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Maritime Trade and Religious Exchange in South and Southeast Asia: Buddhism, Merchants, and the Indian Ocean World

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Abstract

From its inception, Buddhism has been intertwined with trade and traders, who significantly contributed to the patronage and dissemination of Buddhism across India and beyond. The ancient Buddhist monasteries in India appeared to offer spiritual guidance, lodging, and healthcare to long-distance traders, who reciprocated by donating to the monastic communities. Notably, many Buddhist centers in India are situated along ancient key trade routes. The literary sources and archaeological studies clearly highlight the crucial importance of the maritime interface in facilitating the exchange of Buddhist religious ideas, missionaries, and culture from India to different regions of the world. In fact, both local and foreign trade, along with traders, significantly contributed to the promotion of the Buddhist centres in India. Likewise, Indian traders and merchant guilds played an important role in supporting religious institutions overseas. The main objective of this paper is to comprehensively elucidate the relationship between Buddhism and trade, primarily drawing upon recent archaeological, epigraphical findings, and literary references. The paper also briefly addresses the diffusion of Islam into the Malay Archipelago through peaceful trade networks and the Sufi missions. The propagation of Islamic traditions along the coastal regions of Gujarat and Kerala in India, well before the establishment of the Islamic dynasty in North India, mainly occurred through the peaceful interaction of Arab merchants in this region via maritime trade.

Keywords:

Archaeological source, Buddhism, Merchant guild, Monastery, Trade and Traders.

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Abstrak

Sejak awal kemunculannya, agama Buddha telah terkait erat dengan perdagangan dan para pedagang, yang memberikan kontribusi signifikan terhadap dukungan serta penyebaran agama Buddha di seluruh India dan wilayah lainnya. Biara-biara Buddha kuno di India tampaknya menyediakan bimbingan spiritual, tempat singgah, dan layanan kesehatan bagi para pedagang jarak jauh, yang kemudian membalasnya dengan memberikan sumbangan kepada komunitas biara tersebut. Perlu dicatat bahwa banyak pusat kegiatan Buddha di India terletak di sepanjang jalur perdagangan utama pada masa lampau. Berbagai sumber tertulis dan kajian arkeologis dengan jelas menyoroti betapa pentingnya peran jalur maritim dalam memfasilitasi pertukaran gagasan keagamaan Buddha, penyebaran oleh misionaris, serta pertukaran budaya dari India ke berbagai wilayah di dunia. Faktanya, kegiatan perdagangan—baik lokal maupun mancanegara—serta para pelakunya telah berkontribusi secara signifikan terhadap perkembangan pusat-pusat agama Buddha di India. Demikian pula, para pedagang dan serikat pedagang India memainkan peran penting dalam mendukung lembaga-lembaga keagamaan di luar negeri. Tujuan utama makalah ini adalah untuk menguraikan secara komprehensif hubungan antara agama Buddha dan perdagangan, terutama dengan merujuk pada temuan arkeologis dan epigrafis terkini serta berbagai referensi tertulis. Makalah ini juga membahas secara singkat penyebaran Islam ke Kepulauan Melayu melalui jaringan perdagangan damai dan misi Sufi. Penyebaran tradisi Islam di wilayah pesisir Gujarat dan Kerala, India—yang terjadi jauh sebelum berdirinya dinasti Islam di India Utara—terutama berlangsung melalui interaksi damai para pedagang Arab di wilayah tersebut lewat jalur perdagangan laut.

Kata Kunci:

Agama Buddha, Biara, Perdagangan dan pedagang, Serikat pedagang, Sumber arkeologis.

Introduction

Trade, through maritime and terrestrial routes, along with the traders, was instrumental not only in bolstering Buddhism but also in significantly promoting its dissemination across India from its heartland, which comprises the middle Gangetic plain of India, corresponding to the present states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (the ancient kingdom of Magada), into other reigns of India and abroad, particularly to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, from the 4th-3rd cent

BCE onwards. The trade routes, both maritime and overland during the early and medieval periods in India, facilitated the dissemination of the religious, cultural, and artistic elements of Buddhism to far-flung regions across Asia and beyond. The connection between Buddhism and merchants was vibrant even during the time of Lord Buddha. The first individuals Buddha met after his enlightenment at Bodhgaya were two traders named Tapussa (Trapusa) and Bhallika (Bhallika).[i] They became the initial lay followers of the Buddha, signifying the beginning of a strong bond between Buddhists and merchants that expanded in later periods. Additionally, another affluent businessman, Anathapindika, became a lay disciple after encountering the Buddha in Rajagriha. He constructed the Jetavana monastery in Savatthi by purchasing land from the king of Kosala with a substantial sum of money, and he extended an invitation to the Buddha and his disciples to reside there during the rainy season. As one of the initial benefactors of the Buddhist community, Anathapindika is revered for his readiness to relinquish all his belongings. Buddhism steadily became more popular among merchants, who not only facilitated the dissemination of Buddhist concepts through their commercial networks globally but also established pathways for the religion to access new centres of Buddhism.

Inspired by the remarkable generosity of Anathapindika, the benefactors of merchant communities contributed generously to the Buddhist community to facilitate the expansion of the monastery network. His primary contribution to Buddhism was purchasing the Jeta Grove and constructing the Jetavana Monastery. According to Buddhist lore such as the Jataka Commentary (specifically the *Nidanakatha*) and the *Vinaya Pitaka* (the *Cullavagga*), he covered the ground with gold coins to secure the land, subsequently funding the construction of living quarters, meditation halls, and walkways. He also provided daily sustenance, robes, and medicine not only to the Buddha but to hundreds of monks. The close relationship between Buddhism and commerce arose from the necessity for Buddhist monks to rely on contributions from lay Buddhist adherents to meet their fundamental needs. Buddhist monasteries seemingly provided spiritual guidance, accommodation, and medical assistance to long-distance traders and Buddhist followers, who in turn made donations to these monasteries. Merchants were instrumental in facilitating the travel of monks, supplying religious artifacts, and aiding in the establishment and upkeep of monastic institutions through their contributions. Additionally,

they played a significant role in disseminating Buddhist teachings across various regions. Princess Hemamala, accompanied by her spouse from Dantipura in Kalinga, is believed to have transported the Tooth Relic of Buddha to Sri Lanka aboard a trading vessel that journeyed directly from Tamralipti (an ancient port located near present-day Tamluk in West Bengal) during the rule of King Sirimeghavanna (301-327 CE).[ii]

Methods

This paper seeks mainly to discuss the connection between Buddhism and trade as well as traders. This analysis is grounded in archaeological investigations and excavations, accounts from foreigners, Indian literary references, inscriptions, archival documents, and the author's field studies and personal observations.

