came four horsed chariots and yoked oxen. Then followed the attendants, wearing a holiday dress, and holding in their hands golden cups, goblets, boards etc. whether it was a copy of similar royal procession of Persia or was a local innovation, can’t be said for certain. But it is possible that while on one hand Chandragupta followed an Iranian practice, the Iranian themselves added colour and grandeur to their own royal
procession by adding the most majestic animals of the world including the elephants especially from India.\textsuperscript{316}

About the origin of Mauryas, Dr. D.B. Sporner opines that Mauryas belong to an Iranian house of the famous city of 'Merce'.\textsuperscript{317} But this view of Spooner is not accepted by most of the historians. Again curiously enough he traces the origin of Chanakya, the prime Minister of Chandragupta from Iranian tribes on the ground that Chanakya was great astronomer and Iran and not India, was leading in oriental astronomy. Detailed study have clearly shown that firstly the Indian school of astronomy was very different from Iranian school and secondly Chanakya is more known for his book on polity and administration than for the knowledge of astronomy.\textsuperscript{318}

Iran and India were very close not only from commercial but also from cultural exchange point of view. India is greatly indebted to Iran for its cultural transformation by coming in contact with Iranian culture. The two cultures exchanged the ideas, values, life styles and other and enriched each other. Though it is very difficult to determine the cultural exchange in terms of quantity, the impacts of different cultures are clearly visible.

**Hellenistic world**

The invasion of Alexander, brought India very close to Greek world. After Alexander, the Indian territories were under the charge of Seleucus, who was defeated by Chandragupta Maurya.\textsuperscript{319} Seleucus ceded four Greek provinces to Chandragupta, named as Paropamisadæ (Kabul) Aria (Heart) Arachosia (Kandahar) and Gedrosia (Baluchistan) and received five hundred elephants as gift from Chandragupta.\textsuperscript{320} This was followed by a matrimonial alliance,\textsuperscript{321} the exact nature of which is not known. Megasthenses\textsuperscript{322} was deputed by Seleucus to the court of Chandragupta. From Althenaeus; we know that the Indian king (Chandragupta Maurya) sent some precious gifts including some Indian drugs, to the Greek satrap.\textsuperscript{323}

During the period of Bindusara, the relation between the two countries became deeper. According to Strabo,\textsuperscript{324} Antiochus Soter (281-260 B.C.) a
Seleucid king sent Diamachus as envoy to the court of Bindusara. Athenaeus (3rd C.A.D.) says that this second Mauryan King asked Antiochus I to send him wine, dried figs and Greek philosopher, but received wine and figs only, as it was considered an insult for the Seleucid house to send a philosopher to a foreign country.\textsuperscript{325}

Epigraphical evidence on the proximity of the Greeks to the Mauryan Empire is available from the Greek inscriptions issued by Asoka and found in the environs of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. A recently discovered pre-Asokan Greek inscription of the early third century B.C. has added to our knowledge of Kandahar as a Greek settlement.\textsuperscript{326} In the course of excavation a stone threshold turned out to be the base of a status inscribed with two elegiac couplets referring to a new statue. Paleographically the inscription, though badly worn, is similar to the Hellenistic Greek of the Asokan inscriptions from Kandahar. The inscription refers to a sacred precinct and to the son of Aristanax. It has been argued that this and other evidence points to Kandahar having been a regular Greek settlement along the lines of other major centres such as Ai-Khanum on the Oxus. Some scholars have identified Kandahar with Alexandria in Arachosia. This may well be so given the strategic location of Kandahar as the meeting point of routes going to Heart, Kabul and Seistan and linked with India via the Gomal and Bolan passes. There is also evidence to suggest that the site of Shahr-I-Kohna, which later developed into Kandahar, was earlier an Achaemenid fortress. That Asoka issued edicts in Greek and Aramaic in this area is therefore not surprising.

Similarly in the Aramaic version at Kandahar and in other Aramaic inscriptions, Dhamma has been translated by modern scholars as Truth and as “the conduct of the good”. The latter phrase is suggestive of Zoroastrianism in which a contrast is drawn between the conduct of good and evil. An intriguing statement in the Aramaic version reads: “and there is no judgment for all pious men”. This has been interpreted in the context of Rock Edict Four, i.e., the officers of the law who have the power to judge. However, it may be suggested
that in the same way as the Greek translation draws on terms familiar to Greek philosophy such as eusebeia and diatribe, the Aramaic translation uses terms derived from Zoroastrian thought. Perhaps the Judgement in this case referred not to officers but to the Zoroastrian belief in judgments after death. This concept being unfamiliar to Greek thought was not used in the Greek version. What the king might have been saying in effect was that those who observe the Dhamma or the conduct of the good would be regarded as pious and therefore exempt from judgments after death. Such an interpretation would in principle be perfectly logical. The Aramaic inscription was intended for those familiar with pre-Hellenistic ideas and practices and its appeal was to the Iranians settled in the region. Asoka’s familiarity with Zoroastrianism probably derived from his period as viceroy at Taxila before he became king. That he had this degree of sensitivity to the religious beliefs of those within his empire enhances one’s assessment of him as administrator. There is also no mention of Brahmanas and Sramanas in this inscription presumably because, as he states in his Thirteenth Rock Edict, these two categories are absent in the land of the Yonas. The above reading would further endorse the suggestion of the significance of a considerable number of Iranian population in the northwest of India.

