UNIT 17  SULTANATE AND ITS CITIES*

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17.1  INTRODUCTION

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), Arab historian, believed that ‘royal authority’ and ‘dynasties’ were essential for building and planning of a city. Large cities and monuments could only be the effort of strong and influential authority/dynasty. Thus Ibn Khaldun sees cause (dynasty) and effect (cities) relationship between the towns. Its rise and fall too was closely intertwined with the fate of the dynasty: ‘If the dynasty is of short duration, life in the town will stop at the end of the dynasty… On the other hand, if the dynasty is of long duration and lasts a long time, new constructions will always go up in the town, the number of large mansions will increase, and the walls of the town will extend further and further’ (Ibn Khaldun, cited from Omer, 2011). The city was where knowledge flowed. Thus the primordial ‘Islamic city’ Medinah was addressed as ‘city of knowledge’ (madinat al-ilm).

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Turks established their sway over north India in 1206 when Muizzi slave Qutbuddin Aibak assumed power in Delhi. However, even much before the Turkish conquest, Muhammad Qasim’s onslaught in Sind made a deep impact on the layout of the Indian cities. With Turks, markers of the ‘Islamic cities’ started showing signs in the layout of north Indian cities in a big way. Here, my purpose is not to enter into a dialogue whether idea of ‘an Islamic city existed at all?’ what K. Brown calls it a ‘western notion’ Nonetheless there are some ‘typical’ features common to all the so-called ‘Islamic’ cities: a) the main mosque (where weekly congregational prayers were to be performed) surrounded by the suq (the market); attached to which was the madrasa (school/college). While mosque was central to religious life; bazaar (suq) was where centred the economic activities. b) the citadel (qasaba) with covered walls where resided the ‘goveror’/‘sultan’ along with his administrative machinery and retinues. c) Residential quarters (later mohallas) often based on personal ties (ethnic, social, economic) generally had their own gates. d) There existed main street/s leading to network of sub-streets connecting the main street/s/mosque/fortress. e) The city was surrounded by a wall with a number of gates. f) The exterior of the city wall often possessed ‘weekly market’ along the main gate (vegetable, grain or animal markets) as well as the city was often surrounded by gardens, etc. Extreme weather conditions (excessive heat) resulted in narrow covered lanes and gardens. In socio-cultural life religious beliefs dominated giving the ‘mosque’ the central place in spatial settings. Again, the religious beliefs propagated the separation of public and private life as evident in spatial settings. Even the belief in gender separation resulted in segregation of male and female quarters. In the spatial structures the social organisation based on ethnic identities was instrumental in encouraging them to live in central places close to the mosque. However, shift in political power from shura [lit. consultation; technically the consultative decision making body] resulted in distancing of political quarters towards the ‘periphery’, away from the centre, in the form of ‘fortress’ ensuring security (Saoud, 2002: 4-7).

Thus, though the concept of an ‘Islamic city’ is a contested terrain, my contention of using the term is solely in the context of added Islamic features in the landscape of Indian cities which were so far alien to India, and which prominently altered the landscape of the pre and post-Sultanate Indian towns. Makran in Sind, a region contiguous to Iran was the first to face the Arab onslaught in the 7th century CE. These early Arab attacks (643 and 712) brought major changes in the urban landscape of the Sind. Muhammad Qasim in his letter to Hallaj narrates, ‘It is hoped that all the forts of the infidels will be conquered and taken possession of, and in lieu of the kafirs’ place of worship, mosques and (Mussalman) prayer-houses will be built…’ At many places Muhammad Qasim built new mosques (Alor, Multan) (Chachnama, 1900).

17.2 TEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SULTANATE CITIES

Ali Kufi has represented cities as centres of royal seats marked by the royal presence – palaces, gardens, fountains, etc. Kufi applauds Alor as a ‘beautiful and splendid city’ and informs that, ‘The town of Alor was the capital city of Hind and Sind. It was a town adorned with various kinds of royal buildings, villas, gardens, fountains, streams, meadows and trees [and was] situated on the bank of a river called Mehran.’ Kufi also represented cities as administrative headquarters and seats of governance (Brahminabad, Siwistan, Iskandah, Multan, Mattah). But what were profusely represented by Kufi were fortified towns (Babiah, Sikkah, Sikkah Multan, Multan, Debal, Sisam, Bhallor, Aghror, Bet, Bahror, Dahlelah, Ramal, Kurij, Siwistan) (Chachnama, 1900).
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The city is represented often by Hasan Nizami (*Taj-ul Maasir*) where ‘feeling of plenty’ is there. He calls Delhi as ‘one of the principal cities of Hindustan’, ‘the land of bounty and the *qibla* (source) of delight’ and ‘the centre of prestige and prosperity’.

Ziauddin Barani applauds the grandeur of Delhi as chief centre of learning: ‘…the royal capital of Delhi had emerged as a great city and had become a source of envy for Baghdad and a cause of jealousy for Egypt, equal to Constantinople and comparable to *Bait al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem) … in every branch of learning’ (Barani, 2015: 209, 217).