Result and Discussion

Role of Maritime interface in the spread of Buddhism

The literature and archaeological investigations clearly demonstrate the significant role of the maritime interface in the transmission of Buddhist religious concepts, missionaries, and culture from India to various parts of the world. The narratives of certain Buddhist pilgrims particularly Faxian, Xuanzang, Yijing and others provide insight into the ancient land and sea trade routes, the arduous nature of long-distance journeys, commercial exchanges, as well as the connections between Buddhist pilgrims and itinerant traders.

Faxian (Fa-Hien) (c. 337-422 CE), a Chinese Buddhist monk, embarked on a pilgrimage to India alongside trade caravans and returned via the ocean route through Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. He documented his travel experiences in his travelogue (Legge 1886). In his writings, he referred to India as *Tianzhu*.[iii] Faxian made his return journey on a merchant ship from Tamralipti (Tamluk), the eastern Indian seaport, to Sri Lanka. After spending approximately two years in Sri Lanka, he boarded another trading vessel and travelled to Sumātra. Subsequently, he took yet another merchant ship to reach China (Hinubar, 2010, 223-247). He referred to the large trading ship as *shangren dabo* and the trade wind as *xinfeng* (Hinubar, 2010, 223-247). Faxian's account of his travels on these mercantile vessels highlights the connection between Buddhist monks and traveling merchants, as well as the reality of the maritime trade route linking India and China. Moreover, his

account also revealed that the sailing in the ocean between South Asia and China was the most dangerous one due to the ravages of the ocean and the navigational techniques being of rudimentary nature.

Three centuries later, the travel of another Chinese Buddhist monk named Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) (602-664 CE) to India significantly contributed to the establishment of ambassadorial relations between the kingdom of Kanauji (India) and the Tang court (China). Notably, Xuanzang's meeting with Harshavardhana, the king of Kanauji and a staunch follower of Buddhism, prompted the Indian ruler to seek diplomatic connections with the Tang court. Harshavardhana organized a grand Buddhist religious assembly in his capital, Kanauji, and honoured Xuanzang during this occasion. In his work, *Si-Yu-Ki* (Records of the Western Countries), Xuanzang extolled Harsha's illustrious reputation. The contemporary Chinese ruler was Emperor Taizong (Tai-Tsung) of the Tang Dynasty (626–649 CE). It is mentioned that in 641 CE Harshavardhana sent an envoy to the Tang emperor of China, and in response, the Chinese ruler sent embassies to Harshavardhana's court.

Another Chinese pilgrim, Yijing (I-Tsing) (635-713), embarked on a Persian merchant ship in November 671 CE from Guangzhou, the hub of maritime trade across South China in the olden days, and arrived in Srivijaya (present Palembang of Sumātra) after 22 days. Following six months' stay, he proceeded northward to Moluoyu (Jambi region in Sumātra) and stayed there for two months. After that he arrived at Kataha (present day Kedah of the Malay peninsula). From there, he travelled northwest for ten days and reached Luorenguo (present Andaman and Nicobar Islands). After travelling for about half a month, he reached Tamluk on 2 February 673. Yijing described the position of the constellations in the sky and recorded that the Chinese sailors mainly followed the stars for navigation.

Yijing describes the travel details of sixty-odd Buddhist pilgrims to India in his work *Da Tang xi yu qiou fa gao seng zhuan* (*Great Tang Biographies of Eminent Monks Who Sought the Dharma in the Western Regions*). Out of which 39 Buddhist monks reached India through sea routes, boarding merchant ships, in spite of the perilous monsoon wind during their journey. The various sections of trails of the Buddhist monks in the Indian Ocean are: Srivijaya to Melayu; Melayu to Kataha; Kataha to Andaman; Andaman to Tamralipti; Melayu to Nagappattinam; Nagappattinam to

Harikela; Nagappattinam to Mahatitta (Sri Lanka) and Sri Lanka to Lata (Gujarat) (Huimin Bhikkhu, 2007).

Sacred Safeguarding from the Dangers of Maritime Travel

Buddhist monks travel by sea, often on merchant ships, and land has been a catalyst for the spread of Buddhism widely across Asia and beyond. In many stories, the monks onboard were said to have used their virtue and meditation to calm down the beast (*Vaḷabhā -mukha nāga*) while the ships were being attacked by sea monsters. The *Wang och'ŏnch'ukkuk chŏn* (Memoir of the Pilgrimage to the Five Kingdoms of India) an 8th-century travelogue written by the Korean Buddhist monk Hyecho, records the popular story that the sea creatures invited the monk to their undersea world to teach them the *Dharma* and miraculously returned him to the deck of his ship when they had received his teachings. The Universal Door Chapter (Chapter 25) of the *Lotus Sutra* mentions that Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, emerges unexpectedly to rescue a drowning crew. To avoid death at sea, it was considered particularly effective to chant the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which praises and invokes Avalokitesvara's powers.

The belief was prevalent in the coastal region of eastern India that Goddess Tara (*Ashta mahabhaya Tara*) was the protector of eight major dangers, including the sea voyage. In Ratnagiri, Odisha there is a Tara sculpture that shows around her the scene of the eight major dangers (*Ashta mahabhaya*) and one of them is a shipwreck. Often, the Buddhist monks and nuns were invited travellers on sea voyages because of their aptitude to protect the ship.

From the 1st century BCE onwards, the intensification of the long-distance trade network of India strengthened more the association between merchants and the monastic communities, and the Buddhist thoughts also travelled to various parts of the world through the trade activity. The merchants were able to facilitate the movement of monks, prove ritual items, and help to establish and sustain monastic institutions through donations. In fact, they were the main whisperers of Buddhist ideas from one region to another. The maritime traders often seem to have brought with them the monks in their long voyages, who served as priests, physicians, as well as sorcerers. During the reign of Si-Nhiep or Shiti Hsieh (187-226 CE), Giao-Chi or Jiaozhi (North Vietnam) had grown up as an important Buddhist centre with the affluence of

the Indian merchants trading in that area. It is reliably understood that Giao-Chi played an notable assembly point for the Indian, Chinese and other foreign travellers and missions during the 3rd -7th centuries CE.

