



223en21

**21**

## **SPREAD OF INDIAN CULTURE ABROAD**

People have started travelling a lot today. They go by road, by air, by sea, by rail and any other way they can. But do you know people travelled long distances even in those days when there were no trains or aeroplanes in India. India had been in contact with the outside world commercially right from about the middle of the third millennium B.C. Even though India is surrounded by sea on three sides and the Himalayan in the north but that did not stop Indians from interacting with the rest of the world. In fact they travelled far and wide and left their cultural footprints wherever they went. In return they also brought home ideas, impressions, customs and traditions from these distant lands. However, the most remarkable aspect of this contact has been the spread of Indian culture and civilization in various parts of the world, especially Central Asia, South East Asia, China, Japan, Korea etc. What is most remarkable of this spread is that it was not a spread by means of conquest or threat to life of an individual or society but by means of voluntary acceptance of cultural and spiritual values of India. In this lesson we shall find out how Indian culture spread to other countries and the impact it had on these countries. This lesson also brings forward the beautiful idea that peace and friendship with other nations, other societies, other religions and other cultures help our lives and make it more meaningful.



### **OBJECTIVES**

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- *explain various modes through which Indian culture spread abroad;*
- *identify the trade routes through which traders went and became the first cultural ambassadors to spread Indian culture;*



- explain the role of ancient universities, teachers and missionaries in the spread of Indian culture;
- trace the spread of Indian culture in East Asia and the Southeast Asian countries;
- describe India's trade relations with the Roman empire;
- discuss the spread of Buddhism in many countries as a religion of peace;
- examine the impact of Sanskrit language on the language and literature of these countries;
- give an account of the popularity of Indian Epics, Indian Philosophy, Indian modes of administration and law in these countries;
- illustrate the shared heritage in the form of huge temples, sculptures and paintings produced over the centuries in these countries; and
- describe India's cultural interaction with the Arab civilization.

### 21.1 SPREAD OF INDIAN CULTURE THROUGH TRADERS, TEACHERS, EMISSARIES AND MISSIONARIES

In ancient times, traders from India went to distant lands in search of new opportunities in business. They went to Rome in the west and China in the east. As early as the first century BC, they travelled to countries like Indonesia and Cambodia in search of gold. They travelled especially to the islands of Java, Sumatra and Malaya. This is the reason why these countries were called *Suvarnavdipa* (*suvarna* means gold and *dvipa* means island). These traders travelled from many flourishing cities like Kashi, Mathura, Ujjain, Prayag and Pataliputra and from port cities on the east coast like Mamallapuram, Tamralipti, Puri, and Kaveripattanam. The kingdom of Kalinga had trade relations with Sri Lanka during the time of Emperor Ashoka. Wherever the traders went, they established cultural links with those places. In this way, the traders served as cultural ambassadors and established trade relations with the outside world.

Like the east coast, many cultural establishments have also been found on and near the west coast. Karle, Bhaja, Kanheri, Ajanta and Ellora are counted among the well known places. Most of these centres are Buddhist monastic establishments.

The universities were the most important centres of cultural interaction. They attracted large numbers of students and scholars. The scholars coming from abroad often visited the library of Nalanda University which was said to be a seven storey building. Students and teachers from such universities carried Indian culture abroad along with its knowledge and religion. The Chinese pilgrim Huien-tsang has given ample information about the universities he visited in India. For example, Huien-tsang describes his stay at two very important universities—one in the east, Nalanda and the other in the west, Valabhi.



## Notes

Vikramashila was another university that was situated on the right bank of the Ganges. The Tibetan scholar Taranatha has given its description. Teachers and scholars of this university were so famous that the Tibetan king is stated to have sent a mission to invite the head of the university to promote interest in common culture and indigenous wisdom.

Another university was Odantapuri in Bihar which grew in stature under the patronage of the Pala kings. A number of Monks migrated from this university and settled in Tibet.

Two Indian teachers went to China on an invitation from the Chinese Emperor in AD 67. Their names are Kashyapa Martanga and Dharmarakshita. They were followed by a number of teachers from universities like Nalanda, Takshila, Vikramashila and Odantapuri. When Acharya Kumarajiva went to China, the king requested him to translate Sanskrit texts into Chinese. The scholar Bodhidharma, who specialised in the philosophy of Yoga is still venerated in China and Japan.

Acharya Kamalashela of Nalanda University was invited by the king of Tibet. After his death, the Tibetans embalmed his body and kept it in a monastery in Lhasa.

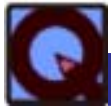
Another distinguished scholar was Jnanabhadra. He went to Tibet with his two sons to preach Dharma. A monastery was founded in Tibet on the model of Odantapuri University in Bihar.

