CHAPTER – V

CONCLUSION

Proto-historic Sri Lanka was more closely linked with South India. The occurrence of the same individual or composite graffiti marks on black and red ware both in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu sites enable us to presume that there was a continuous cultural and trade contacts between these two regions. Tamil traders were very active in Sri Lanka from the 4th century B.C.E. to 11th century C.E. The issuing of coins in their own names written in their own script in Tamil, account for the fact that the Sinhalese and the Tamil merchants were actively involved in trade in the southern coast of Sri Lanka. The traders of Sri Lanka had sailed from Mahākoṇḍa and landed at Kāvēripaṭṭana in India and from there they had further been to North India and China.

The very first record of the monetary transaction was found in the Mahāvamsa and it dates to the 6th B.C.E. When evaluating the historical records in Sri Lanka, one may assume that there had been a system of barter as well as the monetary transactions from the beginning of the history. There were labourers, who worked for the daily income in the 2nd century B.C.E. in Sri Lanka. There were labourers who serve by turns. The king Kithsirimewan (303-331 C. E.) had given the wages for all the living beings. Both the properties and the money have given as wages. The kings like Buddhadāsa (340-368 C. E.) understood the importance of a salary to a person during this period and work for the welfare of the people.

Kamboja people had found their way to Sri Lanka, and were living as a distinct social group, constituted into a corporation in the second century B.C.E. The inscriptions indicate that the Kambojas had organized themselves into Corporations. It is interesting to note that in the citadel of Anurādhapura, as in India, fine Grey Ware and Northern Black Polished Ware were found in successive strata. This shows that there was a solid trade relation between North India and Sri Lanka. Apart from the coins, beads and intaglios, the contacts between Sri Lanka and the Gandhāra region
are revealed by other pieces of archaeological evidence from recent excavations at various sites.

Sri Lanka’s maritime commerce began to develop by leaps and bounds once trade links were established with the Persian Gulf. Cosmos bears witness to the presence of Persian traders in Sri Lanka in the 5th century. The uninterrupted trade contacts of Sri Lanka with Persia, Central Asia and Northwest India are revealed by the recent finds of Sasanian ceramics, bullae and coins at Māntai, Anurādhapura and Tissamahārāma. Persian Nestorian Christians were responsible for the increasing trade activities between the Sasanian emperor and the Island.

The traders were in a wealthy position in the society and they were able to donate the caves, to the monks. As mentioned in the Brahmi inscriptions in Sri Lanka, there were well organized guilds of traders. The ships of this seaborne network were probably capable of carrying a greater volume of goods than the land bound caravans. Attempts were being made from about the fifth century to ensure the security of the sea. The sixth century probably represents the highest point of the development of Sri Lanka as a centre of navigational and commercial activity.

The deeds of the Indian donors may have inspired the kings in Sri Lanka to make contribution to the Buddhist establishments. Specifically, the rulers receiving the patronage of the Bhikkus had experienced a considerable possibility of acquiring the will of the general public at large. Hence the rulers have always acted in a way where the order of the Bhikkus was assured with the progress and upliftment.

After the 6th century, we can observe the increase of the Tamil population and as well it is evident that they became very close to the Sinhalese culture and many of them became as dignitaries. After the 7th century, villages have been granted not only for the Bhikkus but also for the Tamil people, who served the king.

The kings have donated villages to the monks personally after the 6th century. But the common practice which is left behind is giving the whole Sāṅga. The women also had authority of granting bōgagama to the monasteries. It is clear that the Abayagiriya Vihārāya had been able to maintain a close and cordial relationship with the king, and also it had the potential of political influence. The monasteries gained a massive income during the 7th century. Under these circumstances, it could be
believed that sometimes this particular institution has had a right to manufacture coins according to their needs. There were many administrative officers who helped the king in the monetary transactions. Three types of treasuries can be identified. There were separate treasuries for the king’s jewelries, elephants, the horses and the chariots.

It is a well known fact that unlike Brāhmaṇism, Buddhism looked favourably upon trade activities. The monastery needed stable source of income in order to regularly provide for the essential requisites of its inmates, the performance of its ritual, and the maintenance of its buildings. The main income of the monasteries gained from the irrigation works, fields, plantations, salterns and villages. The monks also have been appointed as treasurers in the temples. There were many workers in a vihāra, and also they were paid a salary for their survival. The women were in a good economic position to make donations for the monks. The distinguished feature that can be seen after the 5th century C.E. is the giving money to the monastery to get free from the slavery. The rate existed during this period for the release of a slave was one hundred kahāpaṇa. It appears that the chief monk of the monastery had a place in the committee of the management, presumably in a supervisory capacity. It is evident that the land of the monastery was given to the tenant cultivators on a share cropping basis.

The kings have presented the saṅgha with quantities of precious substances, equal to their own weight. As mentioned in the most of the inscriptions, that the grant was to be valid as long as the sun and the moon lasted. By the ninth century, the relationship between the king and the saṅgha had become rather complex owing to the changes which had appeared in the constitution and in the organization of monasteries. The monastery of this period was not merely a group of monks living together; it also represented an institution which possessed considerable land holdings and an administrative organization to control its property and its tenants.

The strict rules laid down by the kings of this period prohibiting the sale and mortgages of monastic property. The income derived from the trees, plants, rented houses, tanks and the ponds should be given to the Vihāra. Most probably all the transactions have been done by using the lands, belonging to the monastery. All the
income and the expenditure have to be recorded and read out at the end of every year before the assembly of senior monks. Every month the sheets of accounts shall be made public and a fresh statement of account be prepared from them. The contents of the tablets of Mahinda IV (956 - 972 C.E.) found at Mihintale are the best inscriptional evidence on the administration of a monastery.

The literary, epigraphical, numismatic and archaeological evidences provided ample facts to understand the economy of Sri Lanka during the Anurādhapura period. The monetary transactions are one of the important dimensions in the economy. It is understood that the traders, monks and rulers played a dominant role in shaping the economy of Anurādhapura.