Sultanate sources also make clear distinctions between the rural and urban residents. They looked down upon their rural counterparts and frowned on them as *rustics*. Isami calls villagers as ‘impure, demons and unworthy’. He labelled city dwellers as ‘parrots and nightingales’ and villagers as ‘crows and ravens’. *Tariikh-i Mubarakshahi* mentions how people make fun of the villagers of their ‘simplicity and lack of urbanity’: when *Shaikh-ul Islam* Shaikh Nizamuddin once gave to the newly converts two dentrifices, having shown their ignorance to use them they were mocked by poet Ubaid. Similarly, Shaikh Rizqullah Mushtaqi also attests to that villagers could easily be identified ‘on account of their rusticity’ (Siddiqui, 2011: 198-199). Thus cities were often conceived as ‘culturally refined and symbols of civilisation’. This is in tune with Ibn Khaldun’s idea who also perceived the city as axis of civilisation. He believed: ‘see all the lands which the rural and Nomads [Bedouins] have conquered in the last few centuries civilisation and population have departed from them’ (Saoud, 2002: 2). Mohammad Habib also agreed that the cities became (following Turkish conquest) ‘the sole repositories of the country’s civic sense’ (Habib, 1952: 55).

### 17.3 DEBATES

While K.M. Ashraf speaks about the changing skyline of the cities following Turkish conquest where the mosques, tombs and arches overshadowed the temples (Ashraf, 1970); Mohammad Habib puts forth theory of ‘urban revolution’ in northern India in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries following the Turkish conquest. He has interpreted Turkish conquest against the backdrop of the overarching weakness of the contemporary Indian society. He argues that ‘The India of the eleventh century was a country of fortified cities and towns and of fortified villages (*mawas*) and over them the control of the higher classes was supreme and exclusive. The condition of the workers or the producing classes, on the other hand, was tragic…the higher classes appropriated the cities and towns exclusively to themselves while the workers lived in unprotected villages and in settlements outside the city-walls’ (Habib, 1952: 41-43). He argues that ‘The government of the *rais* had kept the Indian workers outside the city-walls. When the Turks entered the cities, the Hindu low caste workers entered along with them. And they came to stay.’ ‘Indian city labour, both Hindu and Muslim, helped to establish the new regime’. Thus the new regime emancipated the labouring classes. ‘The cities, under the new regime, were developing into thriving centres of industry and commerce, and expansion and overcrowding were both inevitable’ (Habib, 1952: 55-70). However, Irfan Habib has questioned that workers and peasants hardly ‘enjoyed larger degree of emancipation’ following Turkish conquest as argued by Mohammad Habib (Habib, 1978: 287-303). Irfan Habib believes this expansion of urban economy and craft production was more of a result of technological innovations. Introduction of Persian wheel facilitated continuous water supply thus irrigating vast tracts became possible that in turn created surplus, so essential for the growth of towns. Similarly, introduction of *charkha* with crank-handle increased the production of the cotton yarn six fold. Introduction of the treadle (pit)-loom further facilitated the increase in the textile production (Habib, 1969).
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Naqvi attributes that during the 12-15th centuries European towns primarily developed as merchant towns supported by huge inflow of working force which turned the character of medieval European towns from ‘ephemeral’ to ‘permanent’. In contrast, Sultanate towns were ‘sponsored for political reasons by the highly centralised state established at Delhi in 1206’. For her, list is almost unending – Lahore, Sialkot, Multan, Delhi, Hissar, Jaunpur, Ahmadabad, Burhanpur, Agra. ‘…Though founded or developed primarily and initially as administrative centres…the Sultans of Delhi makes it abundantly clear that they were following a carefully worked out plan of urban growth. The material base of the rising towns was provided by commercial traffic and industrial prosperity.’

She even viewed the ‘growth’ of the towns as a result of state action, ‘by establishing internal peace and security, maintenance of law and order providing for a smooth administrative organism, urbanisation of industries, and improvement in communication system’. Sultans provided the essential ‘outlay’ ‘by way of repairs, extensions, or introduction of new constructions’. Clearly for Naqvi while European towns were *sui generis*, growth of Sultanate towns was state supported. She remarks since the growth of towns in the Sultanate period is ‘politically inspired’ its future too got twined with the ‘political vicissitudes’. The Portuguese blockade on the seas adversely effected growth of Gujarat towns in the early 16th century. In the early 15th century while Ahmadabad had 360 *puras* as reported in *Haft Iqlim* which got reduced to 175 and later further the number came down to 80 as reported in the *Ain-i Akbari*. She contends ‘the inhabitants as a body were excluded from urban administration, the imperial deputies were entrusted with the task of running and regulating the urban structure.’

She argues while the principal economic activity of European towns was trade whereby 14th century industries started flourishing; while ‘in Hindustani towns the focus was on the commercialization of craft’; production centres were small in size ‘quite often belonged to the category of *qasbah*’ (Samana, Jaunpur, Sehwan, Sirohi) and only a few ‘urban centres emerge as carrying on the industrial production side by side with brisk commercial traffic’ (Lahore, Multan, Ahmadabad Cambay); while some emerged as purely trading towns (Hugli, Bhakkar). Naqvi points out that Europeans’ oceanic superiority, accumulation of merchant capital, plenty supply of raw material, both from home and colonies, autonomy of towns all this ‘rather than numerical strength (which was quite moderate by 1500) that contained catalytic dimensions within their infrastructure’ (Naqvi, 1977: 362-369).

