

CBSE Notes Class 7 Social Science History Chapter 6-Towns, Traders and Craftsperson

Administrative Centers

Thanjavur, the capital of the Cholas, as it was a thousand years ago- perennial river Kaveri flows near- can hear the bells of the Rajarajeshvara temple built by King Rajaraja Chola-architect Kunjaramallan Rajaraja Perunthachchan-his name carved on the temple wall-Inside is a massive Shiva linga-Besides the temple are palaces with mandapas or pavilions-Kings hold court in these mandapas- issue orders to their subordinates-barracks for the army are there-bustling with markets selling grain, spices, cloth and jewellery-Water supply comes from wells and tanks-Saliya weavers of Thanjavur and the nearby town of Uraiyur produce cloth for flags to be pursued in the temple festival, fine cotton for the king and nobility and coarse cotton for the masses-Some distance away at Svamimalai, the sthapatis or sculptors make exquisite bronze idols and tall, ornamental bell metal lamps.

Temple Towns and Pilgrimage Centres

Thanjavur-example of a temple town-represent a very important pattern of urbanisation, the process by which cities develop-Temples central to the economy and society-built temples to demonstrate their devotion to various deities-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 temples also made donations. Temple authorities used their wealth to finance trade and banking. Temple town grew as a large number of priests, workers, artisans, traders, etc. settled near the temple to cater to its needs and those of the pilgrims. Temple Towns emerged-around temples such as those of Bhallasvamin (Bhilsa or Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh), and Somnath in Gujarat- other important temple towns-Kanchipuram and Madurai in Tamil Nadu and Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. Pilgrimage centres developed into townships-Vrindavan (Uttar Pradesh) and Tiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu) are examples. Ajmer (Rajasthan)-capital of the Chauhan kings in the 12th century-later became the suba headquarters under the Mughals-provides an excellent example of religious coexistence-Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, the celebrated Sufi saint settled there in the 12th century- attracted devotees from all creeds-Pushkar Lake Near Ajmer attracted pilgrims from ancient times.

A Network of Small Towns

From 8th century onwards subcontinent was dotted with several small towns that probably emerged from large villages-had a mandapika (or mandi of later times) to which nearby villagers brought their produce to sell-also had market streets called hatta (haat of later times) lined with shops-there were streets for different kinds of artisans such as potters, oil pressers, sugarmakers, toddy makers, smiths, stonemasons, and so on-some traders lived in the town, others travelled from town to 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- a samanta or, in later times, a zamindar built a fortified palace in or near these towns.-levied taxes on traders, artisans and articles of trade-sometimes “donated” the “right” to collect these taxes to local temples, which had

been built by themselves or by rich merchants- “rights” were recorded in inscriptions that have survived to this day.

Traders Big and Small

Many kinds of traders including Banjaras- Several horse traders, formed associations-headmen negotiated on their behalf with warriors who bought horses- as traders had to pass through many kingdoms and forests, they travelled in caravans-formed guilds to protect their interests-several such guilds in south India from the 8th century onwards—most famous being the Manigramam and Nanadesi-guilds traded extensively both within the peninsula and with Southeast Asia and China-communities like the Chettiars and the Marwari Oswal 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- sold textiles and spices in these ports -in exchange, brought gold and ivory from Africa-spices, tin, Chinese blue pottery and silver from Southeast Asia and China- 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-eventually reached European markets, fetching very high profits-Spices are grown in tropical climates (pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, dried ginger, etc.)- became an important part of European cooking, and cotton cloth-eventually drew European traders to India.

Crafts in Towns

Craftspersons of Bidar were famed for their inlay work in copper and silver- it came to be called Bidri. Panchalas or Vishwakarma community, consist of goldsmiths, bronze smiths, blacksmiths, masons and carpenters- they were essential to the building of temples-also played an important role in the construction of palaces, big buildings, tanks and reservoirs-weavers such as the Saliyar or Kaikkolars emerged as prosperous communities-made donations to temples. Aspects of cloth-making like cotton cleaning, spinning and dyeing became specialised- became independent crafts.

A Closer Look: Hampi, Masulipatnam and Surat

The Architectural Splendour of Hampi

Hampi located in the Krishna-Tungabhadra basin formed the nucleus of the Vijayanagara Empire, founded in 1336-magnificent Hampi ruins reveal a well-fortified city-No mortar or cementing agent was used in the construction of this walls-technique followed was to wedge them together by interlocking-architecture of Hampi was distinctive-buildings in the royal complex had splendid arches, domes and pillared halls with niches for holding sculptures-had well-planned orchards and pleasure gardens with sculptural motifs such as the lotus and corbels-In the 15th-16th centuries, Hampi bustled with commercial and cultural activities-Muslim merchants, Chettis and agents of European traders such as the Portuguese, thronged the markets of Hampi-Temples were the hub of cultural activities-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 tributes from subordinate chiefs-king also watched dance and music performances, as well as wrestling bouts from here-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-the emporium of western trade during the Mughal period-along with Cambay (present day Khambat) and somewhat later, Ahmedabad-Surat, the gateway for trade with West Asia via the Gulf of Ormuz- also called the gate to Mecca because many pilgrim ships set sail from here- cosmopolitan and people of all castes and creeds lived there-In the 17th century the Portuguese, Dutch and English had their factories and warehouses at Surat-According to the English chronicler Ovington (wrote an account of the port in 1689), on average a hundred ships of different countries could be found anchored at the port- 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-built numerous rest-houses to take care of the needs of people from all over the world who came to the city- magnificent buildings and innumerable pleasure parks-The Kathiawad seths or mahajans (moneychangers) had huge banking houses at Surat- Surat hundis were honoured 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 17th century-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- Surat is a bustling commercial centre now.

Fishing in Troubled Waters: Masulipatnam

Town of Masulipatnam or Machlipatnam (fish port town) lying on the delta of the Krishna river was a centre of intense activity in the 17th century. Dutch and English East India Companies attempted to control Masulipatnam because it became the most important port on the Andhra coast. Fort at Masulipatnam-built by the Dutch. Qutb Shahi rulers of Golconda imposed royal monopolies on the sale of textiles, spices and other items to prevent the trade from passing completely into the hands of the various East India Companies. Fierce competition among various trading groups(the Golconda nobles, Persian merchants, Telugu Komati Chettis, and European traders) made the city populous and prosperous. Mughals began to extend their power to Golconda- their representative, the governor Mir Jumla (also a merchant) began to play off the Dutch and the English against each other-In 1686-1687 Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb annexed Golconda-caused the European Companies to look for alternatives-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 should combine political, administrative and commercial roles-As the Company traders moved to Bombay, Calcutta (present-day Kolkata) and Madras (present-day Chennai), Masulipatnam lost both its merchants and prosperity-declined in the course of the 18th century-today is a dilapidated little town.

New Towns and Traders

16th and 17th centuries-European countries searching for spices and textiles, popular both in Europe and West Asia-The English, Dutch and French formed East India Companies 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-forced Indian traders to work as their agents-English emerged as the most successful commercial and political power in the subcontinent-spurt in demand for goods like textiles led to a great expansion of the crafts of spinning, weaving, bleaching, dyeing, etc-more and more people taking them up-Indian textile designs became increasingly refined-this period also saw the decline of the independence of craftspersons-began to work on a system of advances -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-had to reproduce the designs supplied to them by the Company agents-18th century saw the rise of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras-nodal cities today-Crafts and commerce underwent major changes-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 craftspersons were confined here while the “white” rulers occupied the superior residencies of Fort St. George in Madras or Fort St. William in Calcutta.