

# Towns, Traders and Craftpersons

One of the most interesting aspects of the medieval period in the 17th century was the growth of urbanization. In medieval India, there were three types of towns—a temple town, an administrative town and a commercial town or a port town.

The Arabs, Turkish and Afghans settled in many parts of the country leading to the evolution of towns and cities.

## Sources of Knowing about the History of this Period

- The sources of history are travellers' accounts.
- Monserrate, Fitch, Thomas Roe, Domingo Paes, Nicolo Conti and Abdul Razzaq Samarqandi wrote about the life of this period.

## Court Towns

- Some of the important court towns were Lahore, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Delhi.
- Fatehpur Sikri was the new capital founded by Akbar.
- Delhi was known as Shahjahanabad and was built by Shah Jahan in 1639.

## Port and Trading Towns

- Some towns developed as ports due to their proximity to the seashore.
- Some major ports were Cambay, Surat, Broach, Masulipatanam, Nagapattinam, etc.

## Administrative Towns

- Some towns were capital cities. They were centres of administration.
- Thanjavur and Uraiyur were important centres.

## Temple Towns and Pilgrimage Centres

- Temples towns were important centres of urbanization and led to the development of cities, economy and society.
- Pilgrims gave huge donations to temples. This wealth was used by temple authorities to finance their trade and banking.
- Important temple towns were Bhillasvamin in Madhya Pradesh, Somnath in Gujarat, Kanchipuram and Madurai

## How Important was Bronze

- Bronze is an alloy compound of copper and tin.
- Chola rulers used this metal to make statues through the 'Lost wax' technique.

### **The Emergence of Small Towns**

- From the 8th century onwards, small towns emerged in India. They emerged from large villages. They had a 'mandapika' where villagers sold their produce.
- Likewise, there were market streets, called 'hatta', full of shops.
- Many villagers came to buy local articles and sell products like horses, camphor, saffron, betel nut, spices, salt, etc.
- Normally a Samanta was appointed who fortified the palaces and gave the right to collect taxes from traders, artisans, etc.

### **Name of Traders**

- Many kinds of traders existed.
- Trader travelled in caravans by forming guilds.
- Trade was done on a regular basis within the peninsula and with South-east Asia and China.
- Some other important traders were the Chettiars, Marwari, Banjaras, Baniyas, Muslim Bohras, etc.

### **Crafts in Towns**

- Craftwork was famous by the name of Bidri in the region.
- The goldsmith, bronzesmith, blacksmith, masons and carpenters were together called as the 'Panchalas' or 'Vishwakarma'.
- Some other crafts were cotton cleaning, spinning and dying.
- Surat in Gujarat was a cosmopolitan city. The textiles of Surat were famous for their gold lace borders known as zari and had a market in West Asia, Africa and Europe.

There were three types of medieval towns—a temple town, an administrative centre, and a commercial town or a port town.

Thanjavur, the capital of the Cholas a thousand years ago, emerged as an administrative centre as well as a temple town.

The perennial river Kaveri flows near this beautiful town. The famous Rajarajeshvara temple built by King Rajaraja Chola lies here.

As Thanjavur was an administrative centre, Kings held courts in the mandapas, which were parts of palaces, issuing orders to their subordinates.

Temple towns represent a very important pattern of urbanisation, the process by which cities develop. – ‘

Rulers built temples to demonstrate their devotion to various deities.

Important temple towns were Bhillasvamin in Madhya Pradesh, Somnath in Gujarat, Kanchipuram and Madurai in Tamil Nadu and Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh.

Pilgrimage centres also developed into townships. Examples—Vrindvan in Uttar Pradesh and Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu.

Small towns emerged from large villages. They usually had a mandapika or mandi of later times to which nearby villages brought their produce to sell. They also had market streets called hatta or heat of later times lined with shops.

Different kinds of artisans such as potters, oil pressers, sugar makers, toddy makers, smiths, etc. also lived in these towns.

There were many kinds of traders. They usually travelled in caravans and formed guilds to protect their interests.

There were also communities like the Chettiars and the Marwari Oswal. Gujarati traders traded extensively with the ports of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, East Africa, South-east Asia and China.

Indian spices such as pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, etc. became very popular in European homes. Indian cotton cloth was also in great demand. This eventually drew European traders to India.

The craftspersons of Bidar were very famous. Their inlay work in copper and silver came to be known as Bidri.

The Panchalas or Vishwakarma community, consisting of goldsmiths, bronzesmiths, blacksmiths, masons and carpenters contributed a lot in the building of temples.

The weavers such as the Saliyar or Kaikkolars also donated to temples.

Hampi was the capital of the Vijayanagara Empire. The architecture of Hampi was distinctive. It bustled with commercial and cultural activities during the 15-16th centuries.

Moors, Chettis and agents of European traders thronged the markets of Hampi.

Temples were the hub of cultural activities.

Hampi fell into ruin following the defeat of Vijayanagara in 1565 by the Deccani Sultans.

Surat in Gujarat was a cosmopolitan city. People of all castes and creeds lived there.

The textiles of Surat were famous for their gold lace borders known as zari and had a market in west Asia, Africa and Europe.

The Kathiawad seths or mahajans had huge banking houses at Surat. The Surat hundis were honoured in the far-off markets of Cairo in Egypt, Basra in Iraq and Antwerp in Belgium.

Surat began to decline towards the end of the 17th century.

The town of Masulipatnam was a centre of intense activity in the 17th century. As it became the most important port on the Andhra coast both the Dutch and English East India Companies attempted to control it.

The Qutb Shahi rulers of Golconda decided to prevent the attempts of the various East India Companies. As a result fierce competition among various trading groups made the city populous and prosperous. However, Golconda was annexed by Aurangzeb in 1686-1687.

This caused the European Companies to look for the alternatives. The Company traders moved to Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. This caused the decline of Masulipatnam in the 18th century.

The English emerged as the most successful commercial and political power in the subcontinent.

Indian textiles were in great demand in Europe and west Asia. More and more people began to engage themselves in the crafts of spinning, weaving, bleaching, dying, etc. But the craftspersons were no more independent. They now began to work on a system of advances which meant that they had to weave cloth which was already promised to European agents.

Bombay, Calcutta and Madras became important cities in the 18th century.

The Europeans established Black Towns in these new cities and merchants and artisans were made to move there.

The 'white' rulers occupied the superior residences of Fort St George in Madras or Fort St William in Calcutta.

**Administrative town:** A town from where the administration is carried on.

**Temple town:** A town with a number of famous temples.

**Commercial town:** A town which is the centre of sale and purchase of commodities.

**Emporium:** A place where goods from diverse production centres are bought and sold.

**Hundi:** It is not recording a deposit made by a person. The amount deposited can be claimed in another place by presenting the record of the deposit.

**Factor:** It referred to an official merchant of the East India Company.

**Sthapatis:** Sculptors who made beautiful bronze idols and tall, ornamental bell metal lamps.

**Pilgrimage Centres:** Religious places where people go for pilgrimage.

**1336:** Vijayanagara Empire was founded.

**1565:** Vijayanagara Empire was defeated.

**1704:** Murshidabad became the capital of Bengal.

**At the end of the 17th Century:** Surat began to decline.

**In the 17th Century:** The town of Masalipatnam was a centre of intense activity.

**The 18th century:** Rise of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.