The head of the Vikramashila University was Acharya Ateasha, also known as Dipankara Shreejnana. He went to Tibet in the eleventh century and gave a strong foundation to Buddhism in Tibet. Thonmi Sambhota, a Tibetan minister was a student at Nalanda when the Chinese pilgrim Huien-tsang visited India. Thonmi Sambhota studied there and after going back, he preached Buddhism in Tibet. A large number of Tibetans embraced Buddhism. Even the king became a Buddhist. He declared Buddhism as the State religion. Among the noteworthy teachers, Kumarajiva was active in the fifth century.

## 21.2 SPREAD OF INDIAN CULTURE THROUGH OTHER MODES

**Romas or Gypsies** Some groups of Indians went abroad as wanderers. They called themselves Romas and their language was Romani, but in Europe they are famous as Gypsies. They went towards the West, crossing the present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. From there, their caravans went through Iran and Iraq to Turkey. Travelling through Persia, Taurus mountains and Constantinople, they spread to many countries of Europe. Today they live in Greece, Bulgaria, States of former Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Russia, Poland, Switzerland, France, Sweden, Denmark and England. It took them almost four hundred years to spread to these countries. By that time, though they had forgotten their original home, they did retain their language, customs, ways of living, and their professions.

The Romas are known for their dance and music as well. It is said that every Roma musician is a splendid artist.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.1

1. Who spread our culture abroad?

---

2. Which two universities did Chinese pilgrim Huien–tsang visit?

---

3. Name the Tibetan scholar who gave a description of Vikramashila University?

---

4. Who were the two teachers who visited China during AD 67?

---

5. Why did Acharya Kumarajiva go to China?

---

6. Who were Gypsies in ancient times?

---

### 21.3 INDIAN CULTURE IN CENTRAL ASIA

From the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. onwards India maintained commercial contact with China, Central Asia, West Asia and the Roman empire. Central Asia is a landmass bound by China, Russia, Tibet, India and Afghanistan. Traders to and from China regularly crossed the region despite hardships. The route, that was opened by them, later became famous as the Silk Route. The route was so named because silk was one of the chief mercantile commodities of China. In later times, the same route was used by scholars monks and missionaries. The route served as a great channel for the transmission of cultures of the then known world. The impact of Indian culture was felt strongly in Central Asia.

Among the kingdoms of Central Asia, Kuchi was a very important and flourishing centre of the Indian culture. It was the kingdom where the Silk Route bifurcates and meets at the Dun-huang caves in China again. Thus, there is the Northern and the Southern Silk Route. The Northern route goes via Samarkand, Kashgarh, Tumshuk, Aksu, Karashahr, Turfan and Hami and the Southern route via Yarkand, Khotan, Keriya, Cherchen and Miran. Many Chinese and Indian scholars travelled through these routes in search of wisdom and to propagate the philosophy of Buddhism.



**Notes**



Cultural exchanges that took place between India and the countries of Central Asia are visible from the discoveries of ancient stupas, temples, monasteries, images and paintings found in all these countries. Along the route there were resting places for Monks and Missionaries, for pilgrims and merchants and later these became famous centres of Buddhist learning. Silk and jade, horses and valuables changed hands, but the most lasting treasure that travelled along the route was Buddhism. Thus, the trade route transmitted religion and philosophy, ideas and beliefs, languages and literature, and art and culture.

Khotan was one of the most important outposts. It was on the Southern Silk Route.

The history of cultural relationship between India and the kingdom goes back to over two millennia. Khotan was famous for its silk industry, dance, music, literary pursuits, commercial activities and for gold and jade exports.

The history of the Indo-Khotanese relationship is witnessed by a continuous flow of teachers and monks from India to Khotan. Coins found from the first century AD bear engravings in Chinese on the obverse and Prakrit in Kharosthi script on the reverse providing evidence of a composite culture in Khotan. A large number of Sanskrit manuscripts, translations and transcriptions of Buddhist texts in Sanskrit were discovered from the monasteries buried in sand.

## 21.4 INDIAN CULTURE IN EAST ASIA

### China

The contact between India and China began around the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C. Indian culture first entered China with two monk scholars—Kashyapa Martanga and Dharmarakshita who went to China in AD 67 on the invitation of the Chinese Emperor Ming Ti.

After Kashyapa Martanga and Dharmarakshita, there was a continuous flow of scholars from India to China and from China to India. The Chinese were a highly cultured people. They listened to the thrilling stories of the Buddha with great attention. The Chinese who came in search of wisdom wrote about India and the Indian culture to such an extent that today they are the most important sources of Indian history. Prominent teachers from the Indian Universities and monasteries became famous in China. For example, a scholar named Bodhidharma went to China from Kanchipuram. He went to Nalanda, studied there and left for China. He carried the philosophy of Yoga with him and popularized the practice of '*dhyana*', (meditation), which was later known in China as *ch'an*. Bodhidharma became such an eminent figure that people began to worship him in China and Japan.

