

Internal Trade in Pre-colonial Sri Lanka

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The social and economic history of ancient and medieval Sri Lanka cannot be properly understood without the study of its internal trade, although it may be difficult to quantify this by asking and answering questions such as "how much?" and "of what proportions?" The distribution of luxury commodities among the elite, the collection of articles of trade for export, the distribution of items such as pepper, ginger, arecanut and coconut that did not grow everywhere, the provision of salt brought in from coastal areas and the circulation of handicraft articles, all required a certain amount of organized internal trade.

Merchants, denoted by the term *vanija* or *vanica*, occupied an important position in society from pre-Christian times and figure among the donors in early Brahmi inscriptions found at Kanḍuvil and Bambaragastalāwa in the Ampara District and at Maṇḍāgala in the Hambantota District.¹ Some of the merchants were of the Tamil community, as indicated by the term *demeḍa vanija* in two inscriptions found at Periyapuliyaikulama in the Vavuniya District². There are also early Brahmi inscriptions at Mahakapugollāya and Aliyākaḍa in the Anuradhapura District, Bovattegala 30 miles east of Kataragama, Gōnagala in the Hambantota District, Vālaeliugūḍakanda and Maḍugasnulla in the Monaragala District, which mention corporations or guilds of merchants by the use of the term *puga* or *pugiya*³. The wide dispersal of these inscriptions indicate that even in the pre-Christian era, trade was not limited to the centres of political authority, which were the prime urban settlements. A later Brahmi inscription from Sigiriya refers to a dealer in tamarind (*abala-vābara*),⁴ which indicates that some traders specialized in certain commodities from the early centuries of the Christian era. The *setthi*, frequently referred to in chronicles and literature, seems to have been a person who had acquired wealth and social position by means of trade. By the time of the Polonnaruwa kingdom trade had become so important that the head of the mercantile corporations or chief of the *setthis* was a member of the King's council. In the *Nikāya Sangrahaya* this position is referred to as *situna* and in the Council Chamber inscription of Nissankamalla by the term *kaḍa-gosthiye-ūttavun*⁵. The *Kandavuru Sirita* and the *Pūjāvali* refer to two positions, *siṅu* and

1. S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, vol. I, Colombo (1970) p. 37, 40, 44-45.

2. *Ibid.* p. 28.

3. *Ibid.* p. 11, 42, 50, 55, 94

4. *Ibid.* p. 45

5. *Nikāyasangrahaya*, ed. Simon de Silva, Mendis Gunasekara, W. F. Gunawardena, Colombo (1907) p. 18; *CJSG*, II, p. 139; *U.C.H.C.* I. Pt. II, p. 541

mahavelanjanā.⁶ One of the three officers who organized a revolt against Vijayabāhu I was *Setthinātha*,⁷ and this too may indicate the importance of mercantile communities during the Polonnaruwa period. The prominence gained by the Alagakkōnāras, hailing from a rich trading family during the reigns of the Gampola kings, shows the upward social mobility at the time and the importance of trade in the economy. *Jōti Sitāna*,⁸ who was the chief administrative officer in the Kandy region during the reign of Parākramabāhu VI of Kotte, may have attained his position through wealth accumulated by trade.

Undoubtedly the capital cities, because of their concentration of a large population, some of whom were not involved in economically productive work, were focal points of trade. Courtiers, their families and retinue, dignitaries of military establishments, sometimes mercenaries and other categories of foreigners, lived within the city walls or in the immediate periphery of the city, and most of their needs had to be catered to by traders. The capital cities, in addition to being administrative centres, were also centres of ritual and pilgrimage and therefore they frequently attracted outsiders, which in turn enhanced their trade potential. Besides, the needs of the large monastic establishments in the city had to be catered to by their patrons, headed by the king.