Conclusion

The period of India’s history, during the days of Mauryas, witnessed the economic development largely due to flourished trade and economic development largely due to flourished trade and commerce. From the Arthasastra. Megasthenes Account and Jatakas, we learn that Mauryas had developed a well built administrative structure to carry out trading activities smoothly. The strong and centralized Govt. created a new sense of security, which acted as a stimulus to production and exchange. The appointment of officers like. Superintendent of ships, Superintendent of commerce. Superintendent of Tolls, and others, clearly indicates that the Mauryan rulers were taking proper care of trade and commerce. Again the Mauryas had
created a separate department to take care of foreigners. The violations of trade regulations were punished with an iron hand and the difficulties of traders were paid utmost care. The monumental work of Kehsemendra clearly points out the fact that Mauryan rulers were taking utmost care of the difficulties of traders. The financial prosperity of Mauryan dynasty was mainly built on the prosperity of commerce. Though there are activities between India and West Asia had reached at its epoch, the possibility of a well-developed commerce between the two subcontinents can be corroborated on the facts like, cultural similarity, administrative organizations, the emperor’s interest in trade, and a few archaeological facts.

In the sphere of cultural contacts, the Mauryan period opened a new chapter in India’s relations with West Asian countries. The directional change of relationships were mainly brought by exchange of embassies, the enterprising traders, the missionary zeal, and devout pilgrims, travelers etc. the cultural impacts of West Asian countries on India and Vice-Versa are visible on many aspects like architecture, sculpture, art, literature, day to day life, royal ceremonies and others. But it has created the controversy among the scholars to decide which cultural practice was borrowed and which one was indigenous. But the cultural impacts of West Asian Countries on India can be perceived on many spheres which cultural contacts between two subcontinents can’t be thought without having a good commercial relation. Therefore, a flourished cultural contact is again indicating that there must be developed commercial relations.

The real difficulty arises for a scholar to prepare a list of commodities of export and import between these lands. Because most of the goods of trade were perishable which leaves not trace in archaeological excavations. Therefore, scholars mainly take the help of literary evidences whose authenticity is not the beyond of doubt. Usually the literary works of Ancient India were much more influenced by spiritual and religious ideas, keeping these mundane things like trade and commerce in the backseat. But Kautilya’s
Arthasastra, Megasthene's Indica and Jatak stories throw some light on the trading activities, which are not sufficient enough to build the whole story. Foreign sources like Pliny's Natural History, Strabo's Geography, Arrian's Indica and others are more helpful in this regard. They give an idea about India's trading activities with foreign countries during this period, which are not free from errors. The limited archaeological excavations at Pataliputra, Mathura, Memphis and others; gives more idea about cultural contacts than the trading activities. Ashoka's Rock edicts, except a few names of West Asian rulers, don't provide valuable information about the trade. Hence, keeping things in the mind, scholars, sometimes construct the fact taking the help of assumption and presumption, which are not new to history.

The products, which were exported by India to West Asian countries were mainly, food products, textiles, copal, indigo, lac, animal stock etc. Again the goods, which imported by India were mainly figs, beverages, wine, glass, metal etc. But the imported goods were less in comparison to export which symbolizes that the trade was in favour of India; and it confuses that how the foreign countries were paying for the extra amount. The answer for this question is really difficult. Some scholars opine that the western countries were paying the balance in the form of coins, which are found in different places, while others are in opinion that was not favorable to India because India was importing the goods of equal value.

When Megasthenes came to India, he became wonderstruck by seeing the richness of India's natural resources. The network of roads and waterways were well developed which facilitated the trading activity. Mention may be made, the industries like textile, carpentry, stone cutting and mining, pottery were in a flourished condition. Guilds played a major role in this trading activity, they not only supplied good quality of goods which were highly praised in western society but also controlled the price by producing the huge quantity to goods. Sometimes these guilds acted as banking organizations and
helped the traders for their transaction of money. The role of guilds in this commercial interaction was immense helpful.