The Buddhists philosophy appealed to the Chinese intellectuals because they already had a developed philosophical school in Confucianism.



In the fourth century AD Wei Dynasty came to power in China. Its first Emperor declared Buddhism as the state religion. This gave an impetus to the spread of Buddhism in China. Thousands of Sanskrit books were translated into Chinese. Braving the hazards of a long and perilous journey they came to visit the land of the Buddha. They stayed in India and collected Buddhist relics and manuscripts related to Buddhism and learnt about it staying at the various educational centres.

With the spread of Buddhism, China began to build cave temples and monastic complexes on a large scale. Colossal images were carved on the rocks and caves were beautifully painted from the inside. Dun-huang, Yun-kang and Lung-men are among the most famous cave complexes in the world. Indian influences are quite evident on these complexes.

The two way traffic of scholars and monks was responsible for cultural contacts and exchange of ideas.

### **Korea**

Korea is situated on the Northeast of China. Korea received Indian cultural elements through China. Sundo was the first Buddhist Monk who entered Korea, carrying a Buddha image and sutras in AD 352. He was followed by Acharya Mallananda, who reached there in AD 384. In AD 404, an Indian monk built two temples in the Pyongyang city in Korea. He was followed by a number of teachers from India. They brought philosophy, religion, the art of making images, painting, and metallurgy. Many scholars came to India from Korea in search of knowledge. They were trained in astronomy, astrology, medicine and in several other fields of knowledge. Monasteries and temples acted as centres of devotion and learning all over Korea. A large number of Buddhist texts were translated there.

The philosophy of '*dhyana yoga*' reached Korea in the eighth to ninth century AD. The kings and queens, princes and ministers, even warriors began to practise yoga to be brave and fearless. Out of devotion to wisdom, Buddhist texts were printed by the Koreans in six thousand volumes. Indian scripts had also reached Korea by then.

### **Japan**

The story of Indian culture in Japan is believed to go back to more than fifteen hundred years. But the earliest historical evidence of Indian culture going to Japan is from AD 552. At that time, the Korean Emperor sent a Buddhist statue, sutras, instruments for worship, artists, sculptors, painters and architects as gifts for the Japanese Emperor.

Soon, Buddhism was given the status of State Religion. Thousands of Japanese became monks and nuns.

Sanskrit was accepted as the sacred language in Japan. Monks were given special training

**Notes**

to write the Sanskrit syllables and mantras. The script in which all these are written is known as 'Shittan'. Shittan is believed to be Siddham, the script that gives 'siddhi' (accomplishment).

Even today, there is a keen desire among the Japanese scholars to learn Sanskrit. As the language of Buddhist scriptures, it is a cementing force between India and Japan. Buddhist sutras, translated into Chinese, were brought to Japan during the time of Prince Shotokutaishi in the seventh century, who was highly impressed by their philosophy.

**Tibet**

Tibet is situated on a plateau to the north of the Himalayas. The people of Tibet are Buddhists. The Tibetan king Naradeva is believed to have sent his minister Thonmi Sambhot accompanied by sixteen outstanding scholars to Magadha where they studied under Indian teachers. After sometime, Thonmi Sambhot went to Kashmir. It is said that he devised a new script for Tibet in the seventh century on the basis of Indian alphabets of the Brahmi script. Till today, the same script is being used in Tibet. It also influenced the scripts of Mongolia and Manchuria.

It seems Thonmi Sambhot carried with him a number of books from India. On going back to Tibet, he wrote a new grammar for the Tibetans which is said to be based on the Sanskrit grammar written by Panini. The king was so attracted to the literature brought by him that he devoted four years to study them. He laid the foundation for the translation of Sanskrit books into Tibetan. As a result, from seventh to seventeenth century, there were continuous effort on translation. According to this tradition, ninety-six thousand Sanskrit books were translated into Tibetan.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.2**

1. Why was the route to China named as silk route?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Where is Kuchi? Why is it famous?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Where were the coins of the first century AD bearing engraving in Chinese on the obverse and Prakrit in Kharosthi script on the reverse discovered?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What are Dun-huang, Yun-kang and Lung-men?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. When did the philosophy of 'dhyana yoga' reach Korea?  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. How did Indian culture reach Japan?

