

UNIT

3

State and Society in Medieval India

From the Cholas to the Mughals



Learning Objectives

To acquire knowledge of

- Successive dynasties and the resultant political outcomes from the times of the Cholas to the Mughals
- Influence of Islam and Islamic state on the socio-cultural life of the people
- Institutional and administrative changes during Chola, Pandya and Vijayanagara periods in the south
- Right and Left Hand Caste conflicts and changes in religious spheres on account of advent of European Missions
- Development of literature, art and architecture
- Transformation in agriculture and manufacturing sector
- Progress in maritime trade, commerce and urbanization



Introduction

We begin this chapter by defining the term 'medieval'. The periodization of history into 'ancient/classical', medieval' and 'modern' is conventionally used with reference to European history. In the context of Indian history, the use of these terms is more problematic. Therefore, historians have debated their relevance

in defining different periods of Indian history. For instance, the historian Burton Stein, uses the term 'classical' to describe the period up to the Gupta empire, and dates the 'medieval' period from the 7th century A.D.(CE) till the beginning of Mughal rule in the 16th century. The Mughal era, from the 16th to 18th century is referred to as the early modern period.

The political scenario in all parts of India underwent momentous, definitive changes which transformed the social and economic fabric and development of the country. Historians have now moved away from thinking of history as a linear narrative of kings and dynasties, and the events – mainly wars and military campaigns – which happened during their rule. History is now thought of in inter-disciplinary terms to comprise social and economic change. Nevertheless, such change does not happen autonomously without any reference to changes in the political structure. This is especially true for the period covered in this chapter.

Major Political Changes

- The expansion of the Chola empire from the time of Rajaraja which eclipsed the Pandyan and Pallava kingdoms, extending north till Orissa.
- From the twelfth century, the beginning of several centuries of Muslim rule in Delhi, extending throughout north India and the spread of Islam to different parts of the country.
- By the end of the 13th century the eclipse of the great empire of the Cholas and the consequent rise of many Religious kingdoms in south India. This ultimately culminated in the rise of the Vijayanagar empire



which exercised authority over all of south India and came to be considered the bastion of Religious rule in the south.

- The consolidation of Muslim rule under the Mughals in the north, beginning in 1526 A.D. (C.E.) with the defeat of the Ibrahim Lodi by Babur. At its height, the Mughal empire stretched from Kabul to Gujarat to Bengal, from Kashmir to south India.
- The coming of the Europeans, beginning with the Portuguese who arrived on the west coast of India in 1498.

3.1 Political Changes (1000–1700)

3.1(a) North India: The Advent of Islam

Muslim rule was established in Delhi at the end of the 12th century by **Muhammad Ghori**, but did not expand much beyond this core region for another hundred years. Muslim merchants and rulers were known in India for several centuries even prior to this. Arab Muslim merchants had been trading in the ports of the west coast, especially Kerala, as early as the 9th century. Similarly, Muslim invaders from west Asia had set up Sultanates in Gujarat and Sind since the 8th century. However, these contacts did not lead to any widespread exposure to Islam or Muslim rule in the rest of the country.

The impact of Muslim rule was felt during the reign of **Alauddin Khalji** (1296-1316 A.D. (C.E.)) who sent military campaigns to the south. The primary objective was to plunder the wealth, rather than to expand his territory. Devagiri (near Aurangabad) was captured by Alauddin Khalji. Renamed Daulatabad, it was the second stronghold of his growing kingdom. Alauddin Khalji's slave and

commander, Malik Kafur, was sent on military expeditions further south in the first decade of the 1300s A.D. (C.E.).

The Tughlaq kings who came after Alauddin also sent their armies to the south. As a result, the generally more isolated southern part of the country came into the orbit of the rulers of the north. Governors were appointed in various provinces in the Deccan region, and a Sultanate was even established in Madurai.



Muhammad bin Tughlaq

During the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, there was a revolt in Daulatabad. Alauddin Bahman Shah set up the Bahmani sultanate in 1347 A.D. (C.E.), with his capital in Bidar. The Bahmani kingdom survived for nearly a century and a half, mainly due to the able administration of **Mahmud Gawan**, a great statesman and loyal minister. After his death, many viceroys declared their independence, and by the end of the fifteenth century, five sultanates came up in the Deccan: Bijapur, Golkonda, Ahmednagar, Berar, and Bidar. Bijapur and Golkonda were the largest of these sultanates and the region entered a phase of considerable economic growth and expansion of trade. The Deccan sultanates were conquered by Aurangzeb in the 1660s A.D. (C.E.), and the entire region, as far south as Madras (Chennai) became a part of the Mughal empire.