Navigator and Buddhism

Interestingly, the closeness of the Indian navigator with Buddhism is attested by a Sanskrit inscription of the 5th century CE found in Seberang Perai (Kedah region), Malaysia and presently kept in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. The three-line inscription offers prayers to the Buddha as an expression of gratitude for his safe voyage by the *Mahānāvika* (great sea captain) Buddhagupta who was the resident of Raktamrttika, which most scholars identified in Bengal (Chhabhra, 1965; *JASB*, Vol. XVII, pt. II, 62-66; pt. III, 66-72). The text of the inscription and its translation is below:

1. *Ajñānāc=ciyate karmma janmanaḥ karmma kāraṇa[m] jñānān=na ciyate [karmma karmmābhāvān= na jāyate]*
2. *Mahānāvikabuddhaguptasya raktamrittikavās [tavyasya?]*
3. *Sarvveṇa prakāreṇa sarvvasmin sarvvathā sa[r]vva.. siddhayāt[r] ā[ḥ] santu*

Translation

1. Through ignorance, *karma* is accumulated. The cause of birth is *karma*. Through knowledge *karma* is not accumulated. Through absence of *karma,* one is not reborn.

2 & 3. Of the great sea-captain (*mahānāvika*) Buddhagupta, a resident (?) of Raktamrttika (identified with Rājbāḍidāṅgā in Bengal) … by all means, in all, in all respects.. all…, be (they) successful in their voyage (Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'H, 2002,214-216)

The *āyaka*-pillar inscription at Ghantasala (Andhra Pradesh) records that the pillar is the pious gift of the housewife Utaradataya Si[d]dhatham[i]tā, the wife of the master mariner (*mahānāvika*) Sivaka, the son of the householder (*gahapati*) Savara, together with husband, her daughter(s) and her friends and companions (*EI*, Vol. XXVII, 1- 4). The text and the translation of the inscription is below:

1. *Gahapat[t]nō savarasa patasa mahānāvikasa Sivakasa*
2. *[bha]riyaya gharaniya Utaradataya s[i]dhatham[i]taya sa-patikāya*

3. Sa-duhutakāya sanut[ā]machāya ayaka [tha]bha [dē]yadhama

Translation

This *āyaka* pillar is the pious gift of the house wife U[t]tarada[t]tā Si[d]dha[t]tham[i]tā, the wife of the master mariner (*mahānāvika*) Sivaka, the son of the house holder Savara, together with her husband, her daughter(s) and her friends and companions.

These records indicate that the mariners, who involved in the transnational trade were the active patrons of Buddhism. The inscription of Mādharīputasa Siri Vīrapurisadata of Ikshvāku family reported near Chinna Ganjam, Andhra Pradesh reveals that the son of a merchant and his family members perhaps erected a *mahāchetiya* at a place which had a name ending in *paṭana*. This may be a flourishing coastal town which must have existed on the site where the inscription and the ruined *stūpa* found (*EI*, Vol. XXXIII, 189-191).

Buddhism and Traders Link

The small inscription in *Brāhmi* letters dated to the 2nd century BCE engraved on a boulder in the area to the northwest of the ancient Abhayagiri dāgāba at Anuradhapura showed the connection of the Tamil merchant with the Buddhist institution in Śri Lanka (Figs. 1 & 2). The inscription records, *"dameḍa-vaṇijha ga(pa)ti-Viśakaha line*" (The cave of the householder *Viśāka*, the Tamil merchant). (S. Paranavitana, 1970, Nos. 356 and 357). Probably the cave was meant for the Buddhist monks or for the Buddhist religion. It is exciting to mention that in the *Chakesadhātuvaṁsa*, a 14th century Buddhist Pāli chronicle, the Tamil people were represented as seafaring merchants who built a *stūpa* over the hair-relic of the Buddha, in a land which they visited for the purposes of trade.

Contribution of Indian Traders and Trade Guilds to Buddhism

The two copper-plate grants found at Melkote in southern Karnataka dated to the latter part of the 5th century CE record a royal grant of land to a Buddhist *vihara* (a monastery), and a Buddha Saṅgha. The grant mentioned that it was put under the protection of the *śreṇis* (merchants) of the Manigramam (a merchant guild) of a town called Perur (Ramesh, 1984, 38-43).

The Indian traders played a vital role in promoting Buddhism in India and outside. There are a number of inscriptions related to merchant guilds such as *Ainūṟṟuvar* (the Five Hundred Members), *Maṇigrāmam, Nānādēsi, Padineṇ-vishayam, Padineṇ-bhūmi, Añjuvaṇṇam,* and others, mainly from Tamil Nadu (*i.e.*, undivided Tamiḻakam which includes Kerala and part of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh) found in Southeast Asia and China indicate their intensive maritime trade link with these countries for a long time.

The inscription of Tamil and *Grantha* characters dated to the 8th-9th centuries CE noticed in the ruins of the northern sector of Anuradhapura mentions a Buddhist establishment called [Māk]kōtaippaḷḷi and the facilities made by the *nāṇkunāṭṭar,* one of the merchant guilds of South Indian origin for the management of some endowments made to this Buddhist institution, in association with the employees of the monastery, *paḷḷiyil kammiyar* (Bell, 1893, 5 and 12, *ARE*, 1912, No. 609; *SII*, Vol. IV, No. 1405; Schalk, 2002, 690-98). It is thus clear that there was a corporate Tamil mercantile community called *nāṇkunāṭṭar* in Anuradhapura. They had made an endowment to the Mākkōtaippaḷḷi and appointed a group of individuals to administer the endowment. This perhaps shows the close association of the Tamil merchant community with the administration of the Buddhist monastery. The name Mākkōtaippaḷḷi is reminiscent of Kerala connections. A coastal town in Kerala known variously as Mākkōtai, Mākōtaiyarpaṭṭinam is described in epigraphy and literature. Mākkōtai was one of the principal centres of a flourishing itinerary trade in Kerala and the merchants of the *nāṇkunāṭu,* who had established the Mākkōtaippaḷḷi in Anuradhapura, presumably, had close connections with Mākkōtai.

The Buddhist association of the merchants of the *nāṇkunāṭu* may perhaps be explained in the light of the description of Vañci (ancient Cēra capital) as found in the *Maṇimēkalai* (a Buddhist Epic in Tamil language roughly dated to 5th-6th century CE). According to that work, there were many Buddhist monasteries and temples in Vañci. So, it would appear that the merchant community called *nāṇkunāṭṭar,* who describe themselves as Tamils, were probably Buddhists, who had gone from Mākkōtai in Kerala to Anuradhapura and settled there (Pathmanathan, 2002, 48-56).

