

Economic Background of Dambadeniya, Yapahuva, Kurunegala, Gampola and Kotte that led to Social Changes.

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ABSTRACT

The economic factor can be regarded as the decision of social development in a human society and with that development of the economic situation; various structures of a society similarly are described. Several scholars have analyzed through their various researches that commercial activities and development of commerce are major facts which a society will organize systematically in the world. The economic factor which was a reason for the origin and development of socio- political organization of ancient Sri Lanka can be studied under two major divisions. Those are an economy based on agricultural activities and economy based on trading activities. R. A. L. H. Gunawardhana has suggested that periods of prolific activity in building of irrigation works in Sri Lanka coincided with the most flourishing periods of trade. The explanation for this is that commercial gain provided the resources for hydraulic engineering. He points out that there was only one new major irrigation project undertaken between the seventh and the ninth centuries, in sharp contrast to the intense irrigation activity in the period immediately proceeding. H. J. Benda has clearly shown from his primary studies that economy based on agriculture and commerce has affected the changes of society and political organization. Therefore, from this part, the growth of commercial activities will be discussed based on those views and how the commercial activities affected the society. Commerce is a factor which is based on buying of items, transaction, selling and consumption. A commercial market is a place where meeting of merchants and consumers takes place. When we study commercial history of ancient time, we need to note that there were two major parts which were called local trade and long distance trade. As has been pointed out by Classen, this idea had confirmed the origin of several society and states, and changes of societies as well. The social history of a country cannot be studied without knowledge of internal trade and international trade of that country because commercial activities affect very seriously to change a society. Those societies become

very wealthy societies due to the commercial activities. In relation to Sri Lanka, it describes the growth of local trading activities and how far it affected the development of the Sri Lankan society. There seem to have been certain special economic forces and features that marked the changes that occurred in the medieval period. Therefore, major objective of this presentation is to discuss the economic factors that led to social changes during the period under review. The research will be mainly based on primary sources and wherever necessary material will also be obtained from limited secondary sources published on the political system of the island.

Key words- Economy, Merchants, Human society, Commercial market, Internal and external trade.

1. INTRODUCTION

The economic factor can be regarded as the decision of social development in a human society and with that development of the economic situation; various structures of a society similarly are described. Several scholars have analyzed through their various researches that commercial activities and development of commerce are major facts which a society will organize systematically in the world. (Benda, 1966: 99.). The economic factor which was a reason for the origin and development of socio- political organization of ancient Sri Lanka can be studied under two major divisions. Those are an economy based on agricultural activities and economy based on trading activities. R. A. L. H. Gunawardhana has suggested that periods of prolific activity in building of irrigation works in Sri Lanka coincided with the most flourishing periods of trade. (Gunawardhana, 1983: No. 4.) The explanation for this is that commercial gain provided the resources for hydraulic engineering. He points out that there was only one new major irrigation project undertaken between the seventh and the ninth centuries, in sharp contrast to the intense irrigation activity in the period immediately proceeding. (*Ibid*, No. 4). H. J. Benda has clearly shown from his primary studies that economy based

on agriculture and commerce has affected the changes of society and political organization. (Kiribamune, 1991-1992: 180). Therefore, from this part, the growth of commercial activities will be discussed based on those views and how the commercial activities affected the society. Commerce is a factor which is based on buying of items, transaction, selling and consumption. A commercial market is a place where meeting of merchants and consumers takes place. When we study commercial history of ancient time, we need to note that there were two major parts which were called local trade and long distance trade. As has been pointed out by Classen, this idea had confirmed the origin of several society and states, and changes of societies as well. The social history of a country cannot be studied without knowledge of internal trade and international trade of that country because commercial activities affect very seriously to change a society. Those societies become very wealthy societies due to the commercial activities. In relation to Sri Lanka, firstly it describes the growth of local trading activities and how far it affected the development of the Sri Lankan society.

2. DISCUSSION

Explaining causes for the declining of Rajarata civilization Michael Roberts says that haven provided by the Wet Zone and the potentialities it held out led the population to concentrate their attention on the South-West rather than to attempt a recovery of the civilization in the dry zone. (Roberts, 1971: 99-109). In his view the drift to the South-West was not merely a story of its occupants being pushed out of the dry zone. It was a push pull process. He further states that the more widespread use of iron enabled peasant cultivators to effectively cultivate the Wet Zone and that attention should be devoted to the influence of the coconut palm and the extension of its culture in assisting the population to move to the lowlands of the South-West. Siriweera says that there was a special attraction or process in the South and South-West during and after the thirteenth century to which Michael Roberts has not paid any attention. During this era, there were marked changes in the Indian Oceanic trade. Although there had been a demand for gems, pearls, ivory etc. in the oceanic trade from the very beginning, international trade in spices such as cinnamon, cardamom and nutmeg witnessed an unprecedented spurt after the thirteenth century. Therefore, the Sri Lankans, rulers as well as the ruled, paid greater attention to regions which produced spices. It is due to this factor that ports such as Negombo, Chilaw, Colombo, Bentota, Beruvala, Galle and Dondra developed between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. (Siriweera, 2002: 74). He further says that even the kingdom of Jaffna which towards the last quarter of the