3.1 (b) The Chola Empire in the South

The territorial expansion of the Chola empire began under **Rajaraja I**. The Pallava kingdom had already been assimilated into the Chola kingdom. The Pandya kingdom remained independent, but was subservient to the Cholas. The empire expanded further under **Rajendra I** who had successfully taken his armies as far to the northeast as the river Ganges. He had also sent naval expeditions against the Sailendra Kingdom of Sri Vijaya (in Indonesia), Kadaram (Kedah) and Ceylon. This earned him the title “the Chola who had conquered the Ganga and Kadaram” (*gangaiyum kadaramum konda cholan*). Ceylon remained a province of the Chola empire for a few decades. The empire was further consolidated through marriage with the eastern Chalukyas under Rajendra’s grandson **Kulottunga I**, and extended up to the border of Orissa.

Maritime trade with south-east Asia and China expanded greatly during the Chola period. The continued interaction with Tamil merchants resulted in the spread of the influence of Indic culture and art into south-east Asia, as seen in the magnificent temples of Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

3.1 (c) Vijayanagar and South India after the Cholas

The Chola Empire began to decline after the middle of the 13th century. The last known Chola emperor was Rajendra III. The empire died out in 1279 A.D. (C.E.). Several power centres came up after this in the region. Further to the south, the Pandya kings again sought to regain the glory they had lost under the Cholas. Many brilliant Pandya



kings like Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan ruled at the end of the 13th century. Further to the north was the Hoysala kingdom, with its capital at Belur and later Halebidu. This kingdom extended through much of the present day state of Karnataka. The Kakatiyas ruled from Warangal (Telangana) while the Yadavas ruled in Devagiri until Devagiri fell to Alauddin Khalji’s forces at the end of the 13th century. These states did not exist in peaceful cooperation, and the region was beset by many internal wars and conflicts.



Hampi

The establishment of the kingdom (subsequently empire) of Vijayanagar was the most momentous development in the history of south India in the medieval period. The kingdom was established by Harihara and Bukka, two brothers. They were the first rulers of the Sangama dynasty. They founded a new capital city on the southern banks of Tungabhadra which they named Vijayanagara (city of victory). Harihara was crowned in 1336 A.D. (C.E.). The Sangama dynasty ruled Vijayanagar for nearly one and a half centuries. This was followed by the Saluva dynasty which was in power only for a brief period. The Tuluva dynasty then succeeded as rulers. Krishnadeva Raya, the greatest ruler of Vijayanagar, belonged to this family.

Kingdom: a country ruled by a king or queen. **Empire:** a group of countries controlled by one ruler.

As the empire expanded, kingdoms to the south, such as the Hoysalas and the Tamil region, were also assimilated into Vijayanagar. The rulers of Vijayanagar were almost continuously at war with the Bahmani sultanate as well as with the Religious based kingdoms of Kondavidu and Orissa. Finally, the combined forces of the five Deccani Sultanates defeated Vijayanagar in 1565 A.D. (C.E.) at the Battle of Talikota. The Vijayanagar emperors then shifted their capital further south to Penugonda, and eventually to Chandragiri near Tirupati. The empire (or what remained of it) finally withered away in the middle of the seventeenth century.

3.1(d) The Mughals (1526–1707 A.D. (C.E.))

The Mughal empire was founded by Babur in 1526 A.D. (C.E.) after he defeated Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat. The first six Mughal emperors are referred to as the ‘**Great Mughals**’. Aurangzeb was the last of the great Mughals. Akbar consolidated the Mughal empire through conquests and through a policy of conciliation with the Religious based kingdoms of Rajasthan. The Mughal empire though began to disintegrate after Aurangzeb, continued to exist nominally till 1857 A.D. (C.E.) when the British finally ended the virtually non-existent empire.

A new power centre rose in Maharashtra in the seventeenth century, and the Marathas under the leadership of **Shivaji** seriously undermined the authority of the Mughals in western India. At its height, the empire stretched over most of the Indian sub-continent. Only the south-western

region of Kerala and southern Tamilnadu were not directly under Mughal rule.

