UNIT 6:SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

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6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the medieval Indian society,
- analyse the medieval Indian society,
- describe the nature of economy in medieval India,

6.2 INTRODUCTION

In the last two units you have learnt about the political developments in medieval India. The medieval period in Indian history begins with the Turkish

rule or the Sultanate and ends with the decline of the Mughal dynasty. The contribution and influence of the Turko-Afghan and the Mughal rulers shaped the society, economy, religion and culture of the Medieval India which we will discuss in this unit.



LET US KNOW

Original name of Babur was Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur. He was a descendent of Timur from his father's side and to Chengiz Khan through his mother's side.

6.3 SOCIETY IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

6.3.1 Division of Society

You might have heard or read terms like 'middle class' or 'elites'. You must have also observed people being categorised as labourers or merchants. Thus, people living in a society are often divided into different categories on the basis of different attributes like caste, race, religion, income, vocations, education etc. For example – people who earn their living by engaging themselves in labour are categorised as labourers or those engaging in trade are called traders.

In Medieval India, particularly during the time of Delhi Sultanate, the society was divided into three distinct classes - the nobles, the common people and the slaves. Do you know who the nobles were? The royal officers, ministers, big landlords etc. belonged to that class. The rest, except the slaves, were common people known as commoners. The commoners included merchants, traders, labourers etc. The Sultan and the nobles maintained a huge number of slaves who worked for their masters.

During the Mughal period also society was divided into several classes. The nobility enjoyed special honours and privileges.

The royal court was the centre of luxury. Below the nobility was a small middle class and below the middle class lived the common people. The common people included peasants, artisans etc. The condition of the common people was not satisfactory. They were oppressed and exploited by the upper class of the society. System of slavery was popular during the Mughal period.

6.3.2 Position of Women

In our society women are always treated as second class citizen. Is n't it? In Medieval Indian society also women of both Hindu and Muslim communities were thoroughly dependent on men. They had no liberty. This affected the status and position of women in the society.

While the birth of a son was always welcome in Medieval Hindu society, the birth of a girl was regarded as the source of all troubles by the average householders. Have you ever heard of female infanticide? Killing a girl child at infant stage is called female infanticide. Girl child was regarded as a burden for the family. The practice of female infanticide was prevalent in some places during medieval period. During that period the system of Child marriage was in practice. On account of early marriage there were many widows and they were not allowed to remarry. *Purdah* and polygamy were common among the Muslims. Custom of *Sati* was also prevalent among the Hindus. The Rajput women preferred death to dishonour and performed *Jouhar* in large numbers.

Thus, in the medieval period the women were subjugated by men in all spheres. Education was generally denied to them. Thus, the literacy rate among women declined during medieval period. In general the women suffered from all sorts of handicaps. Lack of education, dependence on men, different social evils lowered down the status of women in the society.

6.3.3 Slavery

Slavery was a popular institution in Muslim India. Slaves were kept by the Sultans as well as by the nobles. Alauddin Khiljis of Khilji dynasty and Firuz Shah Tughlaq of Tughlaq dynasty kept thousands of slaves. Separate department for slaves was created during the time of Firuz Shah Tughlaq. There were also female slaves who were often employed as maid servants in the houses of the nobles. However, Sultan was empowered to release a slave from the custody of a noble but then the master of the slave was to be compensated.

6.3.4 Standard of Living

In Medieval period many European traders and travelers came to India. From their writings we come to know about the standard of living of the people. According to them there was no uniformity in the lifestyle of the Indians. While the upper class people led luxurious life, the ordinary people like peasants and labourers lived in a pathetic condition. A common Hindu man put on *dhoti* wrapped round their waist and a common Mohammedans put on *pajama* and a long shirt. The emperors used gorgeously rich clothes surmounted by a turban decorated with jewels. Hindu women put on *saris* while Muslim women dressed in long *pajamas* or *ghagras* and jackets and used to cover their head with a piece of cloth. As far as the use of footwear is concerned, it is clear from the account of the foreign travelers that the ordinary people went bare-footed. Rich people used costly shoes of various designs.Regarding the food-habits, the Hindus were mostly vegetarians while the Muslims were usually meat-eaters. Country was rich in agricultural products including wheat, rice barley etc. In north IndiaChapattis made of wheat and green vegetables were common. Among Muslims *Nan* and *Kabab* were favourites. Milk and milk products formed an important part of Indian diet. *Ghee* and oil were much cheaper but salt and sugar were more expensive in that period.