thirteenth century concentrated on international sea-borne commerce and expanded along the sea coast in order to gain a greater share in this trade. (*Ibid.*, 74) According to this view, trading activities got a high position during this period. This led to the social change in the relevant period. Therefore, we should refer to the commercial background in this period.

As has been pointed out by Hettiaratchi, Paṭṭanagāma or Paṭungam which are showing the development of commerce can be heard in this period. *AlakēśvaraYuddhaya* and *Rājāvalitells* us that of officers were appointed by AryaCakravarti to collect the revenues from the Nava Toṭamuna. (Hettiaratchi.) Many of these have located in the Northern and Western coastal areas. Prince Sapumal won the YāpāPaṭuna. Kolomtoṭa or Colombo which was camped by the army of AryaCakravarti, Toṭupalas such as Vattala, Halāvata, Mundalama and Puttalam were located in the Western and South-Western coastal areas. Paṭṭanas such as PānaduraToṭa, Beruvala, Galle, Vāligama and Devinuvara were located in South and Eastern coastal areas.

The term *Setthi* who is the person mentioned in some chronicles and other sources was rich and had been important member of society by commercial activities. Commerce had become so important in the Polonnaruwa kingdom, that the chief of the commercial group or chief of the *Setthi* was a member of the king's Council. This term is mentioned in the *NikāyaSaṃgrahaya* as the *Situna* (NS, 1907: 18). and as the *Kaḍagoṣṭhiyeāttavun* in the inscription of Niśśankamalla's Rajasabha. (Codrington, 1928: 139). The two terms *Siṭu* and *Mahavelandanā* have been mentioned in the *KandavuruSirta* (Jayathilake 1956: 139) and *Pūjāvali*. (Pj, 1930: 113). *Setthinā* was a one of the persons who revolted against king Vijayabāhu I (1070- 1110). (Mv., LIX, 17). It shows that what kind of important status the trading communities had in the Polonnaruwa period. The Alagakkōnārāwho was descendent from a very rich trading family had got a very important place in the Gampola kingdom. It can be said that there were many opportunities to advance through the commercial activities. The JōtiSiṭāna (EZ., Vol. III, 9.). who was the main administrative officer at in Kandy area in the period of King Parākramabāhu VI (1412-1467) Kotte period, reached a high level status of the society.

Because of the immense population, the main cities of the country became the major points of the commerce. Members of the kings' Council, their families and retainers, army and related officers, mercenaries and various foreigners lived within the city wall or in proximity to the city. Their necessities would have been provided by the merchants. In addition to becoming the

administrative centers, some capitals became religious centers. Therefore, those cities were very famous among outside people. And it was also a factor which had developed the trading activities. Furthermore, the king and the devotees had to supply basic needs of monastic establishments of a city. According to the model of capital and functions, it was necessary to have separate market rooms and specific areas for merchants.

Some streets in the Polonnaruwa were separated for commercial markets full of commercial items. (*Mv.*, LXXIII, 149). There were commercial streets in Kurunegala (Mudiyanse 1971: 22) and many markets with the abundance of commercial commodities on the two sides of the road in Kotte. (*HS*, 1964: v. 24).

Taking into consideration the planning space of capitals, it can be imagined that commercial centers may have been located in the city or out side the city. The commerce was a one task of a capital city and main task was the port city. There were many port cities in the island such as Mahātīttha which was the most important port in the island about the thirteenth century, Uratota which was a place of bustling trade activity, Galle, Dondra and Colombo were ports more important after the thirteenth century. (Siriweera 2003: 125-134). Galle Trilingual Inscription is vital for this time. (*EZ.*, Vol. III, 334-341). This discloses much information about a larger region in which this island continues to occupy a central position. The tree languages evidently, were the regional commercial languages during that period. Historically, thus the 15th century turns out to be the high water mark of peaceful trade and international cultural intercourse in this region of different territorial, racial, linguistic and religious ethnicities. This toleraence is glaringly apparent from the multi-lingual nature of this Galle inscription. This understanding and collective sharing of mercantile profit among diverse peoples of this immense oceanic highway was rent as under with the commencement of European activities from the beginning of the 16th century when violence, rapaciousness and intolerance replaced the age-long co-operation and understanding that prevailed among these orental people. Other ports such as Goḍapavata can be dated to the 2nd century, Weligama which can be dated to after the 12th century, Beruwala, Bentota, Wattala and Chilow which can be dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. (*Ibid*). Many Sandēśashave pointed out that there were wide streets in port cities. (*TS*, 1991: vs. 52-55; *PS*, 1949: vs. 84-88; *GS*, 1920: v. 104). In addition to that, there were many shops of all kinds full of commodities including beads, pearls, gems and other valuable items. The port city was the import and export centers of commercial commodities as well as centers of collecting of commercial items and