The existence of Ainūṟṟuvanpaḷḷi at Magala is mentioned in the slab stone inscription of c. 1150 CE fixed into a wall in the Rājamahā vihāra at Budumuttava, a village near Nikaweratiya in the Kurunegala district

(Pathmanathan, 1995, 18-19; Pathmanathan, 2002, 37-39; *Avanam, Ital*.9, 1998, 37-39)). This Ainūṟṟuvanpaḷḷi was undoubtedly a Buddhist temple founded or restored and maintained by the mercantile community called Ainūṟṟuvar. The content of inscription at Budumuttava also suggests that the *Vīrakoṭi* had some close relationship with the Buddhist temple at Magala. The money and lamp oil, which the Vīrakoṭiyār had collected from the residents of the town earlier as a levy were to become the dues of the temple of Paramēśvari and the shrine of a deity called Lōkapperuñceṭṭiyār at Ainūṟṟuvanpaḷḷi. It seems the Vīrakoṭiyār are the guardsmen or warriors associated with merchant communities. The Lōkapperuñceṭṭiyār mentioned in the inscription may be taken as Buddha or Bōdhisattva.[iv] The association of Ainūṟṟuvar and other merchant communities with some Buddhist institutions in Śri Lanka is also known also from other inscriptions. The inscription of Tamil with the admixture of *Grantha* dated to the 11th -12th centuries CE reported in the remains of a Śaiva temple between the north gate of the Poloṉṉaṟuva city and the Raṅkōṭṭu vihāra records a Buddhist monastery or temple at a settlement of the Ainūṟṟuvar (*Ainūṟṟuvar pati paḷḷi)*. The record states that the Bōḷāpaḷḷi of Bagicinakay was the *paḷḷi* (monastery) of the town of the *ainūṟṟuvar* of the thousand directions (*ticai āyiravar aiññūṟṟuvar*), the *nānādēsi* of the eighteen countries (*patineṇ pūmit tēci*), who are renowned in all directions (Veluppillai, 1972, 5-22; Schalk, 2002, 703-706). *Ainūṟṟuvar*, one of the merchant guilds, was active at Padaviya and the inscriptions of them mention that they built many Hindu temples and Buddhist shrines in that area.

The inscription of Queen Līlāvati (1197-1212 CE), one of the consorts of Parākramabāhu I, engraved on a stone slab at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, records an abundant information about the connection between the Tamil merchant community and the Buddhist establishment at Anuradhapura (Wickremasinghe, 1928, 177-182; Pathmanathan, 2002, 48-56). The inscription of Līlāvati provides a clear indication of the settlement of *Nānādēsis*, a South Indian merchant guild in Anuradhapura. The inscription records that the merchant guild *Nānādēsi* was expected to be protected and maintain the alms house created on the initiative of the queen there. Since Anuradhapura had been a pilgrim's resort on account of the concentration of many Buddhist monuments, the people who frequented the alms house were mainly the pilgrims. It seems that the *Nānādēsis* had become the suppliers of

commodities to the almshouse and the monastic establishments at Anuradhapura.

The Tamil inscription found in the Laṅkātilaka at Rabbegamuva in Udunuvara in the Kandy district, established as a state temple in 1344 on the initiative of two monastic orders, states an endowment made by a Tamil merchant community to this temple (Paranavitana, 1960, 2 and 16-26; Pathmanathan, 2002, 36-47). The inscription provides an indication of the close interaction that the Tamil merchant community had with the Buddhist temple.

The Cōḷas under Rājarāja I (985-1014 CE) occupied the northern part of Śri Lanka after Anuradhapura had been abandoned by Mahinda-V. This paved the way for the major South Indian merchant guilds namely *Nānādēsis,* the *Vīravaḷañciyar* and their associates to establish a strong base in Śri Lanka under the Cōḷas. The inscription of Līlāvati mentioned elsewhere provides clear evidence of the settlement of *Nānādēsis* in Anuradhapura. The existence of the *Nānādēsis* at the Jētavanarāma site, one of the notable Buddhist monastic complexes, indicates the possibility of their close link with the Buddhist monastic establishment.

There are few Tamil inscriptions which mention the regnal years of Jayabāhu I deal with the Tamils extending patronage to Buddhist institutions. The *Cūḷavaṁsa* portrays that the Cōḻiya monks were as far purer in practice as those of Lanka. King Parākramabāhu II, also known as Pandita Parākramabāhu (13th century), after sending gifts to the Cōḻa emperor invites the Cōḻiya monks to purify the insular *saṅgha* and establish harmony between the two orders.

Role of Tamil Warrior Group in Security of Sri Lanka Buddhist Sites

A Tamil inscription from Morakakavelai in the Tampankaṭavai area, adjoining Trincomalee district, dated 28th year of Jayabāhu I (i.e., c. 1138) mentions that one Uḷakāyakittan gave a *vēli* of land to the Buddha. It is just mentioned '*puttarkku*' in the inscription and no name of the Buddhist institution. The inscription further states that the violator of the charity would have considered the destroyer of the *mūṉṟu kōyil* (three temples*; tri-ratna*: the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *saṅgha*) and also would have wronged the *mūṉṟu kai* (three arms of the army) (*ARE*, 1912, No. 610; *SII*, IV, No. 1406; Ganapatipillai, 1960, 46-49; Schalk, 2002, 722-726). The slab inscription from Kallōya or Galoya near Polonnaruva mentioned that the *vēḷaikkāṟa* army had such three

arms (*mūṉṟu-kait-tiruvēḷaikkāṟaṇ*) (*SII*, IV, No. 1398). The inscription of Ayyāvoḷe 500 states that the *vēḷaikkāṟar* was one of the warrior groups like *aṅkakāṟar, koṅkavāḷ-700, paṉmai-300, ciṅkam, ciṟupuli, nāṭṭuc-ceṭṭi, valaṅkai* and so on associated with merchant communities (Karashima and Subbarayalu, 2002, 72-87). The Polonnaruva (near Daladawaligawa) slab inscription of the *vēḷaikkāṟar* states that the Tooth Relic temple at Poloṉṉaṟuva was named Mūṉṟu-kait-tiruvēḷaikkāṟaṇ taladāyp-perumpaḷḷi (*SII*, IV, No. 1396). Hence it is reasonable to presume that the Morakakavelai inscription was set up by someone who belonged to a group of warriors called "*Mūṉṟu-kait-tiruvēḷaikkāṟaṇ*". A Sanskrit inscription at Padaviya near Hattipola, Kurunegala district, engraved in *Grantha* characters of the 13th century records the construction of a *vihāra* by Lokanātha Daṇḍanāyaka (Lokanātha, army commander) and named it after the *Vēḷaikkāras.* It is also said to have been placed under the protection of *Vēḷaikkāras* (Pathmanathan, 1997, 25-31).

