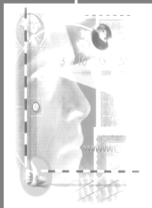


7th – Towns, Traders and Craftsperson I



Administrative Centers: Thanjavur the capital of the Cholas as it was a thousand years ago. The perennial river Kavery flows near this beautiful town. One hears the bells of the Rajarajeshvara temple built by King Rajaraja Chola. The Tonspeshvara are all praise for its architect Kunjaramallan Rajaraja praise for its architect Kunjaramallan Rajaraja Perunthachan who has proudly carved his name on the temple wall. Inside is a massive Shiva Linga.

Besides the temple, there are palaces with mandapas or pavilions. Kings hold court in these mandapas issuing to their subordinate. There are also barracks for the army. The town is bustling with markets selling grain, spices, cloth and jewellery. Water supply for the town comes from wells and tanks. The Saliya weavers of Thanjavur and the nearby town of Uraiyur are busy producing cloth for flags to be used in the temple festival, fine cottons for the king and nobility and coarse cotton for the masses. Some distance away at Svamimalai the Sthapatis or sculptors are making exquisite bronze idols and tall, ornamental bell metal lamps.

Temple Towns and Pilgrimage Centres: Thanjavur is an example of a temple town. Temple towns represent a very important pattern of urbanization, the process by which cities develop. Temple was often central to the economy and society. Rulers built temples to demonstrate their devotion to various deities. They also endowed temples with grants of land and money to carry out elaborate rituals, feed pilgrims and priests and celebrate festivals. Pilgrims who flocked to the temple also made donations.

Temple authorities used their wealth to finance trade and banking. Gradually a large number of priests, workers, artisans, traders, etc. settled near the temple to cater to its needs and those of the pilgrims. Towns emerged around temples such as those of Bhilashvamin (Bhilasa or Madhya Pradesh) and Somnath in Gujarat. Other important temple towns are Kanchipuram and Madurai in Tamil Nadu, and Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. Pilgrimage centres also slowly developed into townships. Vrindavan (Uttar Pradesh) and Tiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu) are examples of two such towns. Ajmer (Rajasthan) was the capital of the Chauhan kings in the twelfth century and later became the suba headquarter under the Mughals. It provides an excellent example of religious coexistence. Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti the celebrated Sufi saint who settled there in the twelfth century, attracted devotees from all creeds. Near Ajmer is a lake, Pushkar, which has attracted pilgrims from ancient times.

A Network of Small Towns: From the eighth century onwards the subcontinent was dotted with several small towns. These probably emerged from large villages. They usually had a Mandapika (or Mandi of later times) to which nearby villagers brought their produce to sell. They also had market streets were called Hatta (haat of later times) lined with shops. Besides, there were streets for different kinds of artisans such as potters, oil pressers, sugar makers, toddy makers, smiths, stonemasons, etc. while town of town. Many came from far and near to these towns to buy local articles and sell products of distant places like horses, salt, camphor, saffron, betel nut and spices like pepper. Usually a samanta or, in later times, a zamindar built a fortified palace in or near these towns. They levied taxes on traders, artisans and articles of trade and sometimes

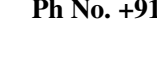
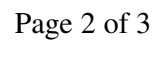
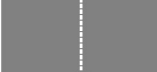
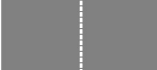
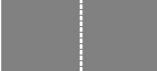
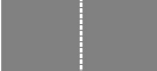
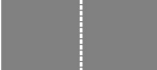
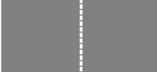
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“donated” the “right” to collect these taxes to local temples, which had been built by themselves or by rich merchants.

Traders Big and Small: There were many kinds of traders. These included the Banjaras. Several traders, especially horse traders, formed associations, with headmen who negotiated on their behalf with warriors who bought horses. Since traders had to pass through many kingdoms and forests, they usually traveled in caravans and formed guilds to protect their interests. There were several such guilds in south India from the eighth century onwards- the most famous being the Manigramam and Nanadesi. These guilds traded extensively both within the peninsula and with Southeast Asia and China. These were also communities like the Chettiars and the Marwari Oswal who went on to become the principal trading groups of the country. Gujarati traders, including the communities of Hindu Baniyas and Muslim Bohras, traded extensively with the ports of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, East Africa, Southeast Asia and China. They sold textiles and spices in these ports and, in exchange, brought gold and ivory from Africa; and spices, tin, Chinese blue pottery and silver from Southeast Asia and China. The towns on the west coast were home to Arab, Persian, Chinese, Jewish and Syrian Christian traders. Indian spices and cloth sold in the Red Sea ports were purchased by Italian traders and eventually reached European markets, fetching very high profits. Spices grown in tropical climates (pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, dried, ginger, etc.) became an important part of European cooking, and cotton cloth was very attractive.