6.3.5 Fairs and Festivals

Indian life was very colourful during that period. There were a large number of fairs and festivals both for Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus celebrated the festivals like *Holy, Dashahra, Sivratri, Vasant Panchami* etc. while the Muslims celebrated *Id-Ul-Fitr, Id-Ud-Zuha, Shab-I-Barat* and *Muharram* etc. Most of these festivals were marked by public celebrations through processions, accompanied by the beating of drums, playing of music, etc.

6.3.6 Amusements

Indian people were fond of games and sports. The chess, playing-cards etc. were common among the upper and middle class people of both sexes. Hunting, animal fights, *chaugan* (polo), etc. were enjoyed by the privileged section of the society. Elephant catching and tiger hunting were the privileges of the Emperor. Boating was also an interesting pastime. Gardening was a hobby of the king, nobles and the other well to do people. The wrestling and the magic shows were enjoyed by the common people. Women of the harem enjoyed dance, music and listening to stories of love and adventure.



ACTIVITY -6.1

Prepare a short report on the standard of living of the people of Medieval India.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



Q 1: Answer the following questions:

(a) Who wasthe founder of the Mughal Dynasty in India?

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(b) In which year battle of Panipath took place?

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Q 2: State true or false:

(a) The Medieval society was a society of inequalities.

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(b) Custom of *Sati* was absent in Medieval Indian society.

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(c) *Jouhar* was performed by Rajput women.

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6.4 ECONOMY IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

Economy plays a very vital role in the life of an individual or a nation. A man may have the will or a plan to do something. But if he has no money, then he may not be able to do that. Every action of an individual, personal, social, political, religious or cultural is determined, to a large extent, by his economic status and nature of his earning. Similarly, in case of a nation, its economy greatly determines its political, social and cultural lives. The medieval economy is mainly dominated by the economic developments of the Sultanate and Mughal period.

6.4.1 Land Revenue System

The medieval economy of India mainly centered round agriculture. The soil of India was very fertile. So, the Indian people had an extensive cultivation. Land was too an important source of revenue. During the time of the Delhi Sultanate the kind and measurement of the lands determined the land revenue. The land during the reign of the Delhi Sultanate was of four kinds, namely the *Inam or Waqf*, *Walis or Muqtis, land underHindu chiefs* and*Khalisa land*.

In the Vijaynagara kingdom, land revenue was the principal revenue which was payable both in cash and in kind. The revenue department was styled *Athavane*. There were three major categories of land tenure: *Amara, Bhandaravada* and *Manya*. A part of its

income was utilized to maintain the forts of the kingdom.

The Mughal land revenue system was designed by Akbar with the active assistance of Raja Todar Mal (the Wazir looking after revenue matters). The cultivable land was classified into four categories such as *Polaj, Parauti, Chachar and Banjar*. Thefirst two categories of lands (*Polaj* and *Parauti*) were again classified into three grades – good, middle and bad. The produce of the three grades of land was calculated and their average was taken as the actual produce of the land, on the basis of which the state claimed its share of revenue. The prominent land revenue systems of the Mughal period were *Zabti* or *Dahsala, Ghallabaksha, Kankut, Nasaq,* etc.

The area of Maharastra was a hilly region and did not yield much land revenue. As such the Marathas levied*Chauth* and *Sardeshmukhi*on the neighbouring tracts. *Chauth* was ¼th of the land tax paid to the state in return for freedom from subjection to raid. It was a sort of military tax which he spent on his army. *Sardeshmukhi* was an additional levy of 10% on those lands over which the Marathas claimed hereditary rights, but which formed part of the Mughal Empire.

6.4.2 Agrarian Economy

The land being fertile, agrarian economy in the medieval India was on the whole prosperous. Agriculture was the mainstay of the vast majority of the people. The Indians produced two crops every year- the autumn and the spring crops. Besides the usual crops, such as rice, wheat, barley, gram, peas and oil seeds, sugarcane, indigo, poppy, etc were cultivated in many parts of India.

There was the localization of crops. Gujarat produced in abundance wheat, millet, peas and beans. Cotton was produced in many places of Central and Western India. Sugarcane was cultivated in parts of modern Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Bihar. Indigo was cultivated in many places of Northern and Southern India. Ibn

Battuta (a Moroccan traveller) described Malabar, a region in Southern India as a “pepper country”. He stated that every portion of land in Malabar was cultivated. In most cases, agricultural tools andimplements were the same as now. The peasants usually watered their fields from the neighbouring tanks and wells.

The agricultural produces were also exported. In the coastal province of Tulu-nud, the agricultural produce was sold in Persia and Arabia. Animals too were domesticated by the people. In Orissa the people breeded cattle, sheep and horses extensively. While, in Bengal horses, cows, sheep and domestic fowls were available and were very cheap.