---

7. What is known as Shittan in Japan?

---

8. How many books of Sanskrit language got translated into Tibetan during seventh century to seventeenth century AD?

---

**Notes**

## 21.5 INDIAN CULTURE IN SRI LANKA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

### **Sri Lanka**

You might have read the great epic called Ramayana in which Lord Rama, King of Ayodhya goes to Sri Lanka to bring back Sita. It is possible that the Lanka of that time and Sri Lanka might be different places. King Ashoka made great efforts to propagate Buddhism outside India. He sent his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra to Sri Lanka to spread the message of the Buddha. A number of other scholars also joined them. It is said that they carried a cutting of the Bodhi tree from Bodhgaya which was planted there. At that time Devanampiya Tissa was the king of Sri Lanka. The teachings of the Buddha were transmitted orally by the people who had gone from India. For around two hundred years, the people of Sri Lanka preserved the recitation of Buddhist scriptures as transmitted by Mahendra. The first monasteries built there are Mahavihar and Abhayagiri.

Sri Lanka became a stronghold of Buddhism and continues to be so even today. Pali became their literary language. Buddhism played an important role in shaping Sri Lankan culture. The Dipavansa and Mahavamsa are well known Sri Lankan Buddhist sources.

With Buddhism, Indian Art forms also reached Sri Lanka, where the themes, styles and techniques of paintings, dance, folklores and art and architecture were taken from India. The most renowned paintings of Sri Lanka are found in the cave-shelter monasteries at Sigiriya. King Kashyap is believed to have converted it into a fortified place in the fifth century AD. Figures painted in the cave are in the Amaravati style of India.

### **Myanmar**

People and culture of India began to reach Myanmar in the beginning of the Christian era. Myanmar is situated on the route to China. People coming from the port towns of Amaravati and Tamralipti often settled down in Myanmar after the second century AD. The people who had migrated included traders, brahmins, artists, craftsmen and others.



**Notes**

In Burma, Pagan was a great centre of Buddhist culture from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. It is still famous for its magnificent Pagodas. King Aniruddha was a great builder who built Shwezigon Pagoda and about a thousand other temples. They also developed their own Pali language and translated both Buddhist and Hindu scriptures in their version of Pali.

Indian traditions were quite strong at the Burmese court. Up to the recent times the court astrologers, soothsayers and professors were known to be brahmins called *ponnas*. Most of them were believed to be from Manipur. Pundits were said to be very active. They were also known for their knowledge of science, medicine, and astrology.

**Thailand**

Till the year 1939, Thailand was called Siam, its original name. Indian cultural influences began to reach there in the first century AD. It was first carried by Indian traders, followed by teachers and missionaries. The Thai kingdoms were given Sanskrit names such as Dwaravati, Shrivijay, Sukhodaya and Ayutthiya. The names of their cities also indicate a strong cultural interflow. For example, Kanchanaburi is from Kanchanapuri, Rajburi is from Rajpuri, Lobpuri is Lavapuri, and names of the cities like Prachinaburi, Singhaburi are all derived from Sanskrit. Even the names of the streets like Rajaram, Rajajrani, Mahajaya and Cakravamsha remind us of the popularity of the Ramayana.

Brahminical images and Buddhist temples began to be constructed in third and fourth century AD. The earliest images found from Thailand are those of Lord Vishnu.

At different points of time, the Thai kingdom was shifted from one place to another. At every place a number of temples were built. Ayutthiya (Ayodhya) is one such place where large number of temples still stand though today most of the temples there are in ruins. There are four hundred temples in Bangkok, the present capital of Thailand.

**Cambodia**

The famous kingdoms of Champa (Annam) and Kamhuja (Cambodia) were ruled by the kings of Indian origins. The history of deep-rooted cultural relationship between India and Cambodia goes back to the first and second centuries AD. In Kamhuja, Kaundinya dynasty of Indian origin ruled from the first century A.D. We can reconstruct their history from numerous Sanskrit inscriptions and from literary works. We can also see their splendour from the magnificent temples.

Cambodians constructed huge monuments and embellished them with sculptural representations of Shiva, Vishnu, Buddha and other divinities from Indian Epics and the Puranas. The episodes from these texts were chosen by the kings to symbolise great historical events. Sanskrit remained their language for administration till the fourteenth century.



Their kings bore Sanskrit names. Brahmins assumed the highest position. The government was run according to the Hindu polity and Brahminical jurisprudence. Ashrams were maintained in temple vicinities as seats of learning. A large number of localities were given Indian names like Tamrapura, Dhruvapura and Vikramapura. The name of months in their language are known as *chet*, *bisak*, *jes*, *asadh* and so on. In fact, thousands of such words are still in use with a slight variation in pronunciation.

Angkor Vat is supposed to be the abode of Vishnu, that is, Vaikunthadhama. Its five towers are said to be the five peaks of the Sumeru mountain. The king Suryavarman is portrayed there as an incarnation of Vishnu who had attained a place in heaven because of his meritorious deeds. The temple represents a square mile of construction with a broad moat running around adding to its spectacular charm. Scenes from Ramayana and Mahabharata are engraved on the walls of this temple. The largest among all of them is the scene of *Samudra manthan* that is churning of the ocean.