The form and functions of the capital city required specific areas to be set apart for trade-stalls and traders. The *Dīpavamsa* refers to an inner market place (*antarāpana*) at Upatissagāma, one of the earliest capitals of the island.⁹ The *Mahāvamsa*, in its story of Paṇḍukābhaya, refers to a separate quarter near the Western gate of the city for *Yavanas*, probably traders of Mediterranean or Persian origin.¹⁰ The inscription on the stone canoe within the citadel of Anuradhapura implies that marketing was an all-important function at Anuradhapura.¹¹ Even land-owning groups in the city of Anuradhapura lent capital to the urban merchants for trading and were sleeping partners in trading ventures.¹² The *Samantapāsādikā* refers to food-centres within the city, where one could purchase meal (*ivakkhāyika-bhattapacanaghara*), including cooked meat (*māmsa*) and sweets (*pūva*).¹³ In Polonnaruwa certain streets were set apart for the bazaar, where there were open shops full of commodities.¹⁴ Kurunegala had *velanda vīdi*,¹⁵ or merchant streets,

6. *Sinhala Sāhitya Līpi*, ed. D. B. Jayatillake, Colombo (1956) p. 65, *Pūṭāvali*, ed. Bentota Saddatissa, Colombo (1930) p. 113

7. *Cv*, lix, 17

8. *EZ*, III, no. 24

9. *Dv*, ix, 36

10. *Mv*, x, 90

11. *EZ*, III, 9

12. *Manorathapūranī*, vol. II, ed. Max Walleser and Herman Kopp, P.T.S., London (1930) p. 188.

13. *Samantapāsādikā*, vol. II, ed. J. Takakasu and M. Nagai, P.T.S., London (1927) p. 380-381

14. *Cv*, lxxiii, 149

15. *Ms. Kusunegala Vistaraya*, British Museum, (OR 5042) fol. 3b

while at Kotte there were many shops on either side of its streets full of various commodities.¹⁶ In considering this spatial lay-out of the capital cities, it can be assumed that the venues of trade in most cases were located on the periphery of the inner city or in the outer city.

While trade was one of the functions of the capital cities, it was the prime function of the port cities. Of these, special reference may be made to Mahātittha, which was perhaps the most important port in the island up to about the thirteenth century, Ūratōpa or modern Kayts, a place of bustling trade activity, at least in the twelfth century, and to Galle, Dondra and Colombo, which gained prominence after the thirteenth century.¹⁷ Among the other centres of import were Goḍapavata on the mouth of the Walawe river, which is mentioned in an inscription of the second century A.D., Weligama, which became increasingly important after the twelfth century, and Beruwela, Bentota, Wattala and Chilaw, which were primarily dominated by Muslims in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁸ The *Sandesa* literature, which throws light on the conditions which prevailed towards the end of this period, refers to wide streets in port cities, such as Galle, along which there were shops of all kinds full of commodities, including beads, pearls, gems and other precious items.¹⁹

As centres of import and export the port cities were also collection and distribution centres. Certain export commodities, such as gems, pearls, spices and animals like elephants, had to be extracted from the interior and transported to the port cities. Some of the items of export had to be manufactured in or near the port cities or transported from areas of manufacture in the interior. Current archaeological excavations at Alakolavewa, about five kilometers from Sigiriya, and at Samanala wewa, indicate that large-scale iron-melting of very high quality (which could boast of about 99 per cent purity), had taken place in these areas, and part of the produce was perhaps used for export. Imported luxury commodities, such as ceramic ware, silks, perfumes and wines, had to be channelled to the local market, and all these necessitated an intricate trade organisation.

The evidence available for an understanding of this organizational network is extremely limited. Regarding the manufacture of commodities in port cities, a Chola inscription, datable to the eleventh century, is of some value. This inscription refers to taxes on looms at Māntāi.²⁰ It is also reasonable to believe that, after about the twelfth century, coir industry flourished in the vicinity of most of the port cities of the Western and Southern coasts, as even ships from Oman and Yemen came to Sri

16. *Hamsa Sandesaya*, v. 24

17. W. I. Siriweera, "Pre-colonial Sri Lanka's Maritime Commerce, with Special Reference to its Ports, *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea*, Colombo (1990) p.125-134

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Tisara*, vs. 52-55; *Parevi* vs. 84-88; 103; 105; *Girā*, vs 104

20. *S.I.I.* vol. IV, no. 1412; 1414 b

Lanka to obtain rope as well as trunks of coconut trees for masts, and timber for planking, for their shipping industry.²¹