3.1(e) The Arrival of the Europeans

During the fifteenth century the Europeans were pre-occupied with trying to find a direct sea route to India, bypassing the overland route through west Asia and the Mediterranean. The spice trade from India was controlled by Muslims up to Alexandria. By gaining direct access to India the Europeans could exercise more direct control over the spice trade and obtain the spices at more favourable prices. In 1498 A.D. (C.E.), Vasco da Gama landed on the Kerala coast having sailed around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. Barely five years later, the Portuguese built their first fort at Cochin in 1503 A.D. (C.E.). Goa was captured in 1510 A.D. (C.E.) and became the centre of the Portuguese state in India. Because of their naval superiority, the Portuguese were able to conquer many ports from east Africa up to Malacca, and could effectively control the maritime trade over the entire region.



Trade in Masulipattinam

Other European nations soon followed the Portuguese, most notably the Dutch, English and French. The activities of the latter were carried on through the respective East India Companies. While these were all private trading enterprises, they all had a strong political agenda. During the seventeenth century, when Mughal authority was still powerful, the European companies were able to trade

in the Mughal empire, but could not have their own territorial base within the boundaries of the empire. In South India, however, political authority was fragmented and much less cohesive, and they had their own enclaves over which they exercised complete authority. The Dutch were in Pulicat (and later Nagapatnam), the English in Madras, the French in Pondicherry and the Danes in Tarangampadi (Tranquebar).

3.2 Impact on Polity

The above stated political developments in Indian history had far-reaching consequences on administrative institutions, society and the economy across the sub-continent.



King Raja Raja Chola

The CHOLA PERIOD was an enterprising period when trade and the economy expanded, accompanied by urbanization. The administrative machinery was re-organised during Chola rule. The basic unit of local administration was the village (*ur*), followed by the sub-region (*nadu*) and district (*kottam*). Tax-free villages granted to Brahmins were known as *brahmadeya*. Marketing centres and towns were known as *nagaram*. The *ur*, *nadu*, *brahmadeya* and *nagaram* each had its own assembly. They were responsible for the maintenance and management of the water resources and land; the local temples; resolving local

issues and disputes; and for collecting the taxes due to the government.

While the Chola state did not intervene in this fundamental system of local administration, they introduced innovations in revenue administration by creating new revenue divisions (*mandalam* and *valanadu*). Several new taxes on agriculture and commerce were also introduced.

The second notable feature was the great increase in the construction of temples. This had two dimensions: new temples were constructed, and existing temples became multi-functional social and economic institutions. The construction of great temples also was a reflection of the growing prosperity in the kingdom, since the activity involved great expenditure. The temple was no longer a mere place of worship, but became an important economic entity as an employer, consumer and land-owner.

The establishment of Islamic Rule in Delhi made a big impact on Indian society. Initially, Islam did not cause any social tension. Arab merchants, for instance, when they came and settled on Kerala coast, married local women and led a peaceful life. The situation changed when Islam became a state power. For a medieval ruler one way of asserting imperial authority was to demolish the place of worship of the enemies. Otherwise Islam as a monotheistic religion had its positive impact in Indian society. It played a decisive role in the evolution of a composite culture.

Muslim kingdoms in Delhi, as well in the Deccan, also attracted migrants from Persia and Arabia who moved to India and took up service in these states and many became important and well-known statesmen. This also opened up Indian society to steady interaction with west Asia resulting in the transfer of

cultural and technical influences. Muslim merchants and craftsmen also migrated from the north of India to the south in the wake of the military expeditions. Society became more heterogeneous and hybrid in character. A new composite culture evolved. This could be seen most vividly in the Deccan sultanates of Bijapur and Golkonda whose rulers were extremely broad-minded and secular in outlook.

A notable development was the profusion of contemporary historical accounts of the Muslim Sultanates by Arab and Persian historians. Al beruni, Ibn Batuta, and Ferishta are among the best known of the Muslim historians. These historians provide valuable information about the rulers and events of the medieval period. They also provide an alternate historical point of view of Islamic rule in India as seen through the eyes of Muslim writers.

The establishment of the VIJAYANAGAR EMPIRE changed the administrative and social institutional structure of south India, especially in the Tamil country. Perhaps because the new kingdom was threatened from the beginning by the hostility of the Bahmani sultanate in the north, Vijayanagar evolved as a militaristic state. This empire needed two kinds of resources to feed its military establishment – revenue and men. This was achieved through re-organizing the administration of the conquered territories, especially in the Tamil region. Military officers, known as '*nayakas*', were appointed as chiefs of various localities in Tamilnadu and received land grants from the emperor. There were also lesser military leaders known as *palayakkarar* who essentially supplied the manpower for the army. Many forts were also built which were under Brahman commanders.