The craftspersons of Bidar were so famed for their inlay work in copper and silver that it came to be called Bidri. The Panchalas or Vishwakarma community, consisting of goldsmiths, bronzesmiths, blacksmiths, masons and carpenters, were essential to the building of temples. They also played an important role in the construction of palaces, big buildings, tanks and reservoirs. Similarly, weavers such as the saliyan or kaikkolars emerged as prosperous communities, making donations to temples. Some aspects of cloth making like cotton cleaning, spinning and dyeing became specialized and independent crafts.

Vasco Da Gama and Christopher Columbus: in the fifteenth century European sailors undertook unprecedented explorations of sea routes. They were driven by the desire to find ways of reaching the Indian subcontinent and obtaining spices. Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese sailor, sailed down the African coast, went round the Cape of Good Hope and crossed over to the Indian coast, went round the Cape of Good Hope and crossed over to the Indian Ocean. His first journey took more than a year; he reached Calicut in 1498, and returned to Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, the following year. He lost two of his four ships, and of the 170 men at the start of the journey, only 54 survived. In spite of the obvious hazards, the routes that are opened up proved to be extremely profitable- and he was followed by English, Dutch and French sailors. The search for sea routes to India had unexpected fallout. On the assumption that the earth was round, Christopher Columbus, an Italian, decided to sail westwards across the Atlantic Ocean to find a route to India. He landed in the West Indies (which got their name because of this confusion) in 1492. He was followed by sailors and conquerors from Spain and



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Portugal, who occupied large parts of central and south America, often destroying earlier settlements in the area.

A closer look: Hampi, Masulipatnam and Surat: The architectural Splendour of Hampi. Hampi is located in the Krishna- Tungabhadra basin, which formed the nucleus of the vijayanagara empire, founded in 1336. The magnificent ruins at Hampi reveal a well- fortified city. No mortar or cementing agent was used in the construction of these walls and the technique followed was to wedge them together by interlocking. The architecture of Hampi was distinctive. The buildings in the royal complex had splendid arches, domes and pillared halls with niches for holding sculptures. They also had well- planned orchards and pleasure gardens with sculptural motifs such as the lotus and corbels. In its heyday in the fifteenth- sixteenth centuries, Hampi bustled with commercial and cultural activities. Moors (a name used collectively for Muslim merchants), Chettis and agents of Portuguese, thronged the markets of Hampi. Temples were the hub of cultural activities and Devadasis (temple dancers) performed before the deity, royalty and masses in the many- pillared halls in the Virupaksha (a form of Shiva) temple. The Mahanavami festival, known today as Navaratri in the south, was one of the most important festivals celebrated at Hampi. Archaeologists have found the Mahanavami platform where the king received guests and accepted tribute from subordinate chiefs. From here he also watched dance and music performances as well as wrestling bouts.

Hampi fell into ruin following the defeat of Vijayanagara in 1565 by the Deccani sultans - the rulers of Golconda, Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Berar and Bidar.

A Gateway to the West: Surat: Surat in Gujarat was the emporium of western trade during the Mughal period along with Combay (present- day Khambat) and somewhat later. Ahmedabad. Surat was the gateway for trade with west Asia via the gulf of Ormuz. Surat has also been called the gate to Mecca because many pilgrim ships set sail from here. The city was cosmopolitan and people of all castes and creeds lived there. In the seventeenth century the Portuguese, Dutch and English had their factories and warehouses at Surat. According to the English chronicler Ovington who wrote an Account of the port in 1689, on average a hundred ships of different countries could be found anchored at the port at any given time. There were also several retail and wholesale shops selling cotton textiles. The textiles of surat were famous for their gold lace borders (zari) and had a market in west Asia, Africa and Europe. The state built numerous rest-houses to take care of the needs of people from all over the world who came to the city. There were magnificent buildings and innumerable pleasure parks. The Kathiawad Seths or Mahajans (moneychangers) had huge banking houses at Surat. It is noteworthy that the Surat Hundis were honored in the far- off markets of Cairo in Egypt, Basra in Iraq and Antwerp in Belgium. However, Surat began to decline towards the end of the seventeenth century. This was because of many factors: the loss of markets and productivity because of the decline of the Mughal empire, control of the sea routes by the Portuguese and competition from Bombay (present- day Mumbai) where the English east India Company shifted its headquarters in 1668. Today, Surat is a bustling commercial centre.