Most of the port cities were perhaps closely guarded by troops and protected by walls and gates. Their population was composite and consisted of diverse elements. In several of these port cities, such as Mahānittha, Dondra and Weligama, there were also well known religious establishments. So one may assume that in all these port cities there were permanently settled groups of traders who supplied the necessities of the local residents, people of the satellite settlements around them, the religious establishments and sometimes the foreign merchants. These traders also provided the requirements of petty traders, who retailed the items they had collected at the port in interior villages.²² There were mercantile guilds in some port towns, for instance, at Mahānittha a guild of merchants provided baking facilities and accepted deposits of money. A Tamil inscription found there, datable to the eleventh century, states that money for the purpose of burning a street-lamp outside the *Tigurāmisvaram* temple at the port was deposited by a certain Tevan with Cankarapaṭṭār, Verrilai-Vaniyār and the Valakkai Vaniyār, all of Mātoṭṭam.²³

Imported luxury commodities were conveyed from port towns to capitals and market towns in ox-wagons or on pack animals, and commodities for export were also transported in the same manner to the port towns. A number of roads connecting the capitals and market towns with port towns facilitated this movement of trade commodities.²⁴ Periodically designated markets were held in such routes and were known as *tavalama*. One such medieval stop-over or *tanalama* close to Bentota and a caravan leader (*sāntunā*) are referred to in the Galapāta Viḥāra inscription of Parākrāmabāhu II.²⁵ A Tamil inscription from Padaviya refers to another *tavalama*, from which money was collected as tolls.²⁶ *Kaḍigai-tavalam* is a word frequently used in medieval South Indian Tamil inscriptions, which has connections suggestive of either itinerant trading groups or of trading stations.²⁷

Besides capitals and port cities, there were market towns in areas of dense population, information on some of which are available in epigraphic records. There were at least two mercantile settlements, Kalabumabaka and Mahatabaka, outside Anuradhapura in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. As at the Mahānittha port, the

21. R. A. L. H. Gunawardana: "Seaways to Siedidiba" *Kalyani*, vols. V-VI (1986-87) p. 13

22. *Saddharmāṅkāra*, ed. Bentara Sradhdhātisya, Panadura (1934) p. 641; *Rasavāhini* ed. Saranatisa, Colombo (B.E. 2434) p. 128

23. *S.I.I.*, vol. IV, no. 1414 B

24. W. I. Siriweera, "Transport and Communications in Pre-colonial Sri Lanka", *S.I.J.H.*, XII (1986) p. 17-38

25. *EZ.* IV no. 25

26. *C.T.I.*, Pt. I., p. 55, Pt. II, p. 19-20

27. Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, Delhi (1988) p. 113

mercantile 'guilds' in these settlements provided banking facilities where customers could deposit money or grain such as paddy, black peas and green gram and obtain annual interest on their deposits.²⁸ The acceptance of grain deposits by guilds clearly indicates that there was a well organised grain trade, at least in the city and its surrounding areas. It is reasonable to assume that guilds in these localities supplied consumables to the city and its suburbs and that they had facilities for storage of substantial quantities of grain. It may also be reasonably assumed that these guilds had a good tradition of maintaining records and that they did not function in isolation but acted in association with several other mercantile establishments in the area.

If we are to assume of the whole of the island's history through sporadic evidence it would seem that there were many small market towns, denoted by the term *nigama* or *niyangama* all over the place. *Nigama*, like the city, *inter alia* had stalls for the sale of prepared food (*sāpanako*)²⁹ - which means that they were frequented by people from outside, presumably by villagers from the hinterland, traders and artisans, who congregated in order to exchange commodities.

The emergence of these commercial centres with the expansion of population resulted in a kind of social mobility. One of these centres, namely Hopitigama, referred to in the Badulla Pillar inscription of Udaya IV (946-954)³⁰, is typical of a well-regulated market town of medieval Sri Lanka. According to regulations stipulated in the inscription, a trader who kept his shop open on *poya* days was liable to pay a *padda*³¹ of oil for the burning of the lamps at the Mahiyangana monastery. If he failed to do so, a fine was to be imposed and used for the same purpose. This would mean that although it was normal to close all shops on *poya* days, there were exceptions made with certain stipulations. Tolls were levied on goods brought in for sale at the Hopitigama market, and shop-owners or buyers there not expected to purchase these goods before they reached the market. The regulation was obviously intended to prevent the loss of revenue to the king. It seems that Hopitigama was located on an important trade route or at a place where several roads converged, as the inscription specifically states that goods, which were merely transported through the market, were not taxable. In the market itself there were authorized places for the sale of commodities liable to tolls, and if these were not shown to the officers but detected subsequently by them, double tolls were to be levied.³²

Of the many other market towns specific information is available on two, Pada, viya and Wahalkada in the eastern belt of the north-central plain. These had become important centres of trade at least by the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Archaeological remains of Buddhist and Hindu religious establishments spread over a

28. *EZ.* III, no. 17, no. 26

29. *Vimatiinodini*, ed. Berantuduwe Dharmadasa Tissa, Colombo (1935) p. 77

30. *EZ.*, V. no. 16

31. *Padda* or *pata* is a measure of capacity. See below.