Another view which has attracted the attention of the scholars during recent years is the issue of garrison towns: whether Sultanate towns were merely garrison towns? Andre Wink articulates Sultanate cities primarily as ‘garrison towns’ some of which evolved into ‘cities’. He has attributed this to the rise of ‘cash nexus’ and the ‘*iqta*’ system. He remarks that ‘*iqtas*’ could not be defined as ‘local territorial units but as garrisoned urban centres (*khitta*)’. He argues that these towns and cities ‘became the fulcrum of both the sedentary world and of nomadic, mobile wealth and expansion’ as well as ‘the nodal points of the money economy and the system of surplus mobilisation’. He argues that these ‘assignees, amirs of the slave household, commanded troops which were stationed in a garrison in the *iqta*’ (Wink, 1999: 212-213). He underlines that ‘…in the entire conquest area – from Lahore to Lakhnauti – similar pattern emerged…in the thirteenth century. The new horse-troop garrison towns established by the Turkish conquerors became centres of *iqta* management, aiming at the safeguarding of trade routes, markets, the subjugation of the marches, as well as at agrarian expansion, monetisation and regulation and rationalisation of land revenue collection’ (Wink, 1999: 264). He listed as many as eighteen such towns including Delhi, Gwalior, Multan, Uchh, Lahore, Kara Manikpur, and Lakhnauti. Sunil Kumar also argues that from its very inception, ‘Delhi was a collection of garrison towns commanded by senior military
commanders and former slaves (bandagan) of Muizz al-Din Ghauri’ (Kumar, 2013: 127). However, when the Turks emerged on the scene many of these towns were already established and flourishing urban centres; most of them owed their position to their strategic location or being capital towns. Though no doubt thanas so established by Balban along with Badaun were used as ‘garrisoned’ posts which later developed into towns and qasabs, Lahore, Kara Manikpur and Lakhnauti were in no way could be labelled as ‘garrison towns’. Similarly, Delhi was not only recorded as the capital at the same time as the ‘principal’ town by Hasan Nizami. At the time of Muhammad Qasim’s invasion both Uchh and Multan were flourishing towns. Multan was a provincial ‘royal capital’ seat of the governor as early as Muhammad bin Qasim’s invasion. Even Wink admits, ‘Multan is described as a large and populated town’ with a strong fortress (Wink, 1990, I: 186).

17.4 PROCESS OF URBANISATION

Delhi Sultanate saw the emergence of certain new institutions – khanqah (jammat khanas), sarai, thana, madrasas (educational institutions), royal courts, dar-ul shifa (hospitals) and bazaars – that facilitated and accelerated the process of urbanisation and growth of urban centres. However, these factors were not exclusive. Often many factors together facilitated the emergence/prosperity of a particular town.

17.4.1 Iqtas

Various provinces (vilayats and khittas/iqtas) in due course emerged as prominent urban centres under certain agile nobles/governors. Iqtas were territorial assignments largely given to the nobles in their area of jurisdiction. Since these iqtas were held by the nobles as long as they held their respective assignments and it was expected from the iqta holders to work for the expansion of agriculture and facilitate trade. In the long run these iqtas developed into prominent cities and towns. Andre Wink argues that, ‘The Delhi Sultanate in effect, was the sum of its iqtas – defined not as local territorial Units, but as garrisoned urban centres (khitta)…’ (Wink, 1999: 212). Andre Wink’s analysis is contested by historians, nonetheless what is important here is the role iqtas played in the expansion of urban centres during the Sultanate period. When Malik Bahauddin Tughril was granted khitta of Bayana in 1196 by Muhammad Ghori, he expanded the area and built a new city, Sultankot (modern Bayana) and made it his headquarter, instead of old fortified Tahangarh. He invited merchants, scholars and got houses constructed for them. Bahauddin built Jami Masjid at Sultankot (1204) and an Igdah in Bayana which resemble very much with the Qutb mosque of Delhi. Likewise, Kara and Manikpur, on account of being important administrative seats soon emerged as hub of trading activities where merchants and men of repute (tujjar-o ma’arif) from Khorasan and all parts of Hindustan flock together, records Minhaj. Ibn Battuta records these cities being chief centres of supply of wheat, rice, sugar and cloth to Delhi. Kol (modern Aligarh) emerged an important wilayat and from Iltutmish’s reign onwards, ever since Nizam-ul mulk Junaidi received it in his iqta it was often assigned to Prime Ministers (wazirs) of the realm. Baran (Bulandshahr), also grew into an important town. Aibak granted it to Iltutmish. The famous historian Ziauddin Barani also belonged to this place. Badaun was another important area that received importance. Hasan Nizami (1998: 245) mentions Badaun as ‘one of the principal cities of Hindustan’. Throughout the Sultanate period it was one of the important iqta and chief administrative centre with a fort and a vibrant slave market. On account of its strategic location flanking the disturbed Katehr region, till the Khaljis it remained an important garrison town (see Section on thanas). The city is full of early Sultanate monuments. Iltutmish himself built an Igdah during his governorship here. A number of monuments of Iltutmish’s reign built
under the aegis of Ruknuddin (Jama Masjid; 1223) and Nasiruddin Mahmud (Sultani Dargah; 1229) still survives. Multan, Kalpi, Jaunpur Gaur/Pandua, Mandu, Ahmadabad and Bidar also assumed importance once they acquired the status of provincial capital towns (These provincial cities are discussed at length in Unit 18).