6.4.3 Urban Economy

The urban economy of the medieval period centred on the town life which developed surrounding the trade and commercial centers. Ibn Battuta stated that the towns of upper Gangetic Valley, Bengal, Malwa in Gujarat, Malabar and some other towns in the Deccan had some rich markets. He even compared Calicut and Quilon, two towns of Malabar, with important ports of the world like Alexandria in Egypt, Sudak in Crimea and Zaytun in China.Various products were produced in different parts of the country. Barbosa (a Portuguese traveller) observed that Gujarat was a major garment producing center of India in the early 16^{th} century. In Malabar, the town of Shaliyat, near Calicut was famous for its cotton products. Bengal was an important center of textile industry. Dhaka and some places in Bengal were famous for silk cloths, fine muslins and mattresses. Kashmir was famous for its woollen shawls and carpets. Beautiful carpets were manufactured at FatehpurSikri, Alwar and Besides there were works in precious metals, stones, pearls and ivory. During the Sultanate period the affluent section used all these costly items in many forms. Barbosa spoke about such industries in Gujarat. Cambay was an important center and very skilled goldsmiths did some excellent works there. Many works were also

done there in coral, carnelian and other stones. In South India, Kayal was famous for its pearl work. The industries for cutting and polishing precious stones were located in Malabar, Calicut, Vijaynagara, etc.

Trade and commerce was in a flourishing state in medieval India. Both inland and coastal trade prevailed. Delhi was a major trade center. It was the common market for sale of rice from Sarsuti, sugar from Kannauj, wheat from Marh and betel-leaf from Dhar. Some long roads extended from Delhi to Telengana, Malabar and Daulatabad. This road connectivity helped Delhi to become an important trade center. The Western Coast of India has a large number of sea-ports and harbours which fostered coastal trade- both internal and external. Some of the important sea ports of India of that time were- Diu in Gujarat, Goa in the Deccan and Calicut, Cochin and Quilon in Malabar. India had overseas trade relations with countries of Western Asia, East Africa, South-East Asia, etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Answer the followingquwstions:

a) Name the revenue department of the Vijaynagarakingdom?

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b) Who designed the Mughal land revenue system?

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Q 4: Fill in the blanks:

a) ……..…….. was the mainstay of the vast majority of the people.

b) Ibn Battuta was a ……..…….. traveler.

Q 5: State True or False:

a) In Orissa the people breeded cattle, sheep and horses extensively.

.....

b) In South India, Kayal was famous for its metal work.

.....

c) Delhi was a major trade center.

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6.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learnt about

- the division of medieval Indian society, the position of women, the institution of slavery, standard of living of the people, fairs and festivals as well as other amusements which existed in medieval India.
- the economic condition was satisfactory. Agriculture and trade and commerce were prospering.
- in the field of religion Hinduism and Islam flourished side by side. There was the emergence of two new trends in religion, the Bhakti movement and Sufism.
- culturally the medieval period was progressive one. There was tremendous development in the field of architecture, fine arts and literature.



6.6 FURTHER READING

1) Majumdar, R.C., Raychaudhuri, H.C., Datta, K. (1986). *An Advanced History of India.* New Delhi, Macmillan India Ltd.
2) Maiti, P.(2001): *Studies in Ancient India,* Kolkata, Shreedhar Prakashani
3) Raychaudhuri, H.C. (1972). *Political History of India.* Calcutta, University of Kolkata.
4) Sharma, L.P. (1981). *Ancient History of India (pre-historic Age to 1200 A.D.).* New Delhi, Vikas Publication House Pvt. Ltd.
5) Tripathi, Ramashankar (1999). *History of Ancient India.* Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

6.7 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to the question no 1. (a) Babur (b) 1526

Answer to the question no 2. (a) True (b) False

(c) True

Answer to the question no 3. (a) Athavane (b) Akbar

Answer to the question no 4. (a) Agriculture (b) Moroccan

Answer to the question no 5. (a) True (b) False

(c) True

c) Akbar FatehpurSikri

6.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q.1: Name the autobiography of Jahangir?

Q.2: Who was the author of *Ramcharitmanasa*?

Q.3: Define Johar.

Q.4: Name various land revenue systems of Mughal period?

B) Short Questions (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q.1: What do you know about Chauth and Sradeshmukhi?

Q.2: Write a short note on the urban economy of medieval India.

Q.3: Write a short note on fairs and festivals of medieval India.

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in between 150-300 words)

Q.1: Discuss about the land revenue systems of the medieval India.

Q.2: Analyse the social condition of medieval India.

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