32. *EZ.* V. no. 16

considerably large area at Padaviya indicate that the town contained a mixed population of Sinhalese and Tamils. The town had as its nucleus a walled enclosure of about eight acres in extent, which, seems to have functioned primarily as a military outpost during the Chola rule.³³ Tamil inscriptions referring to South Indian mercantile communities such as Ceṭṭis, Nānādesis and Ainnuruvar found at Padaviya indicate that these mercantile communities played a prominent role in trade at the town at Padaviya (*nakeram*), which consisted of markets and shops.³⁴

Wahalkada, close to Horowpatāna, was a mercantile town of modest proportions, which had grown over a long period. The South Indian mercantile communities had gained prominence in the town in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as Tamil inscriptions found in situ refer to Nānādesi and Valaṅṅiyār mercantile communities. One of the inscriptions refers to a gathering of many component groups of the town, which included "the chief of the guild of the boatmen at Māntai".³⁵ This implies that the Wahalkada market centre had wide-ranging connections and served as a point of intersection between two different levels of commercial activity, viz. long-distance trade and regional trade. The same inscription refers to "the superintendent of the streets" at Wahalkada, which indicates that the market town had an efficient administrative organization. Pathmanathan infers that the term *akkasālai*, referred to in the same inscription, was a foundry where metal workers were engaged in craft production.³⁶ If his inference is correct, it is certain that there were artisans involved in craft production at this market town of Wahalkada.

In all the key centres of trade, viz. capital cities, port towns and market towns, tolls were levied either directly by officers appointed by the king, or by mercantile communities themselves who were assigned that task, perhaps in return for lump-sum or regular payment to the king. The nature of these tolls had been determined by custom and usage (*pera sirit*).³⁷ Dues levied at the Goḍapavata port in the second century A.D. were donated to a nearby monastery by the king,³⁸ implying that either the monastery itself had to appoint collectors of tolls or that the king's officers collected dues and handed them over to the monastery. At Mahātiṭṭha royal officials, titled *mahapuḷuddan*,³⁹ were responsible for the collection of tolls in the ninth century, while at Hopiṭṭigama the responsibility devolved on an officer titled *padi lad dada nāyaka* in the tenth century.⁴⁰ The inscription on the stone canoe within the citadel

33. S. Pathmanathan "The Cities of Medieval Sri Lanka; (A.D. 1000-1250) Centres of Dynastic Power, Religious Authority and Commercial Activity," *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*, Colombo, vol. V, no. 1 (June 1982) p. 11

34. *C.T.I.* Pt. I, p. 46-57; K. Indrapala, *Epigraphia Tamilica*, Jaffna (1971) p. 32-35

35. *C.T.I.* Pt. I, p. 46-57

36. S. Pathmanathan, "The Nagaram of Nānādesis in Sri Lanka, circa A.D. 1000-1300", *S.L.J.H.*, vol. X, (1984) p. 145

37. *E.Ṭ.*, II, no. 4

38. *C.J.S.G.* II, Section G. (1930) p. 197

39. *E.Ṭ.*, III, no. 5

40. *E.Ṭ.*, V, no. 16

of Anuradhapura indicates that tolls were levied on goods brought into the city, e.g. one *para* of paddy was charged on each sack of paddy brought in.⁴¹ One of the Tamil inscriptions at Wahaikaḍa refers to a chief of the toll gait,⁴² who seems to have been a member of one of the mercantile communities. According to the Dondra inscription of Parākramabāhu II, customs duties at the port of Devinuwara were charged by an officer titled *mahapandita*.⁴³

This points to the fact that some of the mercantile towns and port cities were reckoned as distinct units for purposes of administration. Pathmanathan, on the basis of Tamil sources, states that Mahātittha, or Mātṅṅam, constituted a separate administrative unit under the Cholas, while Padaviya and Wahaikaḍa were mainly administered by mercantile communities in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁴⁴ However, they could not have been completely autonomous units and were under the king's orders.