17.4.2 Monetisation

Indian trade with the outside world got further accelerated in the Sultanate period resulting in large flows of precious metals. Cambay and Multan emerged chief centres of trading activities so were the Multani, Sahas and Gujarati merchants. The cities were also brimming with merchants from Persia and Central Asia. Ziauddin Barani (2015: 73) comments on the richness of the Multanis and Sahas that, ‘Maliks, khans and dignitaries of those ages were always under burden of debt due to extreme generosity, bounty and giving of alms…The Multanis and Sahas of Delhi became extremely wealthy because of the wealth of the amirs and maliks of the realm of Delhi. They took maximum possible loans from the Multanis and Sahas and made payments to their creditors along with rewards from their iqta. Whenever a khan or a malik organised a party and invited dignitaries as guests, his officials ran to the houses of the Multanis and Sahas, gave them receipts in their own names and took loans on interest…’ All this accelerated monetisation that in turn was fundamental in speeding up urbanisation in the Sultanate period. This process is evident first in the region of Makran – a region first to be conquered by the Arabs. The region soon attracted Arab traders and Makran’s pastoral economy rapidly got transformed into highly monetised economy with the rise of overland trade and the region being swarmed by the growth of urban centres. Two factors also added to the monetisation process: a) since the ruling class was largely town based substantial amount of surplus drained to the cities; b) State’s insistence on payment of land revenue in cash again made available considerable liquid cash in the hands of the ruling class (Alauddin is reported to have extracted one half of the produce as land tax) which also accelerated the process of urbanisation in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries.

17.4.3 Capital Towns1 and Provincial Headquarters

Some cities achieved greater vibrancy on becoming capital. Lahore flourished under the patronage of rulers of Ghazna and Ghor. Muhammad bin Sam made Lahore his winter capital, later the capital of the Sultanate of Delhi. When Qutbuddin Aibak made Lahore his capital it assumed cosmopolitan character. Hasan Nizami is full of praise for its beautiful mansions and palaces. Hasan Nizami (1998: 279) records that ‘it was the qibla of virtuous men, K’aba of nobility and liberal minded gentry, the centre of men of piety and abstinence… it was the refuge of ascetics and devotees… abode of great sufis…’. When Sultan Nasiruddin Qubacha made Uchh his capital (Hazrat-i Uchh) in 1210 it attracted merchants, craftsmen, nobles and the learned from all directions. Ibn Battuta, visiting in the 14th century, records it as a large city with ‘fine bazaars and buildings’ (Gibb, 1929: 188).

17.4.4 Khanqah

Today we relate khanqah with a sufi hospice. However, in the early stages of the establishment of the Sultanate it was more associated with a lodge – a resting place. Till the eleventh century in the Arabic and Persian world ribat was in common usage for resting lodge. Later, it was substituted by khanqah in Khurasan and

1. A discussion on Delhi is omitted for Unit 21 exclusively deals with it. Similarly, for a detailed discussion on provincial headquarters see Unit 18.
Central Asia. In the Arab countries *ribat* is still used for ‘the lodge erected for providing comfort to the travellers’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 29). While distinguishing between the two, Shaikh Jalaluddin Bukhari (1199-1291), famous Suhrawardyi saint, refers that ‘*ribats* were generally built by traders and other philanthropists out of their lawful money…Unlike them, the *khanqahs* in India were built and maintained by the state with money collected in the form of taxes not permitted by the *sharia* (canon law’) (Siddiqui, 2012: 29). Minhaj-i Siraj Juzjani also records that ‘*khanqahs* were built with the money of philanthropists outside India, for providing lodging to travellers’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 28). Sadiduddin Muhammad Awfi (1171-1242) tells us that a Ghazanavide noble posted at Lahore constructed a *khanqah* for travellers (Siddiqui, 2012: 28). Gardezi describes that *ribat* of Margala (near Islamabad) was so huge that when Sultan Masud’s army mutinied at Margala (1041) Sultan took refuge inside the *ribat* of Margala along with his body guards and war elephants (Siddiqui, 2012: 5-6). Thus, initially, *khanqahs/ribats* were not ‘*sufi* hospice but an institution of public utility’. These *khanqahs* were managed by *shaikh-ul Islam* and villages were endowed by the state for its maintenance. From the very onset of the Delhi Sultanate Multan remained the chief centre of Suhrawardyi *sufis*. Their patron saint Shaikh Bahauddin Zakaria (1182-1262) established his *khanqah* in the city and amassed support of the Delhi Sultans. Iltutmish entrusted upon him position of *shaikh-ul Islam*. In 1247 when Mongol Khan Suli Nuyin besieged Multan it was the Shaikh who negotiated peace with the Mongol army. Hansi emerged as a chief Chishti *sufi* centre where resided Shaikh Qutbuddin Munawwar. Afif informs us that when Firuz founded Hisar Firuza he requested his successor Shaikh Nuruddin to grace the city and promised to build a *khanqah* and meet its expenses to which the Shaikh politely declined. Apart from being an important trading town, Ibn Battuta informs that Hansi was ‘an exceedingly fine, well built and populous city, surrounded by a wall’ (Gibb, 1929: 193). Ibn Battuta also mentions about *khanqahs* of Amroha and Dhar constructed by Muhammad bin Tughluq. In the region of Sind and Punjab, records Ibn Battuta, Muhammad Tughluq entrusted the charge of around forty *khanqahs* to *shaikh-ul Islam* (Siddiqui, 2012: 30). Nagaur, on account of the popularity of Chishti *sufi* Hamiduddin Nagauri, emerged from a small town into an important centre of learning and commerce. Similarly Ajodhan emerged as an important *gasba* as a result of Shaikh-ul Islam Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar’s abode. Afif (Jauhari, 2001: 187) informs that, ‘for the benefit and comfort of travellers the Sultan constructed one hundred and twenty hospices in Delhi itself.’ *Sufi Jamaat Khanas* (hospices) also emerged as centres of learning, attracting scholars for discourses on religion and metaphysical philosophy. It also facilitated development of syncretic tradition. *Sufis*, particularly the Chishtis, were greatly influenced by the *yoga* and *yogic* exercises of breath control (*pas-i-anfas*). *Amrit Kund*, Sanskrit work, dealing with *yogic* exercises and philosophy got translated into Persian entitled *Hauz-al Hayat*. Famous *sufi* saints Shaikh Abdul Haque Radauli and Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi used to teach *Hauz-al Hayat* and train disciples in the exercise of breath control. Writing during Shahjahan’s reign Mulla Shaida in his *Sair-i Kashmir* calls Gorakhpanthi *yogis* as chief guides to Muslim *sufis* in practicing *yogic* exercises. Clearly, in the early phase of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate activities of the *sufi* saints and *ulema* facilitated emergence of urban centre in an area and its surroundings where they established their *khanqahs*. 
17.4.5 Sarais, Thanas (Military Outposts) and Forts