Another grand temple constructed at Yashodharapura in the eleventh century, known as Baphuon, is embellished by scenes from the epics such as the battle between Rama and Ravana, Shiva on mount Kailasha with Parvati and the destruction of Kamadeva.

### Vietnam (Champa)

Indian culture was carried to the distant land of Vietnam by a number of enterprising traders and princes who migrated and established themselves as pioneers in the field of politics and economics. They named the cities there as Indrapura, Amaravati, Vijaya, Kauthara and Panduranga.

The people of Champa are called Cham. They built a large number of Hindu and Buddhist temples. The Cham people worshipped Shiva, Ganesha, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Parvati, Buddha and Lokeshwara. Images of these deities and Shivalingas were housed in the temples. Most of the temples are in ruin now.

### Malaysia

Malaysia was known to us since ancient times. There are references in the Ramayana, the Jataka stories, Malindapanha, Shilapadikaram, Raghuvamsha and many other works. Evidence of Shaivism has been discovered in Kedah and in the province of Wellesly. Female figurines with trident have been unearthed. The Head of a Nandi made of granite stone, a relief of Durga image, Ganesha and Shivalingas belonging to the seventh and eighth centuries have been discovered from various sites.

Brahmi, in its late form, was the script of ancient Malaysia. Tablets of Buddhist texts written in a script that resembles old Tamil have been found at Kedah. Sanskrit was one of the source languages for them. Till today a fairly large number of Sanskrit words can be seen in their language, for example, *svarga*, *rasa*, *guna*, *dahda*, *mantri*, *dhipati*, and *laksha*. Hanuman and Garuda were known in Malaysia for their superhuman qualities.



## Notes

Sanskrit inscriptions are the earliest records of our cultural relations with Malaysia. They are written in Indian script of fourth and fifth centuries AD. The most important inscription is from Ligor. Over fifty temples were found around this place.

**Indonesia**

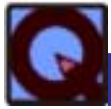
In the field of religious architecture, the largest Shiva temple in Indonesia is situated in the island of Java. It is called Prambanan. It was built in the ninth century. It has a Shiva temple flanked by Vishnu and Brahma temples. Opposite these three temples are temples constructed for their *vahanas*. They are Nandi (Bull) for Shiva, Garuda for Vishnu and Goose for Brahma. In between the two rows are the temples dedicated to Durga and Ganesh, numbering eight in all, surrounded by 240 small temples. It is an example of wonderful architecture. The stories of Ramayana and Krishna, carved on the walls of the temple, are the oldest representations in the world.

Sanskrit hymns are recited at the time of puja. Over five hundred hymns, *stotras* dedicated to Shiva, Brahma, Durga, Ganesha, Buddha, and many other deities have been discovered from Bali. In fact Bali is the only country where Hindu culture flourished and survived. Today, while the entire Archipelago has accepted Islam, Bali still follows Hindu culture and religion.

A large number of scriptural works have been found from Java. They are mostly written on palm leaves in their ancient script called Kawi. Kawi script was devised on the basis of Brahmi. Some of them contain Sanskrit verses (*shlokas*) followed by commentary in Kawi language. Among the texts on Shaiva religion and philosophy, *Bhuvanakosha* is the earliest and the longest text. This has five hundred and twenty five shlokas in Sanskrit. A commentary is written to explain the meaning.

Perhaps no other region in the world has felt the impact of India's culture and religion as South East Asia. The most important source of study of the remains of this cultural intercourse and impact are the Sanskrit inscriptions written in Indian script. They have been found all over this region and a study of these inscriptions and other literature shows that the language, literature, religious, political and social institutions were greatly influenced by India. The Varna system and the division of society into the four castes i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras was known to them. But the system was not as rigid as in India. It was more like in the Rig Vedic age where the society was divided on the basis of profession and not on the basis of birth especially in Bali. Even some of their marriage customs are similar.

The most popular form of amusement was the shadow play called Wayung (like the Indian puppet shows) where the themes are derived mainly from the epics – Ramayana and Mahabharata, still very popular in South East Asia.