The *vēḷaikkāras* are also entrusted with the task of protection of many important Buddhist institutions in Śri Lanka. The inscription (12th century) in Tamil, found at Mayilankulam, about 58 km to the north of Trincomalee, issued in the 18th regnal year of Apaiya Calamēka Cakkaravarttikaḷ Śri Jayabāhu tēvar stated that the king summoned the *vēḷaikkāṟar* of the Vikkirama Calāmēkaṇ Nāṟpaṭai of Utuṭṭuṟai and placed under their custody the Vikkirama Calāmēkaṇ Perumpaḷḷi (Gunasingam, 1980; Schalk, 2002, 699-703). The Polonnaruva slab inscription (on the slab near Daḷadāwaligawa) revealed the involvement of the *vēḷaikkāṟas* in the protection of Buddhist institutions and the possible relation of the itinerant merchants and the royal army (Bell, 1904, 11; *EI*, XVIII, 330-40; *SII*, IV, No. 1396; Schalk, 2002, 737-754). In this inscription, roughly dated in the first half of the 12th century, it is mentioned that the soldiers of the *vēḷaikkāṟa* group undertook a promise to protect sincerely the great Buddhist temple of the Tooth-relic at Polonnaruva, the task entrusted to them by the Śri Lankan king. This solemn oath was taken in the presence of the *vaḷañjiyar* and *nakarattār* (both are merchant communities), who were addressed respectively as our 'elders' (*mūtātaikaḷ)* and 'associates' or 'companions' (*kūṭivarum*) by the army people. As a reciprocal, the *vēḷaikkāras* received the honour of having the Tooth Relic temple named as "*Mūṉṟu kait tiruvēḷaikkāṟan daḷatāypperumpaḷḷi* (sacred shrine of the Tooth of *vēḷaikkāran* of three divisions). The evidence of the Poloṉṉaṟuva inscription is, however, a bit intriguing, as it certainly suggests

some close relations existing between the merchant communities and the *vēḷaikkāṟa* army.

The *Ayyāvoḷe* Five Hundred (*Ayyāvoḷe ainūṟṟuvar* in Kannada and *Aiyappoḷil ainūṟṟuvar* in Tamil) merchants were ardent patrons of Buddhist institutions in Śri Lanka.[v] Eṟivīra-paṭṭinam (also called Vīra-paṭṭinam, Vīra-taḷam and Eṟivīra-taḷam), the commercial settlements in Śri Lanka, had many Buddhist institutions patronized by the Tamil merchants.

Indian Buddhist Sites patronized by Foreign Traders

It is noteworthy to mention that some of the Buddhist institutions in India were either established or patronized by the foreign traders or rulers who came in contact with these Buddhist centres through trade. Nagarjunakonda, the famous Buddhist site in Andhra Pradesh hallowed by its association with *ācarya* Nāgārjuna, had a monastery known as Siṁhala vihāra (Fig. 3). This monastery was probably patronized or established by the devotees from Śri Lanka who frequently visited this site.

The Śailēndras, who ruled the Śri Vijaya kingdom encompassing Sumatra, Java, and the Malay Peninsula, established Buddhist institutions not only within their realm but also in numerous other countries, especially India. An inscription located at Nalanda in Bihar notes that the Śailēndra monarch Bālaputradēva constructed a monastery there during the 9th century CE, and at his behest, King Dēvapāla of Bengal provided villages to support its maintenance (*EI*, XXII, 281-284).

Network of Buddhist** Sites **and Trade Centres

It is interesting to note that many of the Buddhist centre in India were happened to be an important trade centre or located on the major trade routes (Map 1 & 2). Numerous Buddhist sites have also produced pottery, coins, and various artifacts originating from Sri Lanka, China, Korea, Southeast Asian nations, and the Roman Empire, which clearly demonstrate the interaction of these Buddhist sites with those regions. Taxila (presently in Pakistan), Śravasti (near Benares), Pataliputra (modern-day Patna), Sanchi, Bharhut and many other places were closely connected through the intertwined networks of trade and Buddhism. Inscriptions of King Aśoka, which emphasize teachings related to Buddhism, have been discovered in proximity to numerous urban centres.

The Ganges delta, with its extensive fluvial network that opens into the sea at multiple outlets, provided significant opportunities for international interactions among Buddhist pilgrims and traders. Tāmralipti (Tamulk) was one such port that played a crucial role in facilitating international trade and the spread of Buddhism. Most of the Buddhist centres in western and central India are situated along key trade routes, primarily supported by local and foreign merchant communities. Interestingly, the trade network that passed through the major commercial centres and Buddhist sites in this area was linked to one of the seaports along the Arabian Sea. The notable seaports include Barygaza (Broach), Surparaka or Suppala (Sopara), and Calliena (Kalyan), all of which are also famous for the Buddhist relics found there.

Buddhist Sites along the river system and their Trade Network

The large maritime façade of South India and the fluvial networks of various river systems opening out into the sea at many outlets afforded comfortable waterway traffic and trade in the hinterland. Buddhism flourished in many of these maritime trade centres. The Krishna River, recognized as one of the principal rivers in India, provided not only an accessible route to the sea but also gave rise to several prosperous Buddhist and urban establishments. Furthermore, the river significantly enhanced India's maritime commerce and cultural interactions with Southeast Asian nations, as its delta and extensive network of waterways opened into the sea at multiple points, functioning as suitable natural harbors. Supporters of Buddhism contributed generously to the Buddhist institutions, especially in the lower Krishna valley. The important Buddhist centres on the banks of Krishna Rivers and its tributaries are: Bhattiprolu, Ghantasala, Amaravati, Bapatla, Vaddamanu, Penumaka, Gudivada, Alluru, Gummadidurru, Jaggayyapeta, Goli, Manchikallu, Nagarjunakonda, Sannati and Kanganhalli (Bhima valley), Maski and many other sites. It is interesting to note that many of these Buddhist sites also served as an important local and international trade centre. It is not just coincidental, but probably there was a strong link between trade centres and Buddhism.

Ghantasala (Kaṇṭakasela), the famous Buddhist site in Andhra Pradesh, may be identified with the emporium Kantikossula which Ptolemy (Greek geographer of 2nd century CE) mentions immediately after the mouth of the Maisōlos (Krishna River). The site, being in close proximity to the sea on the east coast, was frequented by people from far off regions even from the

overseas, and therefore had a close interaction with many neighbouring Buddhist centres (*EI*, XX, 22-23).

Another Buddhist site located in Andhra Pradesh, atop the hill referred to locally as Pavurallakonda or Pavurallabodu, contains the remnants of *chaitya-gṛihas, vihāras*, votive *stūpas*, and other structures, which have been dated to the 3rd-2nd centuries BCE and the 2nd century CE (*IAR*,1991-92, 3; Subrahmanyam, 1994). The Gōsṭhani river flows adjacent to the northern edge of the hill and eventually merges with the sea, creating a significant confluence at the base of the hillock. This location served as a crucial navigational point for inland trade during the early centuries of the Common Era.