Three major nayaka kingdoms, owing allegiance to the Vijayanagar emperor, came up between 1500 A.D.

(C.E.) and 1550 A.D. (C.E.) in Madurai, Tanjavur and Gingee (Senji). These nayakas had formal roles in court ceremonials at Vijayanagar. This became the new political order in Tamilnadu during the sixteenth century. The nayaka chieftains as well as the three nayaka kings were all strong supporters of Hindu temples. The three capitals became great cultural centres under the patronage of the nayaka rulers who promoted literature and the performing arts.



Rani Mangammal

Resources realized from the land were transferred to the empire by the nayakas not as tax revenue, but as tribute. Thus, the resources of the core regions, especially in the Tamil region, were utilized for military purposes. This administrative set-up effectively destroyed the decentralized, local institutions which managed local resources, temples and affairs which had come up during Chola rule. The appointment of Telugu nayakas also resulted in the migration of

Telugu-speaking people from the north. These included soldiers, agriculturists, craftsmen and Brahmins.

The MUGHAL EMPIRE transformed the economy and society of north India. The empire was consolidated under Akbar through his policy of co-opting the Hindu Rajput rulers under the umbrella of Mughal rule. He also reversed the policy of discriminatory measures against the Hindus. He employed Hindu administrators like Todar Mal in key positions of authority. These initiatives earned the emperor the loyalty and trust of the majority community. As the empire stretched across north India, the entire region was brought under a uniform administrative structure. The political stability of the large empire led to impressive growth of the economy and trade. At the height of its power the Mughal empire was one of the largest, richest and most powerful empires in the entire world.

In part due to Aurangzeb's reversal to orthodox Islamic principles of governance which alienated the Rajput rulers and the Hindu subjects, the over-extended empire began to collapse under its own weight by the beginning of the eighteenth century. The viceroys of many Mughal provinces – Bengal, Awadh (Oudh), Hyderabad, Arcot – became independent rulers of the successor states after the death of Aurangzeb. These states became centres of distinctive local cultures, including styles of cooking like Lucknavi and Hyderabadi cuisines.

The ARRIVAL OF THE EUROPEANS in India ultimately culminated in the establishment of colonial rule in India under the British, and this is what is considered foremost when discussing the impact of the European presence. But the coming of the Europeans was important for many

other reasons. The growing presence of the European trading companies also witnessed an influx of European travellers into India. They left exhaustive accounts of their travels in India, commenting on virtually all aspects of life in India. These accounts are important contemporary sources of information on the economy, society, political developments and institutions in India.

The Europeans came to India primarily in search of spices. But soon there was an explosion in the demand for Indian textiles in the European markets, often referred to as the 'Indian craze'. This led to a significant expansion of textile production in India, which was accompanied by an expansion of the production of commercial crops like cotton and indigo and other dyes.

3.3 Society

3.3(a) Caste

Caste is the most distinctive (and most discussed) aspect of Indian society. We first need to understand two dimensions of the term 'caste'. First, the four-fold division of society as specified in the religious texts, referred to as *varna*. There was a considerable proportion of the population which was outside the *varna* system. The number of such people increased significantly by the medieval period. This was partly because more and more pastoral and forest land was being reclaimed for cultivation, and the people who lived in these lands were evicted. They had to work as landless labourers for their living, and were often tied to the land like serfs.

In reality, caste was a complex phenomenon. It combined economic and social dimensions and has to be understood under the more common term of *jati*.

The different jatis were not necessarily at different levels of ranking in a vertical hierarchy, but each still retained a separate identity. The persons who worked in any specific occupation or profession considered themselves as part of a distinct caste. These occupations could be service related or artisanal crafts like weaving, metal work, woodwork etc. In most cities persons working in the same occupation often lived in their own segregated quarters. In general, occupations were hereditary. Technology and knowledge about production processes were transferred orally from generation to generation.

We have extensive information about occupational castes for south India, especially Tamilnadu. The occupational caste groups are sometimes referred to as guilds. They functioned under a leader or small group of leaders who were the deciding authority on all matters pertaining to the caste. Theoretically, any person who worked in a particular occupation could become a member of the group (as was the case in guilds in Europe). In practice, however, there are virtually no instances of outsiders becoming a member of an occupational caste. Muslim craftsmen or weavers could thus not become members of a Hindu group.