distribution. Merchants collected export items such as pearls, gems, spices and elephants in the internal areas of the country and transported them to the port city. Production of some export items and collection were done in the port city or in proximity areas to the port city. If not, they were transported by internal production centers. Current archaeological excavations, which have been carried out in Alakolawāva, located five kilometers from Sigiriya, Kuratiyawa located fifteen kilometers from Sigiriya and Samanalaweve close to Belihuloya, showed that there was a very high quality and large amount of 99% pure iron production. (Juleff, 1998: 3-9). A part of these sometimes would have been used for exporting. While some exported luxury commodities such as ceramic ware, silk, perfumes and wines were channeled to local commercial market, a complex trade organization was necessitated for all these things.

Understanding of this commercial network is very limited due to the lack of evidence. A Cola inscription that can be dated to the 11th century, mentions a very important account about production of trade items in port cities. Taxes for weaving machines in Mantai have been described in this inscription. (*South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. IV, no. 1412; 1414b). It is reasonable to believe that coir industry was very successful in areas close to Western and Southern coasts after about 12th century AC. Omani and Yemeni ships came to Sri Lanka for coir for ropes, cocoanut trees for masts of ships, timber for their ship industry. (Gunawardhana 2003: 29). Many port cities were properly protected by soldiers using walls and doors. Population of those cities consisted of various races and there were variety of groups of communities. There were many and famous monastic establishments in these port cities such as Mahātīttha, Devundara and Wāligama. It is reasonable to acknowledge that necessities of permanent people, people of suburban areas, religious establishments and sometimes of foreign merchants had been completed by merchants in port cities. (*Sm*, 1934: 641; *Rv*, B. E. 2434: 128). These merchants sold the commercial items which were collected from ports and fulfilled the necessities of minor traders. An inscription located in Māntai, reveals that there was a person called *Tēvan*. *Tēvan* deposited money in the names of commercial guilds Chankarapatiyar, VerylaiVaniyar and ValakkaiVaniyar in Mantai for the purpose of lighting street lamps close to the Tiru- IramishwaramKovil in that port. (*South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. IV, no. 1414B). Nānādēsi was also a trading guild which connected to Sri Lankan commercial activities.

Imported luxury commodities such as silk, ceramic ware, perfumes and wines were transported by ox carts or pack animals from port cities to capital and

merchant cities and commercial items for exportation were transported in the same way to the port cities. It was easy to transport these trading items, because there was a road net work combining the capital and port cities. (Siriweera, 1986: 17-38). It has been revealed by archaeological and literature sources that there were roads from Anuradhapura to Mahātittha, Anuradhapura to JambukolaPaṭṭana via Rambāva, Pāvātkulama and Vavunikulama, Anuradhapura to the Gokanna via Mihintale, Mahakanadarāva, Pankulama and Ratmale. A road which had been directed via Kataragama, Buttala, Yudaganava, Mahiyanganaya and Dastota, was connected to Magama or Tissamaharamaya, Anuradhpura and Polonnaruwa. There was another road which had connected the Southern plain and the North via Mahanagahula close to Ambalntota, Magama, Devanagara, Bhimatittha, Titthagama, Kalatittha, Muhunnaru, Badalatittha, Mahāgalla and Mandagalla. Trading fairs like *Tavalama* were held on these roads. Galapātavihāra inscription, dated to king Parākramabāhu II (1236-1270), mentions about a medieval *Tavalama* and Caravan leader (*Sāttunā*) situated close to Bentota. (EZ., Vol. IV, No. 25). A Tamil inscription which was found in Padaviya, mentions that another *Tavalama* in which the money was collected as taxes. (CTI, 1971: Pt. I, p. 55; Pt. II, 19-20). The term *Kadigai- Tavalam* of medieval South Indian inscriptions has denoted itinerant trading groups or trading fairs.