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.3**



Notes

1. Name the first two monasteries of Sri Lanka?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How did Buddhism reach Sri Lanka?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Which language became the literary language of Sri Lanka?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is Ankor Vat?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What are the five towers of Ankor Vat called?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What is portrayed at the Ankor Vat? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What does the Ankor Vat temple represent?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What is engraved on the walls of Ankor Vat?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Which is the most important scene engraved on the walls of Ankor Vat?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What is embellished at Baphuon?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Name some cities of Vietnam (Champa) whose name were based on Indian culture?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Where were evidences of Shaivism discovered in Malaysia?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. What are some of the important figurines unearthed in Malaysia?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Notes**

14. Which are some of the words of Sanskrit find place in the Malaysian language?  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. Which is the most important inscription of the fourth and fifth centuries AD in Malaysia?  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. How many temples were found at Ligor?  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. What is Prambanan?  
\_\_\_\_\_
18. What is constructed opposite the three temples of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma?  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. How many temples are there in the Java island of Indonesia?  
\_\_\_\_\_
20. Which stories were carved on the walls of the temples in Indonesia?  
\_\_\_\_\_
21. What was discovered at Bali in Indonesia?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 21.6 CONTACTS BETWEEN INDIA AND THE ARAB CIVILIZATION

India's links with West Asia, by land as well as sea routes, goes back to very ancient times. These ties between the two culture zones (the idea of nations had not yet developed) became particularly close with the rise and spread of Islamic civilization in West Asia. About the economic aspects of this relationship, we have from about mid-ninth century AD a number of accounts by Arab and other travellers, such as Sulaiman, the Merchant, Al-Masudi, Ibn Hauqal, Al Idrisi, etc, which attest to a flourishing commercial exchange between these areas. Evidence for a very active interaction in the cultural sphere, however, goes back to the eighth century and earlier.

The fruitful cultural intercourse between India and West Asia is evident in many areas. We shall see here how the Islamic world was enriched as a result of this. In the field of astronomy, two important works namely the *Brahma-sphuta-siddhanta* better known to the Arab world as *Sindhin* and *Khandakhadyaka* (known as *Arkand*) were brought to Baghdad by embassies from Sindh. With the help of Indian scholars of these embassies, they were

translated into Arabic by Alfarazi, who probably also assisted Yakub Iun Tarik. Later Aryabhata's and Varahamihira's works on astronomy were also studied and incorporated into the scientific literature of the Arabs.

Another important contribution of India to Arab civilization was mathematics. The Arabs acknowledged their debt to India by calling mathematics '*hindisa*' (pertaining to India). Indian mathematics, in fact, became their favourite field of study and discussion, its popularity being enhanced by the works of Alkindi among others. They were quick to appreciate the revolutionary character of the Indian decimal system with its concept of zero; a contemporary Syrian scholar paid glowing tribute to it: 'I wish only to say that this computation is done by means of nine signs. If those who believe, because they speak Greek, that they have reached the limits of science, should know these things, they would be convinced that there are also others who know something'.

A number of Arab sources dating back to the tenth and thirteenth centuries inform us about several Indian works on medicine and therapeutics that were rendered into Arabic at the behest of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, the ruler of Baghdad from AD 786 to 809. Indian scholars were also involved in these translations. For instance, the *Sushruta Samhita* was translated by an Indian called Mankh in Arabic.

Apart from astronomy, astrology, mathematics, and medicine, Arabs admired with keen interest many other aspects of Indian culture and civilization as well. They translated Indian works on a wide variety of subjects, but did not remain satisfied with the translations and went on to work out original compositions based on or derived from the treatises they translated. The other fields of Indian knowledge they studied included works on snake poison, veterinary art and books on logic, philosophy, ethics, politics and science of war. In the process their vocabulary was also enriched considerably. For instance, in the field of shipping, of which they were renowned masters, you can easily identify a number of Arabic words that had Indian origin: *hoorti* (a small boat) from *hori*, *banavi* from *baniya* or *vanik*, *donij* from *dongi* and so on.

### 21.7 INDIA'S CONTACT WITH ROME

It was Southern India which had the monopoly of the products that were in great demand in the West. In fact, the first three centuries of the Christian era saw a profitable sea-borne trade with the West represented mainly by the Roman Empire which had become India's best customer. This trade happened mostly in South India and is testified both by literary texts and finds of Roman coins specially at Coimbatore and Madurai. Items like pepper, betel, spices, scents and precious stones like beryl, gem, diamond, ruby and amethyst, pearls, ivory, silk and muslins were in great demand. This trade with Rome was bound to bring in gold to India which gave her a favourable position in trade and established a stable gold currency for the Kushana empire of those days. The Tamil kings even employed '*yavanas*' to guard their tents on the battlefield and the gates of Madurai. In ancient India the term '*yavana*' was used for people belonging to Western Asia and the Mediterranean



Notes

**Notes**

region and included Greeks and Romans. Some historians feel that the 'yavana' bodyguards might have included Roman legionaries.