Improving the status of their jati was a major pre-occupation for all caste groups. This is particularly evident after the fourteenth century when the traditional local assemblies which controlled the resources and social interactions began to weaken. In traditional society many castes were denied various social rights and privileges. Therefore, caste groups often petitioned the local ruler for permission to use various symbols of higher status, like the right to wear footwear, the right to carry umbrellas, the right to use certain decorations at funerals and so on. Each caste also created a mythical genealogy

to establish its origins; this was used to justify the claim for the right to a higher status in the hierarchy. These genealogies are found in many of the manuscripts collected by Colin Mackenzie.

A singular and unusual feature of the caste system existed in most of south India: groups of castes were vertically divided into right (*valankai*) and left hand (*idankai*) castes. Each group included castes at different levels in the caste hierarchy, like merchants, land-owning castes and professional castes down to agricultural labourers. This division was found throughout south India, but we have more comprehensive information on the right and left hand castes in the Tamil region because their conflicts are extensively documented in the English records.

Primarily, the conflicts between the two groups were extremely violent. Generally, these conflicts arose from the claims by each group to indicators of superior ceremonial status, which was another manifestation of the constant striving for improving social status in the caste hierarchy.

3.3(b) Religion

Diverse institutions with different ideologies came up within the bhakti movement during the medieval period. Mathas or mutts were established under different gurus or religious leaders like Vidyaranya; Saivite movements came up like the Tamil *Saiva-siddhanta*, and the *Virasaivas* in Karnataka; in Maharashtra the *Varkarisampradaya* (tradition) of the devotees of Vithoba arose in the 14th century.

Buddhism had faded out in India. Jainism also lost ground in most parts of India due to emergence of bhakti movement under Sankara and Ramanuja. However, it continued to thrive in parts of Gujarat and Marwar, especially among the trading communities. Islam spread throughout

the country as Islamic sultanates were set up eventually entering south India. With regard to Christianity, there were a small number of Christian groups in Kerala claiming their origins to the time of St Thomas, the disciple of Jesus. But Christianity took roots when the Portuguese arrived in Kerala and set themselves up in Goa. In Goa itself the local population was under great pressure to convert to Christianity, especially under the oppressive conditions of the Inquisition. But Jesuit missionaries were also active in other areas, especially among the fishing communities on the Pandyan coast. The best known among the Jesuit missionaries was St Francis Xavier who was instrumental in making the fishing community to take to Christianity in the Tuticorin region. Another notable Jesuit was Roberto de Nobili, a scholar, who was based in Madurai.



Roberto de Nobili

In the north a new religion, Sikhism, was founded by Guru Nanak, who lived during 15th and 16th century. Sikhism grew in strength in spite of severe repression by Aurangzeb. Thus, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, many religions co-existed across India. Foreign religions also came to India when Jews and Zoroastrians (Parsis) migrated to India. The Parsis, who fled Persia to escape persecution, settled in Gujarat, while the Jews lived in Kerala. Parsi merchants were among the richest and most prominent in the port of Surat, and subsequently, in Bombay under the British.

3.4 Culture

Literature, Art and Architecture

The Chola period was an era of remarkable cultural activity. These were the centuries when major literary works were written. The

best known classical poet, Kamban, wrote Ramayana in Tamil which was formally presented (Arangetram) in the temple at Srirangam. Sekkilar's *Periyapuranam*, similarly was presented at the temple in Chidambaram. Among the other great works of the period is *Kalingattup-parani* and *Muvarula*. It was also a period when great religio-philosophical treatises like the *Sankara-bhasyam* and *Sri-bhashyam* were produced.



Darasuram Temple

The monumental architecture of the Cholas is visible in the great temple of Tanjavur, Gangai-konda-cholapuram and Darasuram, to name only a few. Stone images were sculpted on the temple walls and pillars. Bronze images of great beauty and artistry were made by the 'lost wax' process. The best known of them is the iconic representation of Siva as Nataraja, performing the cosmic dance.

A distinct Islamic cultural tradition developed in India with the establishment of Muslim rule. The sultans built forts, tombs, mosques and other monuments in Delhi as well as in south India which came under their rule. The Mughal period particularly was a brilliant epoch in the cultural history of India. The Mughals were well-known for their aesthetic values, and were great patrons of the arts. They left behind numerous monuments, in addition to constructing entire cities like Shahjahanabad (Delhi) and Fatehpur Sikri, gardens, mosques and forts. Decorative arts – especially jewellery set

with precious and semi-precious gems for items of personal use – flourished under the patronage of the royal household and urban elites. The art of painting also flourished in the Mughal period. Primarily known as Mughal miniatures, they were generally intended as book illustrations or were single works to be kept in albums. A large volume of literature was produced, especially in Persian, and also in Urdu, Hindi and other regional languages. In the performing arts, like Hindustani the name of Tansen is well-known indicating the patronage extended to classical music under Akbar.