Phanigiri village, known for its significant Buddhist artifacts from the 1st century BCE to the 4th-5th centuries CE, was a key Buddhist site strategically positioned along the ancient trade route that linked the western and eastern coasts of South India. The Thotlakonda Buddhist Complex, which dates from the 3rd-2nd centuries BCE to the 2nd-3rd centuries CE, is located on a hill that provides a view of the Bay of Bengal, near Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh (*IAR*, 1987-88, 7-8; *IAR*, 1988-89, 5; *IAR*, 1989-90, 4-8; *IAR*, 1991-92, 3-4; *IAR*, 1992-93, 3-4; Krishna Sastry, *et.al.* 1992). The calm sea, protected by the sharply curved coastline adjacent to the hill, offered a secure refuge for mooring vessels. Consequently, this location was often visited by traders and Buddhist monks, who arrived not only from the interior but also by sea from foreign lands. It is likely that this site served as a significant conduit for the transoceanic spread of Buddhism and Indian culture.

Intriguingly, the author's digital documentation of the Buddhist relics in Tamil Nadu has shown that most of them are either maritime or inland commercial hubs (Dayalan, 2017).

Kaveripumpattinam

Kaveripumpattinam in Tamil Nadu, the celebrated capital and port city of the illustrious Cōḷa rulers of the Saṅgam age (3rd cent BCE- 2nd cent CE), is said to have been situated on the confluence of the river Kāviri with the Bay of Bengal. Ptolemy (c. 1st century CE) refers to this place as "Kaberis Emporion" (Gerini, 1992:408) whereas *Periplus of the Erthrian sea* as "Camara" (Schoff, 1974, 46 and 242). Tamil literature of the early centuries of Common Era gives a vivid account of this celebrate port city of the Cōḷas, its harbour, sailors, merchants, merchandise, etc. A poem dating back to the 1st-2nd centuries CE

narrates that large vessels arrived at the port without reducing their sail and unloaded valuable goods from various foreign nations as well as other ports in India (*Paṭṭiṇappālai* (a literature of Saṅgam period) line 185-192). *Silappatikāram,* a Tamil epic of a slightly later period, speaks of the tall lighthouse on the coast summoning the ships to the harbour by the night (*Silappatikāram,* canto. 7, line 3), *Yavanar-irukkai* (colony of foreign traders) (*Silappatikāram,* canto. 5, line 10), etc.

This city was renowned not only for its maritime endeavors but also historically recognized as a magnificent hub of Buddhism. Numerous texts suggest the presence and possibly the flourishing state of the Buddhist institutions at Kaveripumpattinam.[vi] Several Buddhist structures that are believed to have been existed in the city include: Buddhist monasteries known as Intira vikārams (the establishment of these *vihāras* is attributed to Makentra, who is either the son or brother of Aśoka, as well as to God Indra), a Pavilion housing a replica of the Buddha's footprint located in a park named Upavaṇa, and a Prison that was transformed into a Buddhist monastery by the Cōḷa king Kiḷḷivaḷavaṇ at the behest of the nun Manimekalai, along with Cakkaravāḷakkōṭṭam (seems to be a model of a Vajrāyana maṇṭalam), a small Buddhist temple called Kuccarakkuṭikai which is stated to have enshrined Goddess Campāpati (also known as Mutiyāl kōṭṭam-temple of elderly goddess), the pillar-deity known as Kantirpāvai, a divine agent who has the spiritual power of explaining the past and future, Campāpati temple, etc. Interestingly, the excavations conducted at Kaveripumpattinam by the Archaeological Survey of India revealed the remnants of a *Vihāra* dating back to the 4th-5th century, as well as a Buddhist temple from the 6th century or slightly thereafter (*IAR*, 1964-65, 24-25; *IAR* 1972-73, 32-33; Soundara Rajan, 1994). In addition, a large number of Buddhist bronzes are also found in and around Kaveripumpattinam. Some or other reasons the trade activities were weakened at Kaveripumpattinam after the 6th-7th century and in turn Buddhism also lost its importance in this city.

Nagappattinam

Following the decline of Kaveripumpattinam as a hub for maritime trade, Nagappattinam rose to prominence as a significant maritime center in Tamil Nadu during the medieval period, serving as a replacement for the former. Furthermore, the city emerged as a significant Buddhist centre during the

medieval period and thus the city developed into a crucial hub of maritime trade as well as Buddhism in the medieval era.

Nagappattinam was identified as Nikama by Ptolemy (*IA*, Vol. XIII, 332), Nagavadana by I-tsing, Pa-tan by Marco Polo, Malifattan by Rashiduddin and Navutapattana in the Kalyani inscriptions of Dhammaceti (1476 CE) (*IA*, Vol. XXII, 11-53). The strong connection of this location with Buddhism is demonstrated by the excavations in the areas known as Veḷippāḷayam, Nāṇayakkāra street, and Maruntukkottala street, conducted between 1856 and 1934, which have uncovered approximately 350 Buddhist bronze images dating from the 9th century to the 16th-17th century (Ramachandran, 1965). The mass production of bronzes in Nagappattinam indicates that this place was an important centre of Buddhism in India and a large number of Buddhist bronzes were exported from here to various other Buddhist centres in the country. As a result of maritime contacts between South India and Southeast Asian countries, there existed in Nagappattinam a colony of Buddhists and also Buddhist temple and vihāras. During the rule of the Pallava monarch Narasiṁhavarman II (circa 700-728 CE), a Buddhist temple was built at Nagappattinam upon the directive of a Chinese king, likely intended for the Chinese Buddhists who travelled to Nagappattinam from China for commercial purposes.

The Larger Leyden Plates[vii] from the reign of Rajaraja cola I (985-1014 CE) dated to his 21st regnal year (1006-1007 CE) records that the illustrious Māravijayottuṅkavarman, the Lord of the Śri-Vishaya[viii] and Kaṭaha (*kiṭaratt-araiyaṉ*) built the Cūlamanivarma Vihāra, which was of such great height that it overshadowed the Kaṇakagiri, in the name of his father Cūlamanivarman, at Nagappaṭṭiṇam and the grant of Anaimangalam village by Rajaraja for its upkeep. The Sanskrit *prasasti* of this plate seems to be added posthumously early in the region of his son Rajendra cola I about 1019 CE states, as soon as the powerful (Rajaraja) had obtained divinity, his wise son, king Maturantaka (Rajendra I), who ascended the throne, caused an enduring edict (to be made) for this village, which had thus been granted by his father, the king emperor (*EI*, Vol. XXII, 213-266).