By this time Kaveripattinam had become a very important centre of foreign trade. At Kaveripattinam raised platforms, godowns and warehouses for storing goods unloaded from ships were constructed on the beach. These goods were stamped with the 'Tiger' emblem of the Cholas after payment of customs duty and then passed on to merchants' warehouses (pattinappalai). Close by were "settlements of Yavana merchants and quarters of foreign traders speaking various tongues". They were served by a big bazar where all necessary things were available. Here one could find "vendors of fragrant pastes and powders, of flowers and incense; tailors who worked on silk, wool or cotton; traders in sandal, coral, pearl, gold and precious stones; grain merchants; washer men; dealers in fish and salts; butchers; blacksmiths, carpenters, coppersmiths, goldsmiths; painters, sculptors, cobblers and toy-makers. There were also horses brought to the market from distant lands beyond the seas."

Most of these goods were gathered for export. According to Pliny, India's exports included pepper and ginger which fetched a price that was a hundred times more than their original value. There was also a demand for incenses, spices and aromatics from India. Lavish consumption of these commodities took place in Rome.

The importance of trade with foreigners was quite high as one can understand from the number of ambassadors that were either sent to or received by the Indian kings. A Pandya king sent an ambassador to Roman Emperor Augustus of the first century BC. Ambassadors were also sent to Troy after AD 99. Claudius (from Ceylon), Trajan, Antonmis, Puis, Instiman and other ambassadors adorned the courts of various Indian kings.

The volume of trade with Rome was so high that to facilitate its movement, ports like Sopara, and Barygaza (Broach) came to be built in the west coast, while the Coromandal coast in the east carried on trade with "Golden Chersonese (Suvarnabhumi) and Golden Chyrse (Suvarnavipa)". The Chola kings equipped their ports with lighthouses, exhibiting blazing lights at night to guide ships to ports. At a site called Arikamedu near Pondicherry specimens of the famous Italian pottery known as Arretine with the Italian potter's stamps imprinted on them and the fragment of a Roman lamp have also been found.

There is evidence of foreign trade in the Andhra region as well. Some of its ports and inland towns took part in this trade. Thus, the town of Paithana (Pratishthana) shipped abroad stones, tagara, cotton, muslin and other textiles. The Andhra king Yajnasri issued a rare type of coin figuring the ship as the symbol of the state's sea-borne trade.

**21.8 THE SHIPS AND FOREIGN TRADE**

Trade thus became a very important mode that helped in the spread of Indian culture abroad. Even in very ancient times our ships could sail across the vast open seas and reach



foreign shores to establish commercial ties with several countries. The literature, art and sculpture of the neighbouring countries clearly shows the influence of Indian culture and civilization. Even in places like Surinam and the Caribbean Islands that are as far as the American coast, there is evidence of ancient Indian culture.

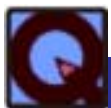
Samudra Gupta (AD 340-380) not only had a powerful army but also had a strong navy. Some inscriptions discovered in the Trans-Gangetic Peninsula and the Malaya Archipelago testify to the activities of Indian navigators in the Gupta age. Hsuan-tsang, who visited India during the reign of Emperor Harsha (AD 606-647), has also written a detailed description of India during those times. The Chola rulers had built a strong navy and conducted raids across the sea.

The Portuguese have noted that some merchants in India owned as many as fifty ships. According to them, it was a usual practice for the merchants to have their own ships.

Certain objects belonging to the Indus Civilization found at various sites in the West prove that there were trade and cultural contacts with the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations in the third millennium BC. India also had contacts with ancient Persia, Greece and Rome which provided a great impetus to the exchange of cultural, religious and social ideas. This flourishing trade contact with the Roman Empire is confirmed by the Roman historian Pliny who deplored the drain of wealth from Rome to India.

## 21.9 WHAT DID THE INDIANS LEARN FROM THIS CONTACT

The Indians learnt many new things from the foreigners for examples minting of gold coins from the people of Greece and Rome. They learnt the art of making silk from China. They learnt how to grow betel from Indonesia. They established trade contact with the foreigners. The art and culture of the various countries got itself reflected over the Indian culture, but than this was reflected in the other countries also.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.4

1. How old is economic relations between India and Arab?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Name some of the prominent travellers of Arab.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Name the two astronomical works given to Arab world by India.

\_\_\_\_\_





**Notes**

4. What was the contribution of India in the field of mathematics to the Arabs?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Who translated Sushruta Samhita into Arabic?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. At whose behest, Indian works on medicine and therapeutics were rendered into Arabic?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What other fields of Indian knowledge was studied by Arabs?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Where were Roman coins found in India?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What were the things in great demand in Arab?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How was a stable gold currency established for the Kushana empire?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Who were Yavanas?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What was the work of Yavanas in ancient India?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Where were specimens of famous Italian pottery Arretine found in India?  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. Which Andhra kings issued a rare type of coin figuring the ship as the symbol of state's seaborne trade?  
\_\_\_\_\_



**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

- Indian culture spread to various parts of the world in ancient times through different modes.
- Indian Universities were famous for their standards of education which attracted students from many countries. These students acted as agents for spreading Indian culture.