Fatehpur Sikri Fort

In south India, the Vijayanagar rulers and their military chiefs actively supported temple construction. Many new temples were built by them. Besides this, new structures like pavilions and halls with many pillars were added extensively to existing temples, with elaborately carved pillars. Art historians point to the distinctive style of the temple sculptures of the Vijayanagar period. The intricately carved lofty towers or *gopurams* at the entrance to temples were all added during the Vijayanagar period. The walls of the temples were embellished with paintings.

A large volume of religious literature, especially in Sanskrit, was produced under the patronage of the

nayakas and the Vijayanagar rulers. Telugu literature flourished under royal support. A new style of Tamil literature called Prabandham emerged during this period. The great commentaries of the epic *Silappadikaram* and *Tirukkural* were also written during this period. Venkatamakhi, son of Govindha Dikshidar who codifying the ragas of Carnatic music had lived in this period.

3.5 Economy

3.5 (a) Agriculture

India was predominantly an agricultural country, and a very large proportion of the population lived in rural areas and depended on agriculture for their livelihood. Both in the north and the south, agriculture depended heavily on irrigation. Canals and wells added to the water sources in addition to rainfall and rivers. The state was actively involved in the construction of canals for increasing the availability of water. The biggest network of canals known in India until the nineteenth century was created in the fourteenth century by Firuzshah Tughluq in the Delhi area. Construction of lakes, tanks and reservoirs with sluices to let out the water as well as the use of check dams all increased the availability of water for irrigation. Cultivators were also encouraged to dig wells. Lift irrigation was used to draw the water. In the north, the Persian wheel was used for lifting water from wells. In the Tamil region, the Cholas had created a network of canals for irrigation connecting the tributaries of Kaveri. Lakes and tanks also added to the water sources.





Persian Wheel

An important feature of Indian agriculture was the large number of crops that were cultivated. The peasant in India was more knowledgeable about many crops as compared to peasants in most of the world at the time. A variety of food grains like wheat, rice, and millets were grown apart from lentils and oilseeds. Many other commercial crops were also grown such as sugarcane, cotton and indigo. Other than the general food crops, south India had a regional specialization in pepper, cinnamon, spices and coconut.

In general, two different crops were grown in the different seasons, which protected the productivity of the soil. Maize and tobacco were two new crops which were introduced after the arrival of the Europeans. Many new varieties of fruit or horticultural crops like papaya, pineapple, guava and cashew nut were also introduced which came from the west, especially America. Potatoes, chillies and tomatoes also became an integral part of Indian food.

Sericulture (silk production by breeding the mulberry silkworm) was introduced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. By the seventeenth century, Bengal had become one of the largest silk-producing regions in the world. In addition, other varieties of silk (like *tassar*) were also produced.

There is more data for north India especially with respect to crop yields. The data for the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, as well as the sixteenth century indicate that the productivity per unit of land was as high then as it was at the end of the nineteenth century. There was less population pressure on land in the earlier centuries, so it can be argued that even productivity per capita was higher than it was in more recent times. By and large, the evidence indicates that land was still plentifully available in north and south India. Rural population were known to abandon a settlement and move to a new location in protest against excessive demands by the rulers. People moved to the more arid, black soil regions of western and southern Tamilnadu in the context of decline of Vijayanagar empire and began to cultivate these lands.

The economic condition of the bulk of the peasantry, however, was poor. They generally lived only at a very basic level of subsistence. There are many instances in south India in the seventeenth century when poor peasants sold themselves and their families into slavery. The shipping lists of the Dutch East India Company regularly mention men and women slaves who were transported to the spice producing islands of Indonesia to work on the plantations.

3.5 (b) Non Agricultural Production

Up to the end of the seventeenth century, India was one of the largest manufacturing countries in the world though the economy was primarily agricultural. Non-agricultural production refers to both processed agricultural products and craft production. Primarily the products can be grouped under: processed agricultural products like sugar, oil, textiles; metal work; precious gems and jewellery; ship

building; ornamental wood and leather work; and many other minor products.

