

**The Sarawak Museum Journal****Vol. XL No. 61****December 1989****ISSN: 0375-3050****E-ISSN: 3036-0188**

Citation: Sebastian, J. V. (1989). Indians in Ancient Periods. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XL (61): 197-216

INDIANS IN ANCIENT PERIODS**Jacob V. Sebastian****THE PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

This paper proposes to briefly outline how Indian and its culture have influenced the rich and varied cultural heritage of Sarawak in the light of contacts between the peoples of these two regions in ancient times.

INDIANS IN ANCIENT PERIODS

by

Jacob V. Sebastian

THE PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper proposes to briefly outline how Indian and its culture have influenced the rich and varied cultural heritage of Sarawak in the light of contacts between the peoples of these two regions in ancient times.

THE ASSUMPTION MADE IN THE COMPILATION OF THIS PAPER

1. In ancient times, there was no political entity which could be delineated as Sarawak or Malaysia and therefore, in historical perspective, the cultural and other associated influences could only be dealt with in the geographical region which we today identify as South East Asia.
2. This South East Asian region which is today clearly demarcated with political boundaries with specific national characteristics was, in historical times, a more homogenous region with uniform cultural, religious and social systems.
3. This region with perhaps present-day Malaya as the focal-point and with a radius encompassing Sumatra, Java, the western half and Northern coast of Borneo, Vietnam, Cambodia, Southern Thailand and Southern Burma was a very busy region with the peoples intermingling freely, at the same time, interacting freely with the two ancient civilizations to the East namely China and to the West, namely India and also for a lesser extent with the Far Western civilizations like Arabia, Egypt, Rome and Greece.
4. From a historical perspective, the actual political structure of this area appears not to have been influenced by conquerors and conquests but more so by traders, missionaries and intellectuals.
5. Again, when we look at the lives of people in ancient times, it becomes a difficult task to trace exactly which group of people has influenced

other groups, which language is derived from another language, where exactly a particular custom or a specific belief had its origin.

FORMAT OF THE PAPER

Since the object of the paper is Indian cultural influence, the period dealt with is restricted from about 1st or 2nd century B.C. to the coming of the Portuguese in 1511 (16th century). Historians record 34 major kingdoms during this period in this region, described as "Larger India" or "Greater India" which were under Indian religious, cultural and language influence. The following are the more well-known among these kingdoms.

1. Funan — (Chinese name) 1st century to 7th century A.D. Founded by Hindu Brahmin Kaundinya. First Hindu and later Buddhist. Lower Mekong delta.
2. Takkola — 3rd century A.D. Buddhist. Mentioned by Ptolomy, the Egyptian astronomer of Alexandria in his Geography book of the Eastern world. West coast of Isthmus of Kra.
3. Kedah — 3rd to 4th century A.D. Hindu and Buddhist. West coast of Malaya.
4. Langkasuka — 5th century A.D. Predominantly Hindu. Situated astride the Malay peninsula; had access to both Bay of Bengal and to Gulf of Siam. Very powerful and wealthy kingdom.
5. Srivijaya — 7th to 8th century A.D. Buddhist kingdom (Mahayama School) The capital was today's Palembang in Southern Sumatra. Chinese name 'Foche'. Chinese pilgrims Fa Hsien and I-Ching have visited Palembang at different times and written about it. I-Ching writes: Quote "Many kings and chieftains of the Southern Ocean admire and believe (in Buddhism) and their hearts are set on accumulating good actions. In the fortified city of Foche (Palembang) Buddhist priests number more than one thousand whose minds are bent on learning and good practices. They investigate and study all the subjects that exist just as in the Middle Kingdom (India); the rules and ceremonies are not at all different. If a Chinese priest wishes to go to the West in order to hear (lectures) and study (the original Buddhist texts) he had better stay here at Foche for one or two years and practise the proper rules and then proceed to India" Unquote. (Moorhead — page 58).
6. Sanjaya — 7th to 8th century A.D. Hindu (Shaivism) Central Java. Forerunner to Sailendra.
7. Sailendra — 8th to 9th century A.D. Buddhist (Mahayama School) It is supposed that this kingdom was founded by the descendents of the old dynasty