

# HIS†ORY

## Traders, Kings and Pilgrims

### Emergence of New Kingdoms along the Coast of South India

About 200-300 years ago, many new kingdoms emerged in South India. The long coastline of South India gave impetus to various trade activities in this region.

- The kingdoms which controlled the river valleys (the Kaveri River Valley was the most fertile river valley in Southern India) and coastal areas became extremely rich and powerful.
- The word '*muvedar*' was used for the heads of the three ruling families of the Cholas, Cheras and the Pandayas.
- The city of Puhar or Kaveripattinam, the port city under the Cholas and Madurai, the capital of the Pandayas, were two important cities at this time.
- These kings did not receive regular taxes but demanded gifts from the people. On military expeditions, they collected tribute from the neighbouring kingdoms.
- The sangam poets wrote compositions in the honour of the kings, who in turn rewarded them with expensive gifts.
- Later, the Satvahanas emerged as a powerful kingdom in this region. Gautamiputra Shri Satakarni was the most important ruler of this kingdom. He sent his army to the eastern, western and southern coast of the Indian subcontinent.
- We learn about him from the inscription composed by his mother, Gautami Balashri.
- Lords of the Satvahanas were known as the Lords of the *Dakshinapantha*, which literally means the routes leading to the south.



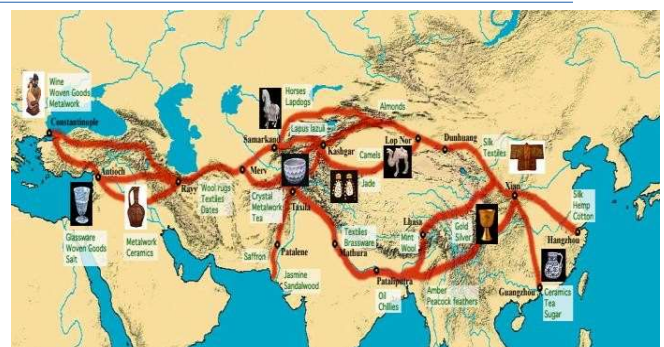
Coins depicting the Satvahanas King, Gautamiputra Shri Satakarni

### Trade on the Sea Routes

South India at this time was famous for gold, precious and semi-precious stones and spices, especially pepper. The demand for pepper was so high in the Roman Empire that it was known as black gold. The traders from South India carried pepper to the Roman Empire in their ships. Many Roman coins have been found in South India. Traders also sailed from the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. They were helped by the monsoon winds while crossing these seas.

### The Silk Route

- Silk was first made in China about 7,000 years ago. Raw silk is first extracted from the cocoons of silk worms, spun into threads and then woven into cloth.
- Since silk was in demand in West Asia and Europe, the land routes which were followed by the traders while travelling to these distant lands while carrying silk with them came to be known



The Silk Route

as the silk route.

- Many kings wanted to control a large part of the silk route so that they could obtain tribute and gifts from the merchants trading in silk.
- In return, these kings protected the traders from robbers when they passed through their kingdoms.

## The Kushanas

About 200 years ago, the Kushanas ruled India.

- They ruled over Central Asia and North-West India.
- The Kushanas controlled a large part of the silk route.
- Peshawar and Mathura, apart from Taxila were two prominent centres under their control.
- The Kushanas were among the earliest rulers in India to issue gold coins. These coins were used by the merchants trading along the silk route.
- Kanishka was one of the most important Kushan rulers.



Kanishka was one of the first kings who issued gold coins in India

## The Spread of Buddhism

Under the Kushanas, not only did Buddhism spread rapidly but also evolved into a new form.

- Kanishka organised the Buddhist Council, where Buddhist scholars met and discussed important matters.
- Ashvaghosha, a poet who lived in the court of Kanishka, composed 'the Buddhacharita' a biography of Buddha.
- Ashvaghosha and many other Buddhist writers began to write in Sanskrit during this period.
- Mahayana Buddhism, a new form of Buddhism emerged during this time. In this new form, statues of Buddha were made. Mathura and Taxila were the two centres where the statues of Buddha were constructed.
- There was a rise in the belief of Bodhisattva. These were persons who were said to have attained enlightenment. They now began to be worshipped. The worship of Bodhisattva spread to Central Asia, China, Japan and Korea.
- Buddhism rapidly spread to western and southern India. Various caves were hollowed out for the monks to live in.
- Buddhism also spread in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia, but the older form of Buddhism was more popular in these areas.



Bodhisattva

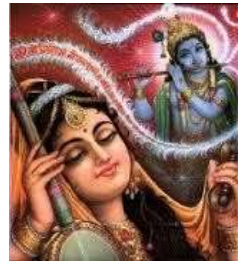
## Pilgrims

Many pilgrims came to India in order to make a holy journey to the various Buddhist places. Prominent among these were Fa Xian, Xuan Zang and I-Qing. They visited many Buddhist places and monasteries and left a detailed account of the social and economic conditions which were prevailing in India at that time.

## The Bhakti Movement

While Buddhism was spreading in India, many developments were taking place in Hinduism as well.

- Various deities such as Vishnu, Shiva and Durga began to be worshipped.
- These deities began to be worshiped through Bhakti. The concept of Bhakti was explained in the Bhagwad Gita, which is a part of the holy epic Mahabharata.
- The word Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit word bhaj which means 'to divide or share'.
- Bhakti laid stress on devotion and individual worship of gods and goddesses. It did not believe in sacrifices.
- It put forth that the path of Bhakti could be followed by all the people irrespective of their caste or economic position.
- It came to be believed that if a devotee worshiped a chosen deity, then it would appear in a form which the devotee desired. This led to the building of beautiful images of these deities.
- Various pieces of sculpture and architecture were made during the Bhakti period. Many developments were also made in the field of literature during this time.



Bhakti laid stress on personal devotion and individual worship of Gc