Officers who were appointed directly by the king or trading communities collected taxes in the main commercial centers such as capitals, ports and the market towns. Perhaps commercial communities were assigned this task, due to getting a lump sum or regular payment to the king. According to the Devundara inscription of King Parakkramabahu II (1236-1270), an officer who was called Mahāpandita, collected customs duties at the Dondra port. (Paranavitana 1953: 63-64). It seems that some market towns and port cities were reckoned as special units for administrative activities. S. Pathmanathan expresses by quoting Tamil sources that Mahātittha or Mātoṭṭam was a separate administrative unit and Padaviya and Vahalkada were mainly ruled by the trading community in the period of 11th and 12th centuries. (Pathmanathan, *Op. Cit.*, 1984: 145). However, those units were under the king and did not act independently.

Kings in ancient and medieval Sri Lanka played a very important role for the foreign trading activities as well as local trade. Specially, the king directly dealt with the foreign merchants besides the ruling of commerce in port cities and market towns as well as measurement in the capital. Some exported commodities such as gems, pearls and elephants were under king's monopoly from

the period of 10th century AC. Abu Side, an Arabian writer, has written that the king appointed the men to protect the gem mines. However, as has been pointed out by Batuta and Vartema, king had all the rights to the gems. But the king gave permission to work relating to gems through some payment.

According to inscription found at Gadaladeniya, dated to the 14th century AC, officers of the king could not interfere with the elephant commerce, producing coins and mining of gems. Barbosa's record shows clearly that elephants were king's monopoly. The king had a right to pearls bank. According to the Chang-Ta- Yuan, a person who worked with pearls, they had to give half of the harvest of pearls to the king. When Ibn Battuta met AryaCakravarti in Jaffna, servants of AryaCakravarti were categorizing best pearls from a large amount of pearls. Barbosa tells us that small pearls were to the divers and large ones were to the king. Servants had to give some payment to the king for diving for pearls. And the king got a large income from the pearls monopoly. Barbosa furthermore claims that cinnamon also was the king's monopoly.

King Bhuvanekabahu I (1272-1284) sent envoys to Egypt (Codrington, 1919: 82-85). and king Parākramabāhu VI (1412-1467) sent an army to the Adrayanpet (Ativīrārāmpaṭṭana) port. (GS, V. 148-149; Somarathne, *Op. Cit.*, 1975: 125). These facts were directly connected with kings' desire to promote trade. However, the king had to develop internal trade activities. The research of S. Pathmanathan which mentioned in the South Indian merchant guilds such as *Valaṅgiyār*, *VīraValaṅgiyār* and *Nānādesias* well as *Ceṭṭin*, *Ceṭṭiputtas*, *Chankarapatiyar* and *Vanniyākas* who were assistants of leaders of guilds in the places such as Mahatittha, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Padaviya, Vahalkada and Viharahinna between the 10th and 13th centuries AC is a extremely vital one, because the nature of connections between the king and guilds helped to develop the economic which led to undergo changes in society. (Pathmanathan, *Op. Cit.*, 1982: 11; Indrapala, 1971: 106-107). These commercial communities which managed their trading activities accepted the permission by the ruling king on the promise of paying some money assessing the income of market towns. Some market towns such as Padaviya and Vahalkada were independent units. Army officers were appointed for their security reasons and there were arrangements for public facilities. The functions of these communities are not clear in the politics and war- fare of kings. But, there are many facts regarding the interaction and collaboration of the establishment and maintenance of religious and cultural institutes. (Pathmanathan, *Op. Cit.*, 1982: 11). For instance, Queen Leelavathi made a custom

house in Anuradhapura, to be built by the Nānādesis who was from an Indian merchant guild. The income of that house was utilized to supply spices and other things to the arms house which was called *Palabalavimedhvi*. (EZ., Vol. I, 179-181; Paranavitana, 1960, pp. 12-13). Re-examining Lankatilaka Tamil inscription, Pathmanathan says that the Tamil inscription engraved on the rock at Lankatilaka, which records a royal order pertaining to the endowments made to the temple, refers to a grant made by the community of merchants called *patineṇvishaiyam*. The inscription provides an indication of the close interaction which the merchant community had with the newly established state temple and the role played by the *patineṇvishaiyam* in the internal and maritime trade of the Gampola kingdom. (Pathmanathan, 2002: 39).

3. CONCLUSION

According to the facts analyzed above, it could be seen that there were commercial activities in Pre-Colonial Sri Lanka in the medieval period of Sri Lanka. With the development of irrigational technology, building activities, Arts and Architecture, there was well organized commerce in ancient and medieval Sri Lanka. Commercial activities were very important in the capital, port cities and market towns. Although agriculture was the main economy in the country, itinerant merchant had a task at the village too. After the 12th century AC, trading activities very rapidly came to the zenith of the economy in Sri Lanka according to the above mentioned facts. Therefore, the development of commerce resulted in the

wealth of the society. With the wealth, elites and various groups of community emerged during this period.

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