The Smaller Leyden copper plates issued during the reign of Kulottunga cola I (c. 1070-1122), dated to 1090 CE record the exemption from certain taxes for the *palliccantam* villages (villages allocated for the maintenance of Buddhist establishments) of the Rajentiracolapperumpaḷḷi and Sailendra

cudamanivarma-vihara *alias* Rajarajapperumpaḷḷi constructed by the king of Kataram (*kiṭarattu araiyaṉ*) at Colakulavallipaṭṭaṇam (Nagapaṭṭiṇam) on the representation made by the ambassadors of the king of Kataram (modern day Kedah in Malaysia) named Rajavidyadhara Srısāmantan and Abhimanotunga Srısāmantan (*EI*, XXII, 267-281).

As mentioned earlier, the Śailendra Cūḷamaṇivarma vihāra was constructed by the Śri Vijaya monarch Maravijayottunkavarman during the rule of Rajaraja cola I, after obtaining consent from the latter (*EI*, XXII, 213-266). It is likely that Rājēndracōḻapperumpaḷḷi was constructed during the reign of Rajendra Cola I or Kulottunga cola I (Rajendra being one of the titles of Kulottunga cola) prior to 1090 CE.

The Buddhist institutions situated in Nagappattinam gained international acclaim. The *Da Tang xi yu qiou fa gao seng zhuan* (Great Tang Biographies of Eminent Monks Who Sought the Dharma in the Western Regions), written by the distinguished Yijing (I-Tsing) in the first or second year of the TianShou era of the T'ang dynasty (approximately 690-691 CE), reports that approximately 39 Buddhist monks journeyed to India via the southern sea during the T'ang dynasty and visited Nagappattinam, presumably to investigate the Buddhist centres located there (Huimin Bhikkhu, 2007). Additionally, the *Daoyi Zhilue* mentions a site known as Tuta, which means "Earthen tower" in the plains of Paṭan (Nagappattinam), suggesting the existence of a brick tower that featured a Chinese inscription.[ix] The inscription referred to in the Daoyi Zhilue indicates that the tower was built in the eighth month of the third year of Xianchun (approximately 1267 CE).

In the 13th century, Marco Polo from Venice travelled to Nagappattinam en route to China, where he described an eastern *stūpa* located in the flat region of Pa-tan (Nagappattinam) with Chinese inscription dated 8th moon of the third year hien chw'en (1267).[x] The presence of a Buddhist structure built by the king of China in Nagappattinam is attested by the Kalyani inscription (1476 CE) from Dhammaceti, the king of Pegu.[xi] As per the inscription, a group of Buddhist *thēras* (senior monks) who were visiting Ceylon encountered a shipwreck, and subsequently journeyed on foot to Nagappattinam, where they visited the location of the Patarikarama monastery. They paid homage to a statue of the Buddha situated in a cave that was constructed at the behest of the Maharaja of Cinadesa (*IA*, XXII (1878), 45)

A dilapidated brick tower stood in Nagappattinam until 1867, when it was demolished by the Jesuits (*IA*, VII (1878), 224- 227) (Fig. 4). This structure was referred to by various names, including Putuveḷikōpuram, Old Pagoda, Black Pagoda, and Jaina Pagoda (*IA*, VII (1878), 224- 227). Sir Charles Valentyn (1725) referred to it as Pagood China (i.e., Chinese Pagoda) (*IA*, VII (1878), 224- 227).

Kancipuram

Kancipuram remained a cosmopolitan hub until the conclusion of the Pallava dynasty (i.e., until the 8th-9th century CE), and its reputation and trade connections were extensive. It appears that Buddhism had a strong presence in Kancipuram during the Pallava period. The *Mattavilāsaprahasana*, authored by the Pallava king Mahēndravarman I (circa 580-630 CE), alludes to the presence of numerous Buddhist *vihāras* in Kancipuram (Unni, 1974). Xuan Tsang, the Chinese traveller who journeyed to India between 629 and 645 CE, noted in his writings that Kancipuram housed over 100 Buddhist monasteries with more than 10,000 monks (Watters, 1988, 226-228). Kancipuram is recognized as the birthplace of Dharmapāla Pūsa. A significant collection of Buddha images, dating from the 7th to the 14th century, can be found in and around Kancipuram, suggesting that it was a vital centre for Buddhism.

As noted in the above sections, the mapping of Buddhist sites in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry (Puducherry) indicates that their density is higher in the Tancavur district, especially in the coastal region, the Pondicherry area, and in and around Kancipuram. Interestingly, these locations also served as significant hubs for maritime and local trade during the medieval era. Additionally, some of these sites are recognized for their political significance. Clearly, this illustrates a robust connection between trade centres and Buddhism.

The presence of Chinese and Southeast Asian materials alongside Buddha images from the same period at Maṇappaṭṭu, Kirmampakkam, Arikamedu (Ariyāṇ kuppam), Pondicerry, and various other locations in South India may indicate a significant connection between them. It is reasonable to assume that the Buddhist relics discovered in this area were either created for or influenced by the merchants who travelled to these trading hubs from China and Southeast Asian nations, settled there either temporarily or permanently.

Conclusion

Both the ancient maritime and overland trade and traders of India played a vital role in stimulating not only trade, but also provided ample opportunities for the propagation and reaching of Buddhist thought, philosophy, written canons and art objects, and the art and architecture from one place to another within India and also from India to various foreign countries. The maritime traders played a crucial role in facilitating the movement of Buddhist pilgrims and teachers, and they were also instrumental in the establishment of Buddhist institutions both domestically and internationally.

It is noteworthy to regard that, Buddhism and Islam share many common ethical values and practical disciplines, even though they exhibit significant philosophical distinctions between theistic and non-theistic beliefs. Both traditions highlight the significance of compassion, charity, mindfulness, and the necessity of leading a virtuous life that is oriented towards the community. Fascinatingly, trade and traders played a significant role in the dissemination of philosophical and religious traditions of both religions, mainly to Southeast Asia, from their places of inception.

Just as Buddhists believe that the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and the goddess Tara protect seafarers and traders from different challenges, Muslim traders share a similar reverence for certain Sufi saints. The Sufi saint Shaykh Abū Isḥāq al-Kāzarūnī (d. 1035), whose mausoleum was located in the town of Kāzarūn (present-day Kazerun, Iran), until its destruction in the early 1500s, is regarded as the guardian of sailors and merchants along the trade routes between the Persian Gulf and South China. Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta visited the saint's shrine in Kāzarūn (Southern Iran) and observed that merchants vowed sums of money to the saint in exchange for their protection.

