

## Post-Mauryan Age - Crafts, Trade & Towns [Ancient History Notes]

After the fall of the Mauryan Empire, many other smaller states emerged in India, some of which are the Sungas, the Kanvas, the Satavahanas, etc. It is an important period in the ancient history of India and hence, important for the [UPSC exam](#). In this article, you can read all about the crafts, trade and towns in Post-Mauryan India.

### Post-Mauryan Age - Crafts

The age of the [Shakas](#), the Kushanas, the Satavahanas (200 BCE - 200 CE) and the first Tamil states was the most flourishing period in the history of crafts and commerce in ancient India.

- The Digha-Nikaya, which belongs to the pre-Mauryan times, mentions nearly two dozen occupations but the Mahavastu, which belongs to this period, catalogues 36 different kinds of workers living in the town of Rajgir.
- The Milinda Panho (the questions of Milinda) mentions about 75 occupations, out of which 60 are connected with various kinds of crafts.
- Craftsmen are mostly associated with towns in literary texts, but some excavations show that they also inhabited villages.
- The field of mining and metallurgy made great advancements and specializations, as many as eight crafts were associated with the working of gold, silver, lead, tin, copper, brass, iron, precious stones and jewels.
  - The technological advancement in iron manufacturing is evident by the excavations of specialized iron artifacts from the Karimnagar and Nalgonda districts of the Telangana region.
  - Indian iron and steel including cutlery were exported to Abyssinian ports and enjoyed great prestige in western Asia.
- The inscriptions of this period mention weavers, goldsmith, dyers, workers in metal and ivory, jewellers, sculptors, fishermen, smiths and perfumers, suggesting that these crafts were in flourishing condition.
  - Mathura was famous for the manufacture of a special type of cloth called “shataka” and Vanga (eastern Bengal) was famous for varieties of cotton and silk textiles.
  - The excavations of dyeing vat at Uraiyur (Tamil Nadu) and at Arikamedu indicates that dyeing was a thriving art in these areas during this period.
  - Ujjain was an important bead making centre. The ivory products, glass objects and beads of precious and semi-precious stones were articles of luxury.
  - Coin minting was an important craft and coins were made of gold, silver, copper, bronze, lead and potin. The craftsmen even made fake coins.
- Beautiful pieces of terracotta have been found in almost all Kushana and [Satavahana](#) sites, especially Yelleshwaram in the Nalgonda district. It is generally believed that terracotta was

mainly used by the upper classes in towns. There are numerous inscriptions that refer to the donations made by prosperous artisans to the monasteries.

## Merchant Guilds

- The communities of merchants were organised in groups called “shreni” or guild under the head - Shreshthi.
- Mobile or caravan trading corporations of inter-regional traders formed another type of mercantile group called “sartha” with its leader called “sarthavaha”.
- Almost all craft occupations were also organised into guilds, under a head called “jetthaka/pamukkha”.
- The guilds were associations of merchants and craftsmen, having the same profession or dealing in the same commodity.
- Each guild had its heads and followed its own rules regarding prices and quality to regulate their business on the basis of mutual goodwill.
- These guilds also served as banks and received public deposits from the public on fixed interest rates.
- On the basis of different texts, it can be said that artisans of this period were organised into at least two dozen guilds.
- Most of the artisans were confined to the Mathura region and to the western Deccan, which lay on the trade routes leading to the ports on the western coasts.
- The Yajnavalkya Smriti refers to the qualifications and powers of the head of the guilds and also hints towards the judicial role of the guilds.
- According to Buddhist texts, the heads of the guilds had a good rapport with the king and used to accompany the king as part of the official entourage and sometimes were even appointed as mahamatta.
- In Nigrodha Jataka, it is mentioned that certain officials called “bhandagarika” were appointed to keep a record of the transactions and conventions of the guilds.
- Some guilds even issued coins and seals which reflect the importance of guilds of this period.
  - Some seals with the captions nigama, nigmasya have been found at the site of Rajghat, seals with the legend of Gavayaka (signifying guild of milkmen), Bhita (seals with the legend of Shulaphalayikanam, signifying guild of makers of arrowheads) and Ahichchhatra (seals with the legend of Kumhakara, signifying guild of pottery makers).

## Post-Mauryan Age - Trade

One of the most important features of the post-Mauryan period was the growth of trade and commerce - both internally as well as externally.

- There were two major internal land routes in ancient India:

- Uttarapatha, which connected northern and eastern parts of India with the north-western areas, and
- Dakshinapatha which connected peninsular India with western and northern parts of India.
- The Uttarapatha was in more frequent use.
- From Taxila it passed through modern Punjab upto the western coast of the Yamuna, following the western coast of Yamuna it went southwards to Mathura.
- From Mathura, it passed on to Ujjain in Malwa and from Ujjain to Broach on the western coast.
- The Broach port seems to be the most important and flourishing amongst the other ports, as the goods produced in the Shaka, the Kushana and the Satavahana kingdoms were brought to it for export.
- There was flourishing trade between India and Rome.
- In addition to the articles directly supplied by India to the Roman empire, certain items were brought to India from China and Central Asia and then sent to the eastern part of the Roman empire. For instance, silk was directly sent from China to the Roman empire through the famous silk route passing through northern Afghanistan and Iran. After the annexation of Iran by Parthians, silk was diverted to the western Indian ports through north-western part of the subcontinent and sometimes it was transported via the east coast to the west coast of India. Thus, there was a considerable transit trade in silk between India and the Roman empire.

#### Post-Mauryan Age - Urban Settlements

Towns prospered in the Kushana and the Satavahana empires because of the growing trade with the Roman empire.

- The country traded with the eastern part of the Roman empire as well as with Central Asia.
- Towns in Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh thrived because the centre of the Kushana power lay in northwestern India. Most Kushana towns in India lay exactly on the northwestern or Uttarapatha route passing from Mathura to Taxila.
- The excavations reveal that the urbanisation was at peak in the Kushana phase which is also applicable to the towns in the Shaka kingdom, of Malwa and western India.
- The most important town was Ujjain because of it being the nodal point of two routes - one from Kaushambi and the other from Mathura.
- The end of the Kushana empire in the 3rd century CE gave a huge blow to the towns.
- Also, with the ban on trade with India imposed by the Roman empire from the 3rd century CE, towns could not support the artisans and merchants of the Deccan region.
- Archaeological evidence also suggests a decline in the urban settlements after the Satavahana phase.