

CC-7: HISTORY OF INDIA (c.1206-1526)

III. SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

(A). IQTA AND THE REVENUE-FREE GRANTS

(B). AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION; TECHNOLOGY

Very little information is available about the economic condition of the people under the Delhi Sultanate. The Historians of this period were more interested in the events at the court than in the lives of the ordinary people. However, they do sometimes tell us the prices of commodities. Ibn Battuta, a resident of Tangier in North Africa visited India in the fourteenth century and lived at the court of Mohammad bin Tughlaq for eight years. He says that the soil was so fertile that it could produce two crops every year, rice being sown three times a year. Sesame, sugarcane, cotton was also grown. They formed the basis of many village industries, such as oil pressing, making of jaggery, weaving etc.

The Sultans of Delhi undertook efforts to enhance agricultural production by providing irrigational facilities and by advancing takkavi loans for different agricultural purposes. They also encouraged peasants to cultivate cash crops instead of food crops, and superior crops (wheat) instead of inferior crops (barley). There was an overall improvement in the quality of Indian fruits and the system of gardening. Waste lands were granted to different people thereby extending the cultivated area.

Agriculture was carried on by peasants living in the villages. Cultivation was based on individual peasant farming, and the size of land cultivated by them varied greatly, from the large holding of the khots or headmen to petty plots of the balahars or village menials.

The peasants of the Delhi Sultanate cultivated a very large number of crops, Ibn Battuta gives a fairly detailed description of various crops harvested in

India (i.e., the region around Delhi) in the autumn (kharif) and spring (rabi). He tells us that the kharif crops were sown on the same soil as the rabi crops. The more important fact was that the same peasants sowed different crops for two harvests in the year.

On Indian fruit growing Ibn Battuta's account seem most instructive. The mango was the most highly prized fruit, but it was entirely seed-grown, the practise of grafting not been mentioned. Grapes were rare and grown only in a few localities besides Delhi.

Ibn Battuta travelled all over India and has left a very account of the products of the country including fruits, flowers, herbs etc. We have some other accounts also. The food-grains and other crops, the fruits and the flowers mentioned by these travellers are familiar us. Rice and sugarcane were grown in the east and south and wheat, oil-seed etc in the north.

There were certain advances made in the field of technology as well during the period of Delhi sultanate.

Increase in production of cotton led to introduction of cotton textile industry with several new techniques such as spinning wheel, cotton-carder's bow and weavers' treadles. Around the fourteenth century sericulture was introduced with led to increase in production of silk cloths which mad India less dependent on Iran and Afghanistan for raw silk. During the 14th -15th century the paper industry also development greatly. New techniques were also introduced in the field of architecture. Leather-making, metal working, carpet weaving also increased under the high demand of the Sultans of Delhi.

When the Turks conquered the country, they divided it into a number of tracts called iqtas which were parcelled out among the leading Turkish nobles. The holder of these offices were called muqtis or walis. It were these tracts which later became provinces or subas. At first the muqtis were almost independent,

they were expected to maintain law and order in their tracts, and collect the and revenue due to the government. Out of the money they collected they were expected to meet the salaries due to the soldiers and keep the balance. As the central government became stronger and gained experience, it began to control the muqtis more closely. It began to ascertain the actual income and to fix the salaries of the soldiers and muqtis in cash. The muqtis were now required to remit to the centre the balance of the income after meeting the expenditure. The auditing of the accounts which took place a couple of years was often accompanied by harshness, including torture and imprisonment of the muqtis. These were relaxed by Firoz Shah Tughlaq towards the end of the Sultanate.

The changes and development that took place in the iqta system was basically due to the changes in the composition of the nobility under the Delhi Sultanate.

Religious institutions such as Mosques, Dargah and Madrasa and also notable religious persons were maintained by making grants. These grants were known as milk, idrar, inam etc. These grants were not generally transferred but the sultan of Delhi had the right to cancel such grants.

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