The term *sarai* in the sense of a resting place for merchants and wayfarers emerged during the sixteenth century. But in the Islamic world the term *sarai* was used in the sense of ‘citadel/palace’. Ottoman Sultans used to hold their courts in *sarai humayun*; similarly palace built by Timur at Kish was termed as *Ak Sarai* (white palace) (Bosworth, 1997: 46). Under the Delhi Sultans also it had similar connotation and was largely used in the sense of a ‘royal palace or the building owned by wealthy person’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 30). Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia addressed Sultan Iltutmish’s palace as *sarai Sultani*. Ziauddin Barani also called Alauddin Khalji’s palace as *sarai* (Siddiqui, 2012: 30-31). I.H. Siddiqui argues that the first reference to a *caravan sarai* comes from Sikandar Lodi’s reign when he is said to have constructed one for the travellers outside Mathura (Siddiqui, 2012: 31). However, Shams Siraj Afif does mention building of ‘Sarais (resting places) and Khanqahs (hospices) for the stay and rest of the pilgrims’. These *sarais* so built in the remote and amidst insecure forest areas were often accompanied by *thanas* with military officers (*shiqdars*) posted there. In no time such settlements fast developed into townships/ *qasbas* (Siddiqui, 2012: 31). When Sultan Firuz constructed hospices, records Afif, he desired ‘that pilgrims must come from all directions (parts of the world) and stay in the Sarais’ (Afif, 2001: 187).

*Thanas* emerged as chief markers of new emerging towns. Barani’s account of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban’s reign (1266-87) suggests that *thanas* were largely established as police posts in the recalcitrant regions to maintain law and order. Balban established Deopalgir *thana* in the vicinity of Delhi to keep the Mewati recalcitrants at bay. He got the jungles in the neighbourhood cleared and established Afghan posts there. A number of such similar *thanas* were established with Afghan garrisons by Balban. Afghanpur was another such *thana* near Amroha, the headquarter of the Kateharia region. Other such *thanas* established with Afghan garrisons by Balban were Jalali, Kampil, Patiali, Bhojpur, Shamsabad and Bogaon in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab (Siddiqui, 2012: 31). Barani records, ‘he [Balban] also built the fort of Jalali and assigned it to the Afghans.
The havens of robbers were turned into thanas. Jalali, known as a sanctuary of robbers… became a home of Muslims and a safe road…’ (Barani, 2015: 37). Similarly, to handle the dacoit prone region of the Chambal valley Sultan Sikandar Lodi (r.1489-1517) built a thana near village Hatkant which later under Sher Shah’s reign emerged as prominent urban centre. Sher Shah himself got established huge Afghan settlement of twelve thousand Tarin Afghans from Sirhind and got them settled down at Hatkant. All these thanas soon emerged as prominent urban centres. Thana of Kampil emerged so prominent a centre that Alauddin Khalji (r.1296-1316) constructed a strong fort there which Ibn Battuta rated among the most impregnable fort in the Doab region. Largely these thanas were established after clearing the jungles, accompanied with the constructions of mosques, madrasas, and at times followed by sufi establishments. The important example of this is Jalali. Some of these thanas were established at distant places particularly on the highways (Siddiqui, 2012: 32). Balban almost combed the Mewat and the Doab (Katehr) regions by establishing forts and thanas and inhabiting the Afghan thus freeing the region from highway robbers (Barani, 2015: 37). When Kalpi emerged important centre in the 15th century, muqtis established a number of thanas by clearing jungles which were to develop into flourishing towns in the 16th century. Badaun, though not exactly a thana, throughout the Khalji period it remained the military outpost; which later on Muhammad bin Tughluq discontinued as army base. Thanas were often accompanied by forts. However, nobles and Sultans also built a number of forts independent of the thanas and laid foundations of new cities. Firuz Tughluq is specially known for such building enterprises. He not only laid the foundation of Hissar Firuza but also built a number of fort towns – Fatehabad, Firozabad, Harnikhera, Tughluqpur Kasna, Tughluqpur Muluk Makut and Jaunpur.