The organization of production basically depended on the nature of the market for which it was produced. A large part of the production was intended for local use in the village, or at most a rural region. These goods were basic utilitarian goods like pots and pans, implements like ploughs, basic woodwork and coarse textiles. Generally the producer marketed the product himself, and exchange was probably conducted on barter.

In economic terms, what was important was specialized production by skilled craftsmen for an external market, especially in demand among the high income rural and urban upper classes. Such craft production was generally located in cities, or in rural settlements close to the cities. Craftsmen generally worked on an individual or family basis from their homes or workshops though larger manufacturing units (*karkhanas*) employing many craftsmen were set up under the Mughal state.

3.5(c) Textiles

Nearly all the cloth that was produced was of cotton, though silk weaving had developed in Bengal where silk was produced, and in Gujarat. Each region of India produced a range of highly specialized local varieties of cotton cloth ranging from the coarse to the superfine, but all were intended for an external market. Dyed and printed/patterned cloth involved the use of vegetable dyes. India had two natural advantages in cotton weaving. The first was that cotton grew in almost all parts of India, so that the basic raw material was easily available. Second, the technology of producing a permanent colour on cotton using vegetable dyes was known from very early times in India. Cotton does

not absorb dyes without a preparatory process using mordants, which was not known in the rest of the world. Indigo was the most important dye crop that was grown in India, but other dye crops (like the chay root for red colour) were also grown in India. Dye woods and resins like lac were imported. In addition, a range of colours were produced by using flowers and fruits, and products like turmeric in various combinations.



Textile Production

Textile production involved several stages and craftsmen in the spinning of yarn, weaving and dyeing and printing. Each was a specialized occupation. Yarn was traditionally spun by women and was a home-based occupation. Indian textiles were in great demand in the Asian markets, and were the chief export from India. During the seventeenth century, the Dutch and the English realized that they could procure spices from the spice islands of Indonesia most profitably in exchange for cloth from India. There was also a growing demand for many varieties of Indian cloth like muslin, chintz and so on for personal wear and furnishings in the European market. This resulted in a sudden expansion of demand for Indian cloth, thereby impacting on agricultural sector also.

3.5(d) Commerce

The large manufacturing sector essentially produced goods for exchange, and not

for self-use. Therefore, India had an extensive network of trade for marketing these goods. The village was the basic geographical unit of production, and was essentially a subsistence economy and barter was the medium of exchange. At the next level, the producer (agricultural or non-agricultural) produced a surplus which he marketed himself, usually in regional weekly markets. At the most advanced level, the producer was de-linked from marketing, which was undertaken by merchant intermediaries. All three kinds of markets co-existed in India, in an “ascending scale in the overlapping circuits of exchange”.

Big cities were usually major commercial centres, with bazaars and shops. They were also intermediate points in inter-regional trade since they were connected by a network of roads to other centres in other parts of the country. In addition to such overland trade, smaller ships and boats were used in coastal trade along both the western and eastern coasts of the country. Itinerant merchants, usually nomadic banjaras, carried supplies for the large armies which were on the move. Finally, the major ports (Surat, Masulipatnam, Calicut etc.) were the nodal points in international, maritime trade.

Maritime trade across the Indian Ocean, extending from China in the east to Africa in the west, had flourished for many centuries. India was an integral part of this maritime. This was partly due to its geographical location in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Till the seventeenth century, ships from China rarely ventured further west beyond the ports of the Kerala coast, while ships from the west did not sail beyond Malacca (in Malaysia) to the east. Thus ports like Malacca, Calicut etc. were ‘entrepots’ or intermediate points in this regionally segmented trade. In the seventeenth century, Surat in

Gujarat, Masulipatnam in the Golkonda kingdom, Chittagong in Bengal, Pulicat (Pazhaverkadu) and Nagapatnam on the Coromandel Coast, and Calicut in Kerala were all major ports in Asiatic trade.

India was also a major exporter of textiles, pepper, precious and semi-precious gems – especially diamonds which were then found only in India – and iron and steel which were greatly in demand in the entire Asian region. Textiles accounted for nearly 90 per cent of the total exports from India. The major imports from China and the east were silk, Chinese ceramics, gold, spices, aromatic woods and camphor. Silk, drugs, dye woods and sugar were the main imports from Persia, while gold, ivory and slaves were brought in from east Africa.

