



Fishing in troubled waters: Masulipatnam

The town of Masulipatnam or Machlipatnam (literally, fish port town) lay on the delta of the Krishna river. In the seventeenth century it was a centre of intense activity. Both the Dutch and English east India companies attempted to control Masulipatnam as it became the most important port on the Andhra coast. The fort at Masulipatnam was built by the Dutch. The Qutb Shahi rulers of Golconda imposed royal monopolies on the sale of textiles, spices and other items to prevent the trade passing completely into the hands of the various east India companies. Fierce competition among various groups - the Golconda nobles, person merchants, telugu Komati chettis, and European traders- made the city populous and prosperous. As the Mughals began to extend their power to Golconda their representative, the governor Mir Jumla who was also a merchant, began to play off the Dutch and the English against each other. In 1686- 1687 Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb annexed Golconda. This caused the European companies to look for alternatives. It was a part of the new policy of the English east India Company that it was not enough if a port had connections with the production centres of the hinterland. The new company trade centres, it was felt, should combine political, administrative and commercial roles. As the company traders moved to Bombay, Calcutta (present-day Kolkata) and Madras (present-day Chennai). Masulipatanam lost both its merchants and prosperity and declined in the course of the eighteenth century, being today nothing more than a dilapidated little town.

New Towns and Traders: In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European countries were searching for spices and textiles, which had become popular both in Europe and west Asia, the English, Dutch and French formed east India companies in order to expand their commercial activities in the east. Initially great Indian traders like Mulla Abdul Ghafur and Virji Vora who owned a large number of ships competed with them. However, the European companies used their naval power to gain control of the sea trade and forced Indian traders to work as their agents. Ultimately, the English emerged as the most successful commercial and political power in the subcontinent. The spurt in demand for goods like textiles led to a great expansion of the crafts of spinning, weaving, bleaching, dyeing etc. with more and more people taking them up. Indian textile designs became increasingly refined. However, this period also saw the decline of the independence of craft persons. 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. Weavers no longer had the liberty of selling their own cloth or weaving their own patterns. They had to reproduce the designs supplied to them by the company agents.

The eighteenth century saw the rise of Bombay, Calcutta and madras, which are nodal cities today. Crafts and commerce underwent major changes as merchants and artisans (such as weavers) were moved into the black towns established by the European companies within these new cities. The “blacks” or native traders and craft persons were confined here while the “white” rulers occupied the superior residencies of Fort St. George in madras or Fort St. William in Calcutta.

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Urbanization during the sultanate period: During the sultanate period (13th to 16th centuries CE), many of the larger villages, especially the district headquarters, slowly grew into towns, known as qasbas. From the 14th century CE onwards these became centres of various crafts and trading activities. The main urban centres during the Mughal Period were Agra, Delhi, Lahore, Multan, Thatta and Srinagar in the north; Ahrnadahad, Surat, Ujjain and Patan in the west; and Sonargaon, Hoogli, Pataliputra, Chitgaon (Chittagong) and Murshidabad in the east. We can classify these towns as administrative centres, centres of trade, pilgrimage centres, port towns and manufacturing centers)

Urbanisation during the Mughal Period: From the 16th to the 18th centuries CE the urbanization of India received further encouragement. His period witnessed the establishment of a stable centre and a provincial government.

Chief towns: The towns that developed during medieval times were of different types, depending on their functions. There were administrative centers, pilgrimage centers, temple towns, craft towns, trading towns, ports and various other types of towns. Factors like accessibility, transport, infrastructure, protection from enemies, natural cover, fertility, etc. were considered before setting up these towns.

Capital towns: These were also called court towns. They were the administrative centers of the king. Mostly, the places where the kings held court developed into capital towns. Delhi, Agra, Dualatabad, Hampi and Lahore were some such town.