- Sanskrit/Buddhist texts were translated into different languages. They became the best modes to spread Indian culture.
- A large number of monasteries and temples were built in all these countries where Indian culture and religion reached .
- Indian art styles were adopted by the artists of many countries.
- Indian Epics are famous in many countries. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are popular Epics in Southeast Asian countries.
- Sri Lanka was the first country to embrace Buddhism.
- Indian script Brahmi was the model for many scripts in the Southeast Asian countries.
- A large number of Sanskrit inscriptions found in these countries are the major sources for the history of Indo-Asian cultural connections.
- Buddhism is a living religion in countries like Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia.
- An important contribution of India to Arab civilization was mathematics.



### TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. What were the various modes through which Indian culture spread abroad?
2. What was the role of the ancient universities in spreading Indian culture abroad?
3. How would Buddhism reach the countries of East Asia as a religion of peace?
4. Give an account of the Indian culture in Thailand?
5. Describe the religious architecture of Indonesia?
6. Briefly describe India's trade relations with the Roman Empire.
7. Ancient India had a great access to sea and foreign trade. Discuss.



### ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

#### 21.1

1. Traders, teachers, emissaries and missionaries.
2. Nalanda and Valabhi universities.
3. Taranatha, the Tibetan scholar.
4. Kashyapa Martanga and Dharmarakshita

**Notes**

5. He went on the request of the king to get some Sanskrit texts translated into Chinese.
6. People who left India and wandered in Europe or settled there, were the ambassadors of Indian culture abroad.

**21.2**

1. Because silk was the main mercantile commodity of China.
2. Kuchi was in Central Asia. It was a famous centre of Indian culture. Silk route bifurcated here.
3. Khotan an oasis kingdom.
4. Famous cave complexes of the world
5. In the eighth to ninth century AD
6. Indian culture reached Japan through Korea. In 552 AD the Korean emperor sent a Buddha statue, sutras, implements for worship, artists, sculptors, painters, and architects as gifts for Japanese emperor.
7. A script in which mantras and syllables are written in known as shittan.
8. 96,000 Sanskrit books.

**19.3**

1. Mahavihar and Abhayagiri
2. It was Ashoka who sent his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra along with a delegation to Sri Lanka. A branch of Bodhi tree from Bodhgaya was planted here.
3. Pali
4. It is supposed to be the abode of Vishnu.
5. They are called the five peaks of the Sumeru Mountain.
6. The king Suryavarman is portrayed as an incarnation of Vishnu. He had attained a place in heaven because of his meritorious deeds.
7. It represents a square mile of construction with a broad moat running around adding to its spectacular charm.
8. Scenes from Ramayana and Mahabharata are engraved on the walls of this temple.
9. The scene of Samudra manthan(churning of the ocean)
10. Scenes form the epics of Rama and Ravana, Shiva on mount Kailasha with Parvati and the destruction of Kamdeva.
11. Indrapura, Amaravati, Vijaya, Kauthara, Panduranga.
12. In Kedah and in the province of Wellesly



13. Female figurines with trident, the head of Nandi, a relief of Durga image, Ganesha and Shivlingas.
14. Some words are svarga, rasa, guna, dahda, mantri, dhipati, laksha
15. The most important inscription is from Ligor.
16. Over fifty temples.
17. The largest Shiva temple on the island of Java is called Prambanan.
18. There are temples of vahanas of Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma
19. Eight big temples, surrounded by 240 small temples.
20. Ramayana and Krishna
21. Over five hundred hymns, stotras dedicated to Shiva, Brahma, Durga, Ganesha, Buddha and many other deities have been discovered.

### 21.4

1. It started in the ninth century AD.
2. Sulaiman the merchant, Al-masudi, Ibn Hauqal, Al Idrisi.
3. (a) Brahma-sphuta – siddhanta better known as Sindhin in Arab. (b) Khandakhadyaka – known as Arkand.
4. The decimal system with its concept of zero.
5. Mankh
6. Caliph Harun al-Rashid.
7. Works on snake poison, veterinary art and books on logic, philosophy, ethics, politics and science of war.
8. At Coimbatore and Madurai
9. Items like pepper, betel, spices, scents, precious stones like beryl, gem, diamond, ruby, amethyst, pearls, ivory, silk, muslins.
10. The trade with Rome brought in gold to India. This established a stable gold currency for the Kushana Empire.
11. People belonging to Western Asia and the Mediterranean region. It included Greeks and Romans.
12. Guarding tents on the battle fields and the gates of Madurai.
13. At a site called Arikamedu near Pondicherry.
14. Yajnasri.