As far as villages are concerned, trade was limited, but certainly not negligible, and this raises the important issue of the self-sufficiency of the ancient village. The ideas of some of the early British administrator-scholars on Asia inspired Marx's views on the Asiatic mode of production, characterized by the predominance of a self-sufficient village economy.⁴⁵ As Morris and Stein have pointed out, the patriotic or nationalist bias of Asian writers too has resulted in an exaggeration of the self-sufficiency of the Asian village.⁴⁶ But it is important to note that some of the essential commodities such as salt, metal and metal implements were not produced in all Asian villages. In Sri Lanka frequently metals and metal products had to be brought into many of the villages from the few producing and manufacturing areas, and salt had to be transported to the interior from the coastal centres. Some of the other needs of the village community too, which could not be procured locally, had to be supplied by outsiders, and this necessitated money exchange or barter. Medieval literature refers to villagers paying currency (*kahavanu*) to purchase ghee, venison and lime.⁴⁷ The peddler or hawker too, who constantly moved about between the regions, played an important role in supplying light-weight commodities such as clothes, rings, necklaces and bracelets to the villagers.⁴⁸ At least in some villages there were also permanent trading places. For instance, the *Cūlavamsa* refers

41. E.Z., I, no. 9

42. C.T.I., Pt. I, p. 46-57

43. S. Paranavitana *Shrine of Upulwan at Devinuwara, ACSM*, VI, Colombo (1953) p. 63-64

44. S. Pathmanathan, *op. cit.*

45. Daniel Thorner, "Marx on India and the Asiatic Mode of Production", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, no. 9, (December 1966) p. 33-66

46. Morris D. Morris and Burton Stein, "The Economic History of India: A Bibliographic Essay", *Journal of Economic History*, vol. XXI (1961)

47. *Saddharmālanakāra*, ed. Kirielle Gūnawimala, Colombo (1954) p. 450, 503 and 675

48. Cv. LXVI, 134; *Rasavahini, Lankāḍḍipputticatthuni*, ed. Saranatiissa Thero, Colombo (B.E. 2434) p. 24 and 134; *Pājanoli* ed. Bentota Saddhotissa, Panadura (1930) p. 517

to "shops here and there on the outskirts of Polonnaruwa".⁴⁹ Towards the end of this period *Parasi Sandesa* refers to village market-places. Some of the village products circulated within the village itself in the form of barter or sale. For instance, those who fished in the village reservoirs sold their catch to the people of the area. The *Saddharmaratnākara* refers to a fisherman who exchanged two-thirds of his fish daily for rice, ghee, milk and oil.⁵¹ The *Saddharmaratnāvaliya* refers to a person who exchanged his fish for metal weights known as *aka*.⁵²

It should be emphasized that monetized exchange was only a small part of the ancient Sri Lankan economy.⁵³ The remuneration for services rendered to the king and to the temples as well as for work related to most of the caste obligations were made in the form of land revenues and not by money exchange.⁵⁴ The circulation of goods depended to some extent on the mechanics of taxation, rent and other payments made in kind. The system of barter was an important mode of exchange. Yet, what is important to note is that currency was also widely used, at least in the capital city, port cities and other commercial centres, and to some extent even in the interior villages.

Coins have been found at sites in the city of Anuradhapura in layers datable to a period between 200 B.C. and the beginning of the Christian era, a factor which points to the early use of currency in the island. Inscriptions and literature attest to the use of currency in a number of different transactions, including the sale and purchase of irrigation works and land. Currency was deposited in guilds in expectation of a return in interest payments, and was also donated to religious institutions.⁵⁵ Besides, currency was used in settling judicial fines and certain payments made by peasant cultivators to owners of land and irrigation works. According to the *Mihānsa* description of the construction of the Mahāsthūpa, Duffhagamani paid for all labour utilized for that task.⁵⁷ From the *Samantapāsādikā*, written in the fifth century A.D., it is clear that the use of coins had become common in transactions involving the purchase of items of everyday use, like axes and ceramic alms-bowls used by monks. It refers to visits by customers to workshops of craftsmen to purchase products in exchange for payments in coin. As stated earlier, the text also indicates that currency was used for the purchase of meals in the city of Anuradhapura. It is

