

## Book Review

**Vikas K. Verma, *Coromandel Trade in Early South India: An Archaeological Perspective*, (Delhi, Agam Kala Prakashan), 2021, i-xvi, 320 pp., Tables 1-8, Maps 1-10, Plates 1-28, Price INR 3950, Hardbound, Language: English, ISBN: 978-81-942937-7-4.**

This book adds to the rich historiography of trade relations in early India. With its special focus on Coromandel (the anglicized name of Chola mandalam – the eastern sea coast of the Indian subcontinent), Vikas K. Verma has meticulously discussed the details of trade contacts based on a survey of archaeological sources. Thanks to the author and the publisher, field survey reports and literary corroborations along with good-quality photographs add to the beauty and academic value of the book. Methodologically divided into six chapters, the book is an extension of Verma's doctoral thesis. Each chapter weaves an interesting narrative based on archaeological evidence and enables the reader to know and understand the rich heritage of our pasts. The chapters focus on coastal sites, hinterland sites, content and context of archaeological data, trade routes, and items of exchange besides the dynamics of trade relations and their continuity and survival in the later periods. The work successfully captures the attention of the general readers and researchers as well because of its rich and updated content of archaeological survey reports. This book also includes the findings from the recently excavated sites like Keeladi and Porunthal which provide valuable information to revisit the ancient past of this region in the context of chronology and material culture. In light of the recent discoveries, the author defends a tenable argument against the notion of the decline of trade and commerce as often echoed in earlier writings on the subject.

The chapters bring to light the trading networks and patterns of trade in the early phase of Indian history since the participation of the Megalithic communities. Admittedly, trade and exchange prove the existence of human habitations, and thus, the study reflects a rich tradition of seafaring in this part of the subcontinent that facilitated maritime trade with distant lands across the seas. The author brings to light the trading networks of the Tamil region with the Mediterranean Sea on the west during the early phase of the contact which was marked by a shift towards the east extending to Sri Lanka, China, and Southeast Asia. The author highlights the fact that the knowledge of monsoon in the first century CE facilitated frequent voyages through the circumnavigation of the Cape Comorin which made the sea travel from the Malabar coast to the Coromandel coast advantageous for the merchants. As a result, sites like Arikamedu developed as a major centers for Indo-Roman trade. By the third-fourth centuries, Kaveripattinam, located on the mouth of river Kaveri,

became a celebrated port city. The author also explains how the period from the Pallava to the Chola rule in the region witnessed the rise of port centers towards the north along the eastern coast. This can be observed in the emergence of Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram) and later, Nagapattinam as major centers of overseas trade.

After brilliantly establishing the development and continuity of vibrant commercial practices on the Coromandel coast, Verma also delineates the layers and phases of these activities. The discussions on settlement patterns and the size of settlements based on the archaeological investigations help the reader to analyze the rise, maturity, and decline of many trading centers with time. The author also presents a comparison of the data from Gangetic Valley which suggests the fact that there was no drastic decline in commercial activities in the post-Gupta centuries. The book under review is an interesting engagement with sources and the narration does not stop only with the demand and supply relationship. It goes ahead in looking for answers to the cultural patterns shaped by Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism flourishing in the region under survey. The book is a significant contribution to the historiography of trade and commerce on the Coromandel coast during the early phase of Indian history. This academic endeavor would certainly lead the way and generate potential impact for further research in the field of trade contacts.

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