In Southern Asia, Islam and Buddhism are in conversation about how 'orders' have functioned within these traditions in expanding and sustaining transregional religious networks. These orders have presented certain traditions and their human representatives as appealing and authoritative, and have developed pathways through which local communities could be acknowledged and engaged as part of a larger network of coreligionists (R. Michael Feenar and Anne M. Blackburn, 2019, 1-19). In this way, the long-standing interactions of Buddhism and Islam with the local communities contributed to their localization within this Southern Asian region.

Following the rise of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula during the 7th century, the faith began to extend into eastern territories, facilitated by trade that was developed through the establishment of the maritime Silk Roads. Muslims were recognized for their commercial acumen, which was significantly promoted by Islam, alongside their remarkable sailing abilities. Consequently, they succeeded in dominating the East-West trade along the maritime Silk Roads.

Muslim traders largely embarked on their journeys independently, a factor that played a significant role in spreading their religion along trade routes and at various locations. Wherever their travels took them, Muslim merchants conveyed the message of Islam. This was facilitated by the Muslim approach to 'direct' trade, recognized as one of the key innovations of Islam. By utilizing the established networks of the Indian Ocean and the Silk Road, Muslim merchants advanced their faith by assimilating into local economies, impacting cultures through shared values and intellectual exchanges, and promoting cross-cultural collaboration among different religions.

The expansion of Islam was significantly supported by the social interactions that emerged from trade. The interactions formed among merchants were vital in integrating Islamic principles with local traditions, promoting vibrant and inclusive societies while nurturing a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. Furthermore, the trade routes acted as channels for the exchange of not just commodities but also knowledge, encompassing disciplines like astronomy, mathematics, and various other domains of Islamic intellectual achievements.

Unlike territorial expansion achieved through military force, the spread of Islam through trade exemplifies a process marked by harmonious cultural and intellectual interactions. Similar to Buddhism, Islam assimilates along with the pre-existing cultural and religious elements of the Southeast Asian regions.

The spread of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia between the 12th and 15th centuries, primarily through peaceful trade and the impact of Sufi Muslim preachers and Muslim merchants. The spread of Islam in these regions occurred seamlessly through commercial networks and spiritual teaching of Sufi saints, fostering a fluid, harmonious blend of cultural and spiritual elements.

Muslim traders were attracted to the Indonesian islands because of the distinctive spices available there. It is believed that some of these traders settled in Indonesia and mingled with the indigenous population. Additionally, after the arrival of Muslim traders on Sumatra Island, the local rulers began to adopt Islam, which further facilitated their integration into the trade networks around the 12th century CE. Archaeological evidence of the acceptance of Islam among the royalty can be found on tombstones that bear inscriptions with the Islamic year corresponding to the Sumatran Kings of the 13th century. The tranquil, commerce-driven expansion led to Indonesia emerging as the most populous Muslim-majority country in the world.

[i] The Vinaya section of the *Tripiṭaka* mentions that they offered the Buddha, his first meal after enlightenment.

[ii] *Dāṭhāvaṃsa*, Edited by M. Asbhatissa, Colombo, 1883, vv. 324, 339.

[iii] He referred to North India as *Zhengbei Tianzhu*; Central India as *Zhong Tianzhu* and South India as *Nan Tianzhu*.

[iv] Detiyamulla Buddha temple inscription also mentioned about Lōkapperuñceṭṭiyār. A. Veluppillai (ed.), *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, Part. II, Peradeniya, 1972: 15-16; *Āvaṇam, itaḷ*. 9, 1998: 34-36

[v] Poloṉṉaṟuva (A Veluppillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, II, p. 12); Vihārehinna (*Āvaṇam*, 9, pp. 33–34. ca. 1150); Budumuttāva (*Āvaṇam*, 9, pp. 37–38. ca.1150); Detiyamulla (*Āvaṇam*, 9, pp. 34-36. ca.1150); Galtenpitiya (*Āvaṇam*, 9, pp. 36–37. ca. 1150); Vahalkada (A. Veluppillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, I, pp. 53–54 & plate; II, pp. 7–8. ca.1150); Padaviya (A. Veluppillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, I, pp. 54–55; *Ibid*, II, pp. 19–20. 38 c.1150).

[vi] *Maṇimēkalai and Silappatikāram* are the Two Tamil Epics tentatively dated to 5th-6th century CE; *Makāvaṁsa, Abidammavatara* (5th century CE), *Buddha vamcatta katā,* etc.

[vii] Two sets of copper plates of the Chola period are presently kept at Leyden University in the Netherlands. The larger number of copper plates issued during the rule of Rajaraja chola I is called the Larger Leyden Plates, and the smaller number of plates issued during the period of Kulottunga chola I is known as Smaller Leyden Plates. Both referred to the donation for the upkeep of the Buddhist establishments made by Srivijaya king at Nagapattinam.

[viii] Śri-Vishaya or Srivijaya kingdom comprised Sumatra and Java, parts of the Malay Peninsula, Borneo, and Thailand.

[ix] *Daoyi Zhilue* is an important 14th century Chinese work on the countries in the southern sea stretching from South East Asia to West Asia

[x] Marco Polo describes the *stupa* at Nagapattinam as follows, "*It is surrounded with stones. There is stupa of earth and brick many feet high. It bears the following Chinese inscription: The work was finished in the 8th moon of the third year hien chw'en (1267). It is related that these characters have been engraved by some Chinese in imitation of inscriptions on stone of those countries; up to the present time they have not been destroyed*" (Ramachandran, 1954,14).

[xi] *IA*, XXII (1878): 29-51. The Kalyāni inscriptions are situated at Zaingganaingm the western suburb of the Pegu. They comprise ten stone slabs with inscriptions on both sides. The language of the first three stones is *Pāli* and that of the rest is Talaing, being a translation of the *Pāli* text. Dhammacheti or Rāmadhipati, king of Pegu, who put up these inscriptions in 1476 CE

Abbreviation

ARE- Annual Report of Indian Epigraphy, Archaeological Survey of India

Āvaṇam, Tamiḻaka Tolliyal Kaḻakam, Tañcāvūr

IA- Indian Antiquary-A Journal of Oriental Research

IAR, Indian Archaeology- A Review, Archaeological Survey of India

EI- Epigraphia Indica, Archaeological Survey of India

EZ-Epigraphia Zeylanica, Archaeological Department, Sri Lanka

JASB- Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal

SII- South Indian Inscriptions, Archaeological Survey of India

Appendix

List of Figures and Maps

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Fig. 2 *Brahmi* inscription in the Abhayagiri dāgāba at Anuradhapura.

Fig. 3 Siṁhala vihara, Nagarjunakonda

Fig. 4 Dilapidated brick tower known as China Pagodaa, Nagappattinam

Map. 1 &2 Important Buddhist Centre in India

Map. 2 Major Buddhist centres in western India located on trade routes.

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