49. *Cv*, LXXII, 212

50. *Parasi Sandesa* V, 105

51. *Saddharmaratnākara*, ed. D. Vimalakitti, Colombo (1955) p. 469

52. *Saddharmaratnāvali* ed. D. B. Jayatillake, Colombo (1930) p. 449

53. R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, "Anuradhapura: Ritual Power and Resistance in a Pre-Colonial South Asian City" in *Domination and Resistance* ed. Daniel Miller, Michael, Rowlands, Christopher Tilley, London (1989) p. 168

54. W. I. Siriweera, "Land Tenure and Revenue in Medieval Ceylon" *CJHSS*, vol I, no. 2, N.S. (1972) p. 1-49

55. M. H. Srisoma, "Coins" *Ancient Ceylon*, vol. II (1972) p. 147-150

56. *Mv* XXXV, 118, 21, *Ca*, XXXIX 10-12; *CJSG*, I, p. 120; *EZ*, I, no. 18, IV, no. 14 and 24; *V* no. 7

57. *Mv*, XXX, 17, 18

reasonable to assume that most of the customs and tolls levied on merchandise at ports, market towns and capitals were collected in cash. By the twelfth century money circulation was perhaps increased, for the *Cūlavamsa* explicitly states that Parākramabāhu I issued *kahavanu* for purposes of trade in the country.⁵⁹ During this period even land tax was paid partly in kind and partly in cash.⁶⁰ Money payments were also made as advance payments denoted by various terms such as *attikāram*, *saccakāra*, *at paṇḍuru* and *hātyuru*⁶¹ in several trade transactions. Medieval literature refers to instances of obtaining currency loans on interest (*poli*) by individuals on trust or by mortgage (*ukas*) of movable and immovable property.⁶²

As in India, the earliest Sri Lankan coins were punch-marked rectangular pieces of silver, known as the *purānas*, which were presumably issued by guilds with the approval of the rulers. These are the coins referred to as *karsāpana* in Sanskrit, *kahāpana* in Pali, and *kahavanu* in the early Brahmi inscriptions.⁶³ Some of the later punch-marked coins were circular in shape. The punch marked coins were succeeded by die-struck coins, and the 'elephant and swastika' and 'Laxmi' coins may be regarded as the earliest die-struck coins of the island. These coins, as well as Roman gold coins, seem to have been accepted as legal tender in trade transactions in the early centuries of the Christian era. In inscriptions up to about the seventh century the *kahāpana* is mentioned, but it is not certain whether *purānas* were in circulation up to that time. A gold coinage, with the *kalanda* as the standard weight, and fractional pieces of one fourth, known as *pala*, and one eighth, called *aka*, were in circulation during the last three centuries of the Anuradhapura period.⁶⁴ Perhaps some of these coins were used as both bullion and currency. A later Brahmi inscription from Kaduruvāwa refers to a *rūpa vāpara* - which has been interpreted by Paranavitana as a dealer in coined money.⁶⁵ The fifth century commentary, the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhagosa, indicates that there were money changers both in India and Sri Lanka and states that the money changer would know 'at what village, town, city, mountain or river bank and by what mint-master a coin was struck.'⁶⁶

The first Sinhalese king to issue coins in his name was Vijayabāhu I, and most of the gold and Silver coins bearing the legend 'Sri Vijayabāhu' can be attributed to him.⁶⁷ The type is the same as that which prevailed in the late Anuradhapura period.

58. *Samantapāsādikā*, ed. J. Takakasu and M. Nagai, P.T.S. London, vol. II, (1927) p. 380-381; vol. III, (1930) p. 698-699

59. *Cv*, lxxvii, 102

60. W. I. Siriweera, *op. cit.*

61. *Dhampiyā Atuvā Getapadaya*, ed. D. B. Jayatillake, Colombo (1932) p. 62; *Jātaka Atuvā Getapadaya* ed. D. B. Jayatillake, Colombo (1943) p. 57

62. *Saddharmālakaraya* ed. Bentara Sraddhatisya, Panadura (1934) *Atadā Sannaya*, ed. Medauyangoda Vimalakitti and Nahinne Samananda, Colombo (1954) p. 237, *Saddharmaratnāvali*, *op. cit.* p. 418