Fort of Hissar Firuza
Photograph by Vishal 14k, April 2011
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/99/Fort_of_Firoz_Shah_Tughlaq_at_Hisar.jpg

17.4.6 Mosques and Madrasas

Madrasas also emerged as part of crucial structure of every newly established towns and thanas. Balban contributed extensively in the growth of madrasas in the towns and thanas. Thanas were established along highways and around Delhi in the Katehr (Rohilkhand) region. In each thana, madrasas were constructed for the education of
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the children of the army personnels. I.H. Siddiqui comments that as a result children of ‘rustic and uncouth Afghans’ benefited so much from the ‘process of acculturation’ that ‘the next generation of Afghans began to attain high positions under the Khaljis and Tughlaq Sultans’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 140). Gates of madrasas were opened to all classes, even Hindu children got educated in Persian and popular sciences. Thus madrasas were instrumental in ‘enhancing upward social mobility’. Suhrawardi sufi saint Shaikh Jalaluddin Bukhari’s disciple Ratan, the barber, who was skilled in calculation and profession of a scribe, rose to prominent position in the nobility during Muhammad bin Tughluq’s reign (1325-51). Similarly, Badaun emerged into prominence and fame on account of Maulana Alauddin Usuli’s teachings. The famous sufi saint and great scholar of the time Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya was his disciple. Their scholarships brought fame to the small town of Badaun. The newly established thanas in the Doab and Mewat regions accompanied by establishment of madrasas and mosques facilitated the expansion and development of these military outposts into full-fledged townships. Kalpi and surrounding areas mainly developed as a result of this process.

Ibn Battuta informs us that the number of madrasas in Delhi alone numbered 1000. As early as Muhammad Ghori’s reign, Qutbuddin Aibak, his Amir established madrasa-i muizi in Delhi after his patron Sultan. When he became Sultan in 1210 he established another madrasa-i Firuzi in his capital Firuzkuh. Itutmish established madrasa-i Nasiria in Delhi and granted financial aids to them. Firuz Tughluq (r.1351-88) established two huge madrasas – madrasa-i Shahzada-i Buzurg near Siri and madrasa-i Firuz Shahi with a separate hostel for students near Hauz Khass. So had emerged the prestige of Delhi that Amir Khusrau compared Delhi in learning with Bukhara.

In other regions also Qutbuddin Aibak took keen interest in establishing madrasas, particularly in the towns under his control in 1192 (Kuhram, Sunam) as Muizi Amir. Another Muizi noble Bakhhtiari Khalji who was entrusted with the charge of eastern campaigns, built khanqahs, and madrasas in his newly founded headquarter at Lakhnauti in Bengal and at Maner and Bihar Sharif in Bihar. In Multan, madrasas maintained by Shaikh Bahauddin Zakaria and Qazi Qutbuddin Kashani were liberally supported by Iltutmish. In Sehwan also, informs Ibn Battuta, there existed a large madrasa. Towns of Hansi, Sunam also emerged as important centres of learning. Maulana Ziauddin Sunami, who was a distinguished scholar of fiqh and tafsir, held the post of muhtasib (public censor) in Alauddin Khalji’s reign. During Firuz Shah Tughluq’s reign Sonargaon in Bengal developed into an important centre of Islamic learning, and emerged in due course second capital next to Lakhnauti, where Sultan invited eminent Ulama from different parts into the region. Maulana Sharafuddin Abu Tawarna, a great scholar of hadis, fiqh, and ilm-i kalam (scholastic theology) was invited from Delhi. Many Balkhi scholars also got settled down in Sonargaon. Similarly, Bahmani wazir Mahmud Gawan built a madrasa in Bidar which enjoyed great fame in India and Iran and where distinguished teachers were invited to teach. Mahmud Gawan himself donated 3000 books to the library of the madrasa. Sultans of Malwa, Hoshang Shah (d. 1434) also constructed a grand madrasa in his capital Mandu.

These madrasas did not simply remain centres of religious discourse, rather it created a great liberal atmosphere, particularly from Alauddin Khalji’s reign (1296-1316) onwards when Sultan patronised rationalist thinkers. Sad Mantaqi, a rationalist thinker was his counsellor. Further, madrasas not only became centres of diffusion of knowledge but also provided vibrancy of intellectual culture and facilitated social mobility in the towns across Sultanate. I.H. Siddiqui believes that the impact of these newly established madrasas was immense. He emphasises that, ‘education through the madrasas was responsible for a certain amount of social tension in Delhi and other cities’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 104). He finds in the support extended to Haji Maula’s rebellion in 1301 by
17.4.7 Bazaars, Mandis

The khangahs, sarais and thanas in due course emerged important urban centres, they thus played key role in the process of urbanisation during the Sultanate period. Gradually, places therein attracted the nearby peasants and artisans to market their goods. The urban lifestyle of new settlers was also a chief factor motivating the common masses (at least the nearby ruling elites who could afford) to emulate the lifestyle of urban elites particularly wearing of fine clothes, their keeping and riding on fine girdled horses and so on, comments Barani so scornfully on the lifestyles of the rural elites, khots, muqaddams and chaudharis (Siddiqui, 2012: 32).

In Islamic city, Bazaars had an important place. When Ghiyasuddin Tughluq (r. 1320-1325) built his new capital Tughluqabad (1320-1), khass bazaar formed a central role in the scheme. Its design and architectural layout was based on Khurasani style:

The Khass Bazar itself seems to have been the main market street of the town with shops on either side...The shops probably ran alongside the entire length of the street...The street is about 20m. wide, and [on] each side of the street runs a platform about 0.65 m. high, over which the shops were constructed in a row of equal sized units...The form of the shops and their platforms is traditional for both Middle Eastern and Indian bazaars, many of which still function. The platform acts as an extension of the shop, and when the shops open in the morning a sample of goods is displayed on the platform in front...Although at Khass Bazar only the lower parts of the shops have survived they provide the earliest examples of their kind in India. It seems that, together with the other architectural and urban design features, the form of the shops set on platforms was imported by the sultans from the region of Khurasan (now comprising Afghanistan, the present Khurasan province of Iran and the Central Asian state of Turkistan). In many cities in India...shops with similar layout have survived...Early examples of such shops can be found in the fort of Gulbarga, dating from the early Bahmani period (1347-1538).


