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INDO – SRILANKA, TRADE RELATIONS – A HISTORICAL STUDY

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Abstract

India is Srilanka's closest neighbour. Ceylon is a big island situated below the tip of South India. In the early ages it was called by the Sanskrit name Simhaladweepa, and Tambapanni and Sihaladipa in the pali language. The Tamilians called Ceylon, Illam. The Greeks and the Arabs named her Taprovane and serendip respectively.

Keywords: Brahmi, Asohka, Buddhists, pali, trade, economic, SAARC.

INTRODUCTION

The first king (according to Mahavamsha chronicle) was vijaya who must have ruled Ceylon during the sixth century B.C He hailed from the Gangetic Plains of India. This was how the process of Aryanisation began over the simhalese language. The simhalese language is associated with pali and its origin is traced to the Brahmi.

While king Vijaya appears to be a legendary character, the first historical King of Srilanka was Devanampiya Tissa of the First half of the third century bc. Emperor Asohaka was his contemporary. So Devanampiya Tissa and his followers become Buddhists.

Trade and Commerce

Economic relations between India and Srilanka have a long history back to centuries. Trade between the Roman Empire and India during the period of

Emperors Augustus and Vespasian was flourishing, thanks to the commercial entrepot situated on the Southern coast of Ceylon. Merchants of China, South- East Asia, India and the Roman empire gathered there to exchange their commodities.

Several Indian ships were found plying at the Gulf of Mannar and Anuradhapura, and attracted the attention of several foreign merchants even though it was not a port city. The Ceylonese ports were made use of by Indian merchants to import spices, forest – resins, scented woods and silk from South - East Asia and China. These imported goods were subsequently sold in the markets spread all over India.

Advent of European Traders

The Portuguese entered Ceylon in 1505 for the purpose of establishing their trade. At the end of the century they

acquired the South-Western districts of Ceylon. They captured Jaffna in 1619. The Sinhalese kings sought the support of the Dutch to expel the Portuguese.

After the decline of Portuguese power in South - East Asia in the last decade of fifteenth century paved the way for the other European powers to enter Ceylon.

The most notable among them were the Dutch who captured the monopoly over spice and pepper trade. The Dutch began to establish their commercial empire in South-East Asia particularly Ceylon. The Dutch established their monopoly over spice trade and made huge profits by selling it to European countries.

The Dutch traveller Lin Schoten, has given a graphic account of his voyages in South - East Asia. He visited many parts of south - East Asia and India. The Dutch merchants were able to prosper mainly because of the pepper trade it was during one of their visits to South – East Asia that they established contacts with Ceylon. Prospects for trade appeared very bright in this region, and therefore, they formed the East India company in 1602 on the model of the British. The natives of this region hated Portuguese and they welcomed the entry of the Dutch. The Dutch were prepared to meet any threat of Portuguese, whose main centres happened to be Malacca and Colombo. The Ceylon offered to the Europeans some of its valuable products like spices, tea, Rubber and cinnamon.

The Portuguese made their impact upon the Ceylonese in many respects. For example, the Ceylon Capital, Colombo is a Portuguese name. Similarly many Christians living in Ceylon have Portuguese names.

King Rajasingha II of Kandy sought Dutch support in 1638 to overthrow the Portuguese domination. The Dutch fought the Portuguese on the coast of Nagapatnam in 1644. Though the Portuguese recovered from these

setbacks, they were unable to hold on to their settlement in Ceylon due to the resistance of King Rajasingha II of Kandy.

The Dutch rule in Ceylon also continued for a long time. The central kingdom of Kandy established its contact with the British East India Company through an agreement made for the purpose of driving out the Dutch (1796). King Rajasingha offered friendly terms to the British. In 1796, the Dutch had to transfer their power and possessions in Ceylon to the British East India Company.

Ceylon Srilanka was a British colony, between 1815 and 1948. In 1947 the British announced that India was to become independent. The Ceylonese demanded their independence and in June 1947 the British agreed to make Srilanka a dominion. Srilanka became independent on 4th February 1948. The formal economic relations in the post-independent era began in 1968 with the setting up of the Indo- Lanka Joint committee on Economic co-operation which aimed at increasing economic co-operations in trade, industry, agriculture and tourism.

India and Srilanka enjoy a vibrant and growing economic and commercial partnership, with bilateral trade growing rapidly in the last decade and a number of leading Indian private sector companies investing in Srilanka and establishing a presence in this country. Srilanka is India's largest trade partner in SAARC. India in turn is Srilanka's largest trade partner globally. The main framework for bilateral trade has been provided by the India – Srilanka free trade agreement, that was signed in 1998.

The other economic engagement of India – Srilanka was firstly the Civil Aviation Agreement. Srilanka enjoys a very special relationship with India in the field of civil aviation. It is the largest foreign air line operator to India.

Secondly Science and Technology co-operation, its first meeting of the India

–Srilanka a joint committee was held at New Delhi on Sep2011.

Thirdly Tourism, It forms an important link between India and Srilanka and India is largest Source market for Srilankan tourism.

Conclusion

The relationship between India and Srilanka is more than 2500 years old and both sides have built upon a legacy of intellectual, cultural, on Economic and commercial partnership.

Economic and political relations between the two countries were dependent on the political and economic policies pursued by the two countries.

India is active in a number of areas of development activity in Srilanka. About one sixth of the total development credit granted by India is made available to Srilanka.

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