63. *CCC*, p. 16 ff, S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, *op. cit.*, p. 60 and 73

64. *UCHC* I, Pt. I, p. 363

65. S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, *op. cit.*, p. 97

66. Cited in Michael Mitchiner, *The Origins of Indian Coinage*, London (1973) p. 122

67. *CCC*, p. 53

With the reign of Parākramabāhu I the use of precious metals for coins entirely ceased,⁶⁸ but it is important to note that even these coins were known as *kahapana* in the contemporary chronicles and literature. The coins of the Sinhalese rulers of the thirteenth century later came to be known as *Dambadeni kāsī*, a phrase correctly indicating the dynasty by which they were issued.⁶⁹ After the middle of the fourteenth century *massa* or *kahāpana* fell into insignificance and coins such as *panam*⁷⁰ were more widely used.

Apart from currency, uncoined metal, particularly gold and silver weights, were also used as media of exchange. Literary and epigraphic sources frequently refer to minute weights such as the *viyāta* (a weight of paddy seed), *madaṭa*, *kalanda*, *nikkha* or *nika* of gold and silver.⁷¹ On the basis of such sources it can be concluded that 8 *viyātas* were equivalent to one *madaṭa*, 2.5 *madaṭas* to one *aka*, 8 *akas* or 20 *madaṭas* to one *kalanda*, and 15 or 25 *kalandas* to one *nikkhā*.⁷² The *Saddharmaratnāvaliyu* indicates that in the thirteenth century one *massa* or *masuran* was equal to the weight of a *kalanda*.⁷³

The measures of capacity and length used in trade could also be gauged from literary and epigraphic evidence. The measures of length frequently referred to are *angula*, *viyāta* and *riyana*. When employed in trade transactions, these were presumably used for measuring items like cloth.⁷⁴ According to the list of measurements of length in Moggallāna's *Abhidhanappadipikā*, as calculated by T. W. Rhys Davids, 12 *angulas* were equal to one *viyāta*, and two *viyātas* to one *riyana*.⁷⁵ The measures of capacity which were employed in measuring liquids as well as dry commodities, such as oil, ghee, honey and grain, were *pata*, *manāva*, *nāli* and *lahasu*.⁷⁶ Two *patas* or *paddas* were equivalent to one *manāva*, and two *manāvas* to one *nāli*, and four *nālis* to one *lahasu* or *lāssa*.⁷⁷

The rulers played a significant role in internal trade throughout history. Besides regulating weights and measures and the manner in which trade was conducted, particularly in the capital, port towns and market towns, the king had to have direct

68. UGHC I, Pt. II, p. 551

69. CCC, p. 64

70. EZ, IV, no. 12

71. GJSG II p. 120; *Jataka Atuvā Gatapādāya* ed. D. B. Jayatillake, Colombo (1943) p. 55; *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, *op. cit.* p. 445 *Pūṇāvaliya op. cit.* p. 578; *Visuddhimārga Sannaya* vol. I, ed. M. Dharmmaratana, Colombo (1890) p. 132; *Co* lxxxii, 12-14

72. CCC, p. 11; F. Modder. "Sinhalese Weights and Measures", *JRASC*, XII, no. 43 (1892) p. 172-183; *Yogaratnākara* ed. Don George Samarātunga, Colombo (1907) V. 284; *Saddharmaratnāvali*, *op. cit.* p. 388, 497, 623 and 821; *Jataka Atuvā Gatapādāya*, *op. cit.* p. 89, 109 and 263-237; EZ, IV, no. 33

73. *Saddharmaratnāvali*, *op. cit.* p. 394 and 860

74. *Saddharmaratnāvali*, *op. cit.* p. 276; *Pujavali op. cit.* p. 5

75. T. W. Rhys Davids, "On the Ancient Coins and Measurements of Ceylon", *Numismata Orientalia*, Pt. VI, London (1877) p. 15

76. EZ I, no. 7; EZ III, no. 14, *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, *op. cit.* p. 282, 755 and 773; *Jataka Atuvā Gatapādāya*, *op. cit.* p. 25

