

**Ques-Give a brief outline of India's foreign trade during the post-Mauryan period. What are the important sources to study this issue?**

**Answer:** During post Mauryan Period (c. 200 BCE to 300 CE), India's foreign trade reached a high point. India was interlinked with a global trade network which was formed by including Roman Empire in the west, Han China in the east, and the Indian Ocean littoral.

- several factors contributed to this extensive foreign trade network.
1. The Monsoon winds were discovered in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. It allowed ships to harness the power of wind energy to bolster their speed. This knowledge made marine navigation relatively easier. Notably, deep ocean navigation has been common in the Indian Ocean for much longer than in other oceans of the world.
  2. Kushana's control over a portion of the Silk route boosted India's direct trade with the outside world as well as intermediary trade in Chinese goods.
  3. Historian Xinrii Liu says that there was a close relationship between the Buddhist monks and traders. E.g. some residue of wine sedimentation as found in the amphorae shards at the monastic sites in Gujarat. Also, according to Ray, the presence of Buddhist symbols and legends on coins and seals led to the emergence of the idea of Avalokiteshwara as the savior of travelers and seafarers.
  4. During this period, not only gold and silver coins were minted, even copper, bronze, lead, point coins were minted. Such diversity and multiplicity of coins hint at a robust monetization to which foreign trade might have contributed.
  5. Guilds played an important role in foreign trade. In Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions, the guilds are referred to as 'nihamas'. Jataka stories refer to as many as 28 guilds.
  6. There were several ports on the western and eastern coasts of India. Periplus of Erythrean Sea mentions about 24 ports. Barabarikam and Broach were two important ports in the north. In Bengal, Tamralipti was an important port. Likewise, ports were also located on the Malabar Coast such as Tondi, Muzris, etc. On the eastern seaboard, Kaveripattanam, Arikamedu, and Korkai were important ports.

These factors helped India to extend its foreign trade network across East Asia, South East Asia, and Roman Empire in the west.

### Trade with East and Southeast Asia:

Trade between India and China has been discussed by Xinrii Liu. The great Chinese Silk route which connected India with Central Asia played an important role in this trade. This trade stretched from the Yellow River in China to the Tigris River in West Asia. Chinese and Central Asian items such as Frankincense, sytrax, etc. were imported into India and transshipped to the west from ports such as Barygaza and Barabaricam. In the same way, there was extensive trade between India and Southeast Asia. Pali texts refer to a land known as Suvarnadvipa i.e. the land of gold. Arthashastra refers to incense called Kaleyaka from Suvarnabhumi.

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- Major imports: Spices – cinnamon, cloves. Aromatics, sandalwood, camphor, tin (possibly from Malaya peninsula)
- Major exports: Cotton cloths, sugar, beads, and certain kinds of pottery.
- **Indo-Roman Trade:**

The post-Mauryan trade saw a flourish in the Indo-Roman trade. Ancient Indian texts frequently refer to the term 'yavana' which means a foreigner coming from the west. A poem by Nakkirar refers to Pandya King Nanmaran drinking perfumed and cold wine brought by the yavanas.

During this period, a large number of Roman coins were discovered in India, especially in the Coimbatore area in Tamil Nadu and Krishna valley in Andhra Pradesh.

**Major exports:** Black pepper, iron cutlery, silk, cotton goods, gems.

**Major imports:** Gold, silver, Arretine potteries, wine, glass goods, and amphorae jar.

The overall balance of this trade was certainly in India's favor because Pliny, the elder expressed grief over the continuous drain of precious Roman gold to India. Similar observations were made by Francois Bernier in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Although foreign trade declined a bit after the post-Mauryan period due to the end of the Han dynasty in 220 CE and the disintegration of the Roman Empire during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, this foreign trade network helped later rules like Guptas in the north and Cholas in the south to extend their trade relations.

*(Note: The answer is illustrative in nature and does not adhere to the word limit intentionally to cover as many areas and dimensions as possible. But, the students must adhere to the word limit for their own good. Students should also focus on how the answer is structured and how arguments flow organically. Give headings and draw diagrams as per your own discretion.)*