The social conditions and attitude of canon laws were not so much favourable for the development of trade. The trading activity, which was especially confined among the Vaisyas, was not accepted as a very good job and highly respected. Again the intelligentsia mass like Brahmanas; and Hinduism were not giving much respect this job because there was a fear of losing caste. Earning money and achieving prosperity by this trading activity was equally reprehensible in Hindu religion because this money was considered as black money. Therefore the trade activity in Ancient India was not to much socially approved and it was not open to the every class of the society. So the surplus wealth of the people of the other castes excepting, Vaisyas, was spent for luxury, amusement and other unproductive purposes. These types of socials restrictions were impediments on the path of trade.

In this connection, the royal support was very much essential to continue and further the trading activities. Fortunately, the Mauryan rulers provided their extensive support to traders as well as trading activities. State itself was also involved in this trade. Some of the industries were also under state supervision like boat building, stone cutting, brick making and others. With the active support of state, the trading activities under the Mauryas reached in a thriving stage.

Under the Mauryas, the commercial interaction between India and West Asian Countries was undoubtedly in a flourished state. The geographical position of India, its fertile soil, suitable climate and strong, centralized Govt. of Maurya; provided a conducive climate for trade. The goods. which were produced in India, was highly needed by West Asian Countries because their unfavorable climate and infertile land was insufficient to cater the needs of the people. Again the luxurious items, created by artisans, were highly praised in foreign soil. The principle of demand and supply became the major determinant of this trade. Finally the trade, which was continuing from the
Vedic period, under active the support of Mauryas, it witnessed its prosperous phase. It’s multifaceted impacts were felt on culture, art, architecture and day to day life which was not previously felt in such a large extent.
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228 Sammaddar, J.N.,op.cit, p. 116
229 Ibid.
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240 Ibid.
242 Mukherjee, B.N., Aramaic Edicts, pp.9-22.
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246 Ibid.
247 Saletore, B.A., India’s Diplomatic relations with the West, p. 156.
248 Ibid.
249 Asthana, Shashi, op.cit, p. 188.
250 Ibid.
251 Charlesworth, M.P., Trade Routes and commerce of the Roman Empire, p. 54.
252 Ibid., p. 56.
253 Asthana, Sashi,op.cit, p. 189.
254 The identification of King Philadelphus as Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt is accepted by all the historians. Cf Smith, V.A., The early history of India, p. 156, Sastri,K.A.N., Age of Nandas and Mauryas, p. 168.
256 Smith, V.A., thinks that the ruler was either Bindusara or Ashoka (The early history of India, p. 156) Saletore,R.N., however identifies him with Bindusara (India’s Diplomatic relations with west, p. 136.)
257 Asthana, Sashi, op.cit, p. 189.
259 Bhandarkar, R.G., Asoka, p. 58.
260 Sastri,K.A.N. op.cit, p. 167.
261 Rawlinson,H.G., Intercourse between India and the Western world, p. 93-94.
262 Ibid.
263 Asthana, Sashi, op.cit, p. 189.
264 Coomarswamy, A.K., History of Indian and Indonesian Art, p. 17.
266 Davar,F.C., India and Iran through ages, p. 54-55.

267 Jairazbhoy, R.A., op.cit., 63. Both the inferences are doubtful and the device could very well be indigenous. An attempt has been made to trace Buddhist influence on revolving wheels of Egyptian temples referred to by Henron of Alexandria (Asthana,Sashi op.cit., p. 189). The depiction of wheel with Trident on a Ptolimic gravestone has been found in Egypt. It might suggest Indian influence (Singhal,D.P., Indian and world civilization, p. 75).
268 Charles worth, M.P., Trade routes and commerce of the Roman Empire, p. 59.
269 Mukherjee. The culture and Art of India, p. 101.
270. Mc, Crindle, Ancient India its invasion by Alexander, p. 27.
272. Strabo, IV, quoted from Asthan, Sashi op.cit., p. 190.
273. Singhal, op.cit., p. 75.
275. Ibid.
277. Asthana, Sashi op.cit, p. 191.
278. Ibid.
280. Ray, N. R., Mauryan and Sunga Art, p. 44.
284. McCrindle, op.cit, Fragment XXVI, pp. 67-68.
290. Strabo, XV, 1, 69, see the Account of the Antioctus, Epiphanes and Ptolemy Philadeph us in Athanaen, IV, 45.
291. Seleucus got 500 elephant from Chandragupta Maurya as a part of treaty between them and Antigonus got sever al of them at a later period.
293. Bose, Sen, Subbarappa, A concise History of Science in Indian, p. 60.
294. Ibid.
297. Mc, Crindle, The Invasion of India by Alexander the Great, pp. 404-5. We did not know the exact nature of alliance Perhaps Seleu ius married his daughter by Megasthenes and Arian. p. 132.
298. Althaeaeus, I. 32 quoted by Mc, Crindle, The invasion of India by Alexander the Great, p. 405
321 Ibid
322 Ibid
323 Asthana, op. cit., p. 202
327 Ibid