Craft town: Sometimes, a town specialized in one particular craft that was favored by ne kings and nobles. This led to the growth of craft towns. Patan, Surhanpur, Kashi, Dhaka and Kanchi were important centres of textile production. Agra was known for carpet weaving craft. Bidar was famous for its beautiful bidri work)

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Commercial town: These towns were major trade centers. They developed as a result of the products found in that area7or because they were near the ports or other trade routes; there were inland trading towns and port towns. The inland trading towns were linked by road to other craft or administrative centers.

Trading towns: The growth of markets encouraged trade, both internal and external. Well-maintained roads linking various parts of the country helped domestic trade. Ibn Batuta had described Delhi as a major trade centre. Superior quality rice and sugar from Kannauj, wheat from Punjab and betel leaves from Dhar in Madhya Pradesh found their way to the markets of Delhi. Caravans arrived at Peshawar with goods from the Deccan, Gujarat, Multan and other parts of India. Lahore was also an important trading city. Limbodar in Gujarat and Dabhol in Maharashtra were trade centers that linked the northern and southern halves of the country.

Post cities: The post were important for India's overseas trade with South-East Asia, West Asia, China and Europe Surat, Broach (Bharuch) and Cambay (Khambhat) in Gujarat, Masulipatnam. Sonargaon, Chittagong and Satgaon on the eastern coast, Bassein (Vasai). Dabhol and Bhatkal on the Konkan Coast, and



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Calicut (Kozhikode) and Cochin (Kochi) on the Malabar Coast were the flourishing port towns of the Medieval Period.

Trade and the traders: Internal trade grew due to the organized system set up by the government. Alauddin Khalji strictly supervised the marketplaces. . Sher Shah built four new roads the most famous of which was the Grand Trunk Road from Sonargaon to the river Indus. This enabled the movement of goods across the country.

Internal trade: Villages and towns in different regions specialized in local products which they exported to other parts of the country. Sind specialized in cotton textiles, silk, wooden articles, ivory bangles and saltpetre. Delhi and Agra were known for paper and glassware. Internal trade took place over land routes and along the waterways. Traders moved along the Dakshinapath, which passed from Delhi through Ujjain. Hampi and other towns in the Deccan to Madurai and Thanjavur in the south. Trade also took place along the rivers like the Ganga, Brahmaputra, Godavari, Tapti, and Narmada. Goods were brought from the interiors of India to the ports through these rivers from where they moved across the seas to other ports along India's coast. Bengal produced so much surplus rice that it was exported to various ports.

Foreign trade: India had a rich trade with other countries. Trade with the west was mainly through two routes- one through the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean, and the other through the red sea through Egypt, to the Mediterranean. The Malabar Coast was the main base for shipping the goods. India main exports were spices, textiles, precious stones, ivory and articles with inlay works. The chief articles of import were horses from Kabul and Arabia, dry fruits and precious stones. India also imported glassware from Europe, high-grade textiles like satin from west Asia and raw silk and porcelain from china.

Craft and craft people: The Delhi sultanate period saw the slow but steady growth of crafts like the spinning, weaving and printing of fine textiles, gem-cutting, and metallurgy and high- quality pottery. Many variety of ornamental work in cut stones. Pearl and tortoiseshell were produced in south India. Finishing for pearls was a major industry centers for cutting and polishing precious ornaments like diamonds, sapphires and rubies were established at Pulicat, Calicut and Vijayanagara. India was famous for its textiles, which formed one of the chief items of exports. Patola, which is a kind of silk colored with natural dyes, was popular in south- East Asia. In the east Bengal was famous for its wide variety of textiles. Ibn Batuta saw many cotton trade centers during his stay in Bengal. Silk were also manufactured there. Golkonda was famous for its kalamkari products. These were finely painted cotton fabrics with motifs from Hindu mythology. They were exported through the port city of Masulipatnam. Palampore, which were another variety of painted fabrics, were popular in the Mughal and Deccan courts. The borders of these pieces were block printed while the centre depicted the 'tree of life' motif made by hand.