Bazaar has Persian (wazar) and Armenian (vačar) roots. However, there are other related words khan, badistan, qaysariya and sarai used as well but they have diverse regional connotation. In large cities separate bazaars for specialised trading were constructed. Minhaj mentions an exclusive market bazaar-i bazaazan (cloth market) in Delhi. Barani describes in great details bazaar-i buzurg in Lakhnauti which was almost 2 miles in length, which, later on, after its occupation by the Turks – when new areas were added – now possessed a 24 miles long bazaar in the capital Gaur (old Lakhnauti). He also provides graphic details of the cattle market of Lakhnauti where daily 1500 tanghan horses were sold, records Minhaj. They were brought through mountain passes, and used to be traded in huge numbers there. During the Sultanate period Uchh, Multan and Lahore emerged as big marts. Janani, situated north of Sehwan, on the banks of river Indus, possessed vibrant bazaars (Siddiqui, 2012: 40-42).

Bazaar-i Chaharsu became a common feature in almost all the newly built towns during the Sultanate period. Architecturally, Bazaar-i Chaharsu had ‘shopping streets around a square in four directions’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 49). Amir Khusrau is full of praise of Bazaar-i Chaharsu of Delhi that was so ‘overcrowded that people rub their shoulders (with one another) as rubs the dangling end of a turban…’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 49). Sikandar Lodi also built Bazaar-i Chaharsu in his new capital Agra (1506). Jaunpur even to this day shares the name of one square as ‘chaharsu chauraha’.

kotwal’s establishment (kotwaliyan), lashkar (soldiery) and the khalq (commoners) as suggestive of the emergence of new educated class who ‘wanted a different kind of state’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 105).
17.4.8  Karkhanas

A new element, *karkhana* got added to the cityscape of the Sultanate. Sultans and nobles established *karkhanas* in the capitals and nobles in the provinces which in turn largely catered to the needs of the ‘elites’. At the same time it not only became chief centres of employment for a large number of artisans but also grew into centres of training where old artisans and slaves were being trained in new techniques and crafts which the Turks brought with them. Afif informs that Firuz had thirty six *karkhanas* where he trained and employed his slaves: ‘Some were placed under tradesmen and were taught mechanical arts, so that about 12,000 slaves became artisans (*kasibs*) of various kinds’ (Afif, Elliot, III: 341).

17.5  WAVE OF NEW TOWNS

Delhi Sultanate saw upsurge of new towns like Hansi, Hissar, Thanesar, Sunam, Bhatinda, Kara, Bayana, Panipat, Meerut, Baran (modern Bulandshahr), Kol (modern Aligarh), Qanauj, Badaun, Amroha, Pakpattan and Abohar. Towards northwest the traditional towns Uchh, Multan, and Lahore not only continued to enjoy status of vibrant production centres but also as dynamic centres of cultural activities. Ibn Battuta mentions Uchh ‘a large town’ with ‘fine bazaars and buildings’. Kol (modern Aligarh) and Meerut emerged as important centres of wine distilling. About Kol, Ibn Battuta informs that ‘it’s a handsome city possessing gardens’. Dhar in Malwa, remarks Ibn Battuta, was a chief city of Malwa and became known for its exports of betel leaves; Kara and Manikpur for its cloth. Ibn Battuta records that they were very prosperous centres of production of wheat, rice and sugar along with production of fine cloth which was exported to Delhi. Ayodhya was another important town where coarse cloth *pat* was produced; Gola (mod. Rohilkhand) developed as an important centre of silk production (*khaz*); Nagaur for lining cloth (*aslan-i-lat*) and Deogiri for *bhairow* (a kind of muslin). Among important centres of production towns Lahore was known for its sugar; while Sirsuti (Sirsa) and Lakhi Jungle along Sutlej emerged prominent centres of *ghi* production. About Sirsuti (Sirsa), Ibn Battuta mentions that it was not only a big town but also a major supplier of excellent quality of rice to Delhi (Siddiqui, 2012: 40-55).

Ibn Battuta praised Bayana as ‘a large and well built town with a magnificent mosque’. He also praises Qanauj as ‘a large, well built and strongly fortified city’ where sugar is ‘plentiful’ and ‘cheap’. He also applauds Gwalior as ‘a large town with an impregnable fortress’ and Ujjain ‘a fine and populous town’. Muhammad bin Tughluq’s transfer of capital to Daulatabad resulted in the emergence of a number of towns on Delhi-Daulatabad route. Chanderi assumed a place of importance with flourishing markets thronged by merchants. It is informed that it had a strong fort and 14000 stone mansions, a number of *bazaars*, *sarais* and mosques (Siddiqui, 2012: 45).

