

A HOLISTIC ANALYSIS OF TRADE IN MALWA DURING THE MUGHAL PERIOD: ROUTES, MARKETS AND MERCHANDISE

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Abstract -

Mughal period was the era of industrial development and economic growth. Mughal rulers encouraged trade, commerce and industry. In order to facilitate long distance trade, Mughal sovereigns facilitated Infrastructural development in their dominions. India went through rapid industrial development during this era. The biggest industries included textile, metalwork, Leather, Sugar, paper, glass, tile, shipbuilding, Ivory and Perfumery. Malwa Suba had witnessed massive infrastructural as well as industrial development during the Mughal rule. Sources such as Chahar Gulshan and Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh mentions the roads, bridges, sarais, etc. constructed by the Mughal administration along the important highways which were major trade routes. The growth of textile industry was witnessed in the Mughal period. The economic policies of Mughal administration and the political stability provided by the Mughal rule played a significant role in the flourishing of textile industry in Malwa Suba during the 17th century. The most important centres of textile industry in Malwa Suba were Sehore, Sironj, Sarangpur, Chanderi and Mandsaur. The above-mentioned cities were part of important highways constructed by the administration to facilitate transport of raw material and distribution of textile products. The most popular textile products which were manufactured in Malwa were Muslin, Chintz and Do-dami.

Keywords: Industrial development; Infrastructure; Sarai; Do-dami; Muslin; Chintz

Primary Sources -

Ain-i-Akbari of Abul Fazl translated by S. Jarret., Storio de Mogor of Manucci translated by William Irvine I, Travels in India 1640-67 of Tavernier translated by V. Balls, Chahar Gulshan of Rai Chatarman translated by Jadunath Sarkar and Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh of Sujana Bai Bhandari translated by Shahbaz Amil are primary sources used in this research.

Secondary Sources -

From Akbar to Aurangzeb by Moreland, A Dictionary of Economic Products of India by George Watt, etc. are Secondary Sources used in this research.

The Suba of Malwa was economically and strategically significant by virtue of its position on the great Mughal route along which caravans marched to Deccan from Agra and Delhi as also the main route to Gujarat and to the sea-ports on the western coast passed through it. Malwa supplied agricultural products to other Mughal provinces. There were several important trade routes which passed through Malwa. The location of Malwa at the centre of the Mughal Empire made it the connecting link between different regions of the Empire. Both Persian sources and foreign accounts help us to trace the route with the greatest traffic during the seventeenth century which passed through Malwa. This was due to the growth of trade and commerce at the port of Surat. There were two routes that connected Agra to Burhanpur. Both these routes passed through Malwa. The shorter route crossed the Narmada River at Handia whereas the longer route crossed Narmada River at Akbarpur.

The chief town and halts on the shorter route were Burhanpur, Mandawa, Chainpur, Charwa, Bichhola, Handia, Ichhawar, Sehore, Duraha, Dillaud, Barra, Pamaria, Sironj, Mughal Sarai, Kachnar, Sadhaura, Kalabagh, Kolaras, Shivpuri, Dongri, Palaicha, Barki Sarai, Antri, Gwalior, Dholpur, Jaju, Saiyan and Agra. The other route which crossed the Narmada River at Akbarpur passed through Burhanpur, Khamla, Bhikangaon, Khargone, Balakwada, Akbarpur, Dikthan, Depalpur, Fatehabad, Ujjain, Kaith, Kanasia, Shahjahanpur, Sunera, Sarangpur, Khokhara and then joining the first route at Duraha. The shorter route through Handia was taken by Mundy, Tavernier and Manucci. The other route through Mandu was followed by Ralph Fitch, Finch and Jourdain. This shows that the shorter route through Handia replaced the longer route through Mandu by about 1630.

Besides this major imperial highway, Malwa had various other minor roads which connected this region with Bundelkhand, Rajasthan, Gujarat, etc. The route through Bundelkhand was difficult as the area was sparsely populated as well as unsafe. Caravans were often attacked and looted by the tribals. The imperial highway was preferred by travellers from Agra to reach Surat and vice-versa. Thus, Malwa connected the financial capital with the administrative capital of the Mughal Empire. But during the rainy season, travellers avoided going through the flooded rivers of Malwa and instead went to Agra through Ajmer and travel along the sandy route. During the Mughal period, there was a great flow of merchandise through Malwa owing to the important trade maintained between Surat and Agra.

The development of imperial route through Malwa was accompanied by simultaneous development of different industries on this route. Manufacturing centres emerged on the route from Gwalior to Handia on one side and on Gwalior to Akbarpur through Ujjain and Mandu. Malwa was rich in agricultural products as well as textile manufacturing industry. The region became hinterland of Burhanpur. A number of European travellers refer to the caravans of Banjaras laden with commodities from Malwa going to Burhanpur. Tavernier observed the variety of Malwa textiles sold in the markets of Burhanpur. Another commodity that was transported to Burhanpur from Malwa was opium. Jourdain informs us that opium was sold at the rate of 3 mahmudis per ser of 24 oz. in 1611. Similarly, Tobacco grown in Bhilsa was transported to Burhanpur market where it was a prominent item of trade. The cotton textile of Malwa such as Chintz of Sironj, Do-dami of Chanderi and muslin of Sarangpur were also traded in Burhanpur as well as in towns such as Sironj, Chanderi, Sehore and Sarangpur. The trade routes passing through Malwa became more and more important due to increase in maritime trade after the arrival of European trading companies in Surat. Thus, trade routes passing through Malwa played a key role in facilitating the Arabian Sea trade.

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