77. T. W. Rhys Davids *op. cit.* p. 18-20; EZ, III, no. 4, p. 94-95; EZ V. no. 16, *Saddharmaratnāvaliy* *op. cit.* p. 773, 747; 960

dealings with foreign merchants. Some of the export commodities, such as gems, pearls and elephants were the king's monopoly, at least from about the tenth century onwards. Parākramabāhu I's establishment of a separate department called *antarangadhura* (office of the interior) to supervise the territories that produced articles in demand in foreign countries, and his Burmese campaign indicate the extent of interest that some of the kings had shown in trade. Bhuvanekabāhu I's (1272-1284) embassy to Egypt⁷⁹ and Parākramabāhu VI's expedition to the port of Adrainpet (*Ativirayāmaputtana*) in South India,⁸⁰ though directly related to foreign trade, would also point to the fact that the king had a stake in the organization of internal trade, which was necessary for him to meaningfully enhance foreign trade activities.

As to the relationship between the king and the trading guilds or mercantile communities, the evidence available is limited. It can be assumed that the mercantile guilds referred to by the terms *puga* or *pugiya* in some of the early Brahmi inscriptions,⁸¹ were autonomous bodies as the state apparatus was in its formative stages during the pre-Christian era. But the activities of the guilds mentioned in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. which accepted money and grain deposits, as referred to earlier, would have been regulated by the king. By the tenth century the activities of the guilds, such as *vanigrāma* referred to in the Badulla inscription were certainly controlled by the king. The preamble of this inscription states that when the king visited the famous shrine at Mahiyangana, the traders and householders of the Hopitigama market, in a petition to the king, complained that the bailiffs of the market exacted illegal dues, contravening regulations made by an earlier king. The king hereupon ordered that a statute of the council be promulgated for the proper conduct of the market place.⁸²

Pathmanathan's exhaustive study of the South Indian mercantile communities, Valaṅṅiyār or Viravalaṅṅiyār, Nānādesis and their associates - Cettis, Cettiputras, Cankarapaṅṅiyār and the Vāṅiyār, has shed greater light on the nature of the relations between the king and these communities which operated in various parts of the island, such as Mahātittha, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Padaviya, Wahalkaḍa and Vihārahinna in the period between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries.⁸³ These communities who managed their own affairs, obtained charters from the reigning monarchs on the condition that a fixed amount in kind from the assessed revenue of the market towns was paid to the state. Some of the market towns, such as Padaviya and Wahalkaḍa, were autonomous units where these corporations maintained armed

78. Cv, LXIX, 32-33

79. H. W. Codrington "A Sinhalese Embassy to Egypt," *JRASC*, XXVIII (1919) p. 82-85

80. *Gira Sandesaya* V, 148-149, G. P. V. Somaratne, *Political History of the Kingdom of Kotte*, Colombo (1975) p. 125

81. See above

82. *EZ* V. no. 16

83. For a detailed study of these communities see S. Pathmanathan, *op. cit.*; also K. Indrapala, "South Indian Mercantile Communities in Ceylon circa 950-1250," *CJHSS*, N. S. vol. I, no. 2 (1971) p. 107-108

retainers for purposes of defense and made arrangements for the purpose of public amenities. The role of these communities in the politics and military pursuits of the monarch is far from being clear, but there is considerable evidence of their mutual interaction and collaboration with regard to the establishment and maintenance of religious and cultural institutions.⁸⁴ For example, in one instance Queen Lilāvati caused a building, identified by Paranavitana as a 'customs house', to be constructed by Nānādesis at Anuradhapura, the proceeds of which were utilized for the supply of spices and other commodities needed by an alms-house called *Palabalavi Mēdhavi*.⁸⁵

The foregoing study reveals that, along with the well-known developments in irrigation technology, construction activity and art and architecture, there were certain trends in the development of internal trade in ancient and medieval Sri Lanka. The study also refutes the view that the ancient Sri Lankans were averse to trade, postulated by European writers such as Tennent,⁸⁶ who set the pattern for the study of Sri Lanka history in the nineteenth century. Taking into consideration both foreign and internal trade, one may conclude that trade and craft production played an important role in the ancient and medieval Sri Lanka economy, though the primary economic activity was agriculture.

84. S. Pathmanathan *op. cit*

85. *EZ* I, p. 179-181, S. Paranavitana, "Lankātilaka Inscriptions" *U.C.R.* XVIII (January 1960) p 12-13

86. James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: An Account of the Island, Physical, Historical and Topographical*, vol. I, London, (1859) p. 440