Until the fourteenth century, in south India, international trade was carried on by merchants who belonged to the corporate group of a guild. Two such guilds are well-known: *Ainnurruvar* (the Five Hundred) who had their headquarters in Aihole, and the *Manigramam*. These guilds were heterogeneous agglomerations of many merchant groups and corporate assemblies like *nagarams*. After the thirteenth century when the local assemblies of villages and towns which had hitherto managed the temples had begun to weaken, the merchant guilds took it on themselves to raise taxes from their members and make joint donations to temples. There are no references to the merchant guilds after the fifteenth century and individual rich merchants took over maritime trade.

A large network of merchants was needed to manage and channel trade across India. Merchants operated at different levels. The petty traders and shopkeepers, single commodity merchants and brokers on the one hand and the richest and most powerful merchants who were involved in exports and imports at the apex of the pyramid on

the other had to source the goods for their trade, especially textiles, from a very large hinterland. In order to meet this need they employed local merchants and brokers to procure the textiles and other products which they exported. Trade on such a large scale could function only with the availability of financial and banking services. Bankers and money changers operated in all the big cities, and bills of exchange or *hundis* (similar to cheques or bank drafts) were used to transfer money from one city to another. Gujarati merchants were found in all the ports of the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, while the Coromandel merchants operated from Malacca and other ports in Siam and Burma.

The European trading companies realized that they could not function in India without the services of these rich and influential merchants. They entered into contracts with them to supply the goods that they wanted and also to lift the imports which they brought in from Europe. The Indian merchants benefited from the business opportunities offered by the European companies. But this scenario began to change from the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Indian merchants were under contract to the Europeans to supply textiles and other goods. But by then the local resources were not enough to produce the quantities required and political disturbances also disrupted all economic activity. This resulted in most merchants being bankrupted diminishing the economic vitality of the merchant community.

3.6 Urbanization

Travellers coming to India in the medieval period noted that there were a number of urban centres of various sizes, from cities to small market towns throughout India, though the country was primarily rural. The urban population was probably quite

small as a proportion of the total, but it had an economic and cultural significance which was much greater than its actual size.

What were the factors which facilitated urbanization? It has been observed that cities and towns fulfilled diverse and overlapping roles in the economy. The large cities were centres of manufacturing and marketing, banking and financial services. They were usually located at the intersection of an extensive network of roads which connected them to other parts of the country. Smaller towns were marketing centres in local trade connecting the immediate rural hinterland. Cities also served as political and administrative centres, both in the capital region (for instance, Agra and Delhi) and in the provinces (Patna, Ahmedabad, Lucknow). Major pilgrimage centres like Varanasi also grew into cities, because the regular inflow of pilgrims provided a market that attracted manufacturing and trade.

In South India, especially the Tamil region, urbanization went hand in hand with temples. Temples were large economic enterprises requiring a variety of goods and services to function. They needed and employed a large number of people to man the religious services, the kitchens and for other work. Devotees coming to worship at the temple needed many services and goods, so that temple towns also became marketing centres. The pace of urbanization increased during the Vijayanagar period when there was a great increase in the construction of temples across Tamilnadu.

It must be remembered that the distinction between rural and urban was not as marked as it is in the present day. Most urban centres also displayed rural characteristics. For instance, it was not uncommon to find fields with crops within

a city. But it is interesting to note that most of the large cities and market centres which existed in the medieval period are still to be found in north and south India, even though their relative importance might have changed over the centuries.

Conclusion

The medieval period covering more than seven hundred years of Indian history was a time when momentous changes took place in the political landscape which also transformed the social and economic fabric of the country.

SUMMARY

- Major political changes commencing from the establishment of Muslim Rule in Delhi, are dealt with.
- The enterprising period of Cholas and the significance of Vijayanagar Empire in the south are analysed.
- The economy and the society during the Sultanate and the Mughal rule are highlighted.
- Occupational castes and conflict between Right and Left Hand Castes are explained.
- Progress in art, literature and music are discussed.
- Conditions of agriculture, trade, commerce and urbanization are examined.

GLOSSARY

watershed	-	சிறப்புமிக்க
awe-inspiring	-	மலைப்புத் தருகிற
bastion	-	அரண்
genealogy	-	பரம்பரை வரலாறு: வம்சாவளி
aesthetic value	-	அழகியல் தன்மை
assimilate	-	உள்வாங்கு
commentaries	-	விளக்கவுரை
alienate	-	அந்நியப்படுத்து
concomitant	-	தொடர்ந்து வரக்கூடிய
agglomeration	-	கூட்டமைப்பு
embellish	-	மெருகூட்டு