By the fifteenth century there emerged certain new towns as a result of the centrifugal tendencies following the decline of the Delhi Sultanate. *Muqtas* and *Zamindars* took advantage of the political chaos and consolidated their position in their areas of influence. It led to considerable growth of new cities and towns. Here, our focus is not to discuss the towns that emerged under the aegis of regional kingdoms following the decline of the Sultanate. That would be discussed separately in Unit 18. The Section largely covers those urban centres which very much formed part of the Sultanate. The consolidation of the position of the *muqtis*, *walis*, or *zamindars* in their principalities also lead to the rise of new towns within the Sultanate. In this regard mention may be made of Kalpi, Bayana, Nagaur, Jaunpur, Mandu, Ahmadabad, and Gaur². These emerging towns

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² For details on the emergence of cities at provincial centres of power see Unit 18 of this block.
facilitated the growth of Muslim population, urbanisation and the spread of syncretic tradition in the hinterlands as a result of the fusion of Indo-Islamic culture. Timur’s invasion of 1398 specially contributed to the migration of Muslim elite and sufis from Delhi to various principalities, provided impetus to these principalities which in due course emerged as prominent urban centres – centres of learning, sufi activities and in turn centres of Indo-Muslim culture (Siddiqui, Chapter 11).

**Qasba**

During the Sultanate period a new category of towns, *qasbas* (townships), which were smaller than the *shahr* (town), emerged. *Qasba* was initially a walled fortress-cum-administrative township which later developed into a full-fledged township and the term began to be used as synonym of a ‘town’ lower than ‘*shahr*’ in hierarchy. Abohar is mentioned as *qasba* by Afif and a prominent centre of sufi activities. Ibn Battuta also mentions it as a small town but thickly populated.

**Port Towns/Maritime Cities**

Port towns occupied particular distinction among the Sultanate cities. Hasan Nizami calls Neharwala (Anhilwara) as ‘one of the most famous maritime cities (*dariyabar*)’. Ibn Battuta records Lahari ‘a fine’ coastal town in Sindh ‘which possessed large harbour, visited by men from Yemen, Fars and elsewhere.’ The major port towns in Gujarat were (Prabhas) Pattan, Sorath, Diu and Gandhar exporting cotton, and cloth and in return horses were received. Rice, sugarcane, spices, timber and canes were exported from Malabar. Mangalore, Cannanore, Calicut, Cochin, Quilon were important port towns in the Malabar. Chaul and Dabul on the Konkan coast served as mid-port towns between Malabar and Gujarat for the transit goods to and fro. Ibn battuta praises Kinbaaya (Cambay) as the ‘finest’ port town with excellent constructions. He points out that the ‘majority of its inhabitants are foreign merchants, who are always building fine mansions and magnificent mosques’. He even praised Quga (Gogo in Kathiawar) as a ‘large [port] town with important bazaars’. Interestingly, it appears that Goa by his time had not yet picked up as an important port. He simply records it as an island of 36 villages. In the Malabar region he praises Mangalore as the ‘largest inlet’ thronged by the ‘merchants from Fars and Yemen’, and that ‘pepper and ginger are exceedingly abundant’.

### 17.6 NEW TRENDS

In the Sultanate period there was a spurt of metropolitan towns, with planned layout which soon acquired cosmopolitan character.

#### 17.6.1 Metropolitan Towns

Medieval texts clearly distinguished between a small town and a metropolis. Ali Kufi in his *Chachnama* prefixes Uchh, capital of Sultan Nasiruddin Qubacha as *Hazrat* (metropolitan city), a word commonly used to address royal capitals in Central Asia. Abu Bakr bin Ali bin Usman al-Kasani who translated Al-Biruni’s Arabic work on *tib* (medicine) *Kitab-ul Saidna* in Persian addresses Delhi as *Hazrat*. Muhammad Jajarani also addresses Delhi as *Hazrat*. Minhaj-us Siraj has also used the word *hazrat* for Delhi. However, at times he used the word *hazrat jalal* Delhi (illustrious/glorious capital Delhi). Shams Siraj Afif has addressed the capital city Delhi as *Hazrat Dar-ul Mulk* and *mamlakat* while for other cities terms like *shahr* (city) and *qasba* (township) are

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3. For a detailed discussion on *qasbas* see Block 5, Unit 22 of this Course and Block 4, Unit 20.2 of our course History of Indian Economy.
used by him. Yahya Sirhindi also records Delhi as *dar-ul khilafat, dar-ul mulk* and *hazrat* Delhi. Ain-ul Mulk Mahru called Cambay as *Shahr-i Muazzam* (great city) possessing beautiful buildings and gardens. For big cities words like *madina-i azima, madina-i kabira* were used. Ibn Battuta calls Satgaon, a port town in Hugli basin ‘*madina azima*’ (large city). Among the large cities (*madina-i kabira*) he named Uchh, Sarsati (Sirsa), Qanauj, Gwalior, Gandhar (on the gulf of Cambay).

**17.6.2 Planned Cities: Changing Landscape and Skylines**

The idea behind laying down of new cities was mainly the establishment and display of power and authority. The new ruling elite carried with them a distinct connotation of a city. Islamic cities were well planned. During the Sultanate period we get references of architects of Iran and Central Asia supervising construction of palaces, water works and pleasure gardens. To add to this the emperor, forced by political compulsions, established a series of new towns (for these compulsions see Unit 21 on why so many cities in Delhi riverine plain?). Introduction of arches and domes added new skyline to the cities.

Fortification was key to all Islamic cities. Multan had such a strong fortification that it could withstand repeated Mongol onslaught. To the existing city landscapes new features like mosques, *madrasas* (educational institutions) were added. The arcuate style transformed the skyline in fusion with existing trabeate style along with pleasure gardens and water works. Soon with the fusion of indigenous trabeate and corbelled with acuate style a new form of Indo-Islamic architecture emerged. Arch and dome became the distinguishing features of newly established cities. The new motifs, particularly calligraphy (arabesque) inscribed on the buildings added distinct decorative elements. Further, the cities were generally accompanied by fortification walls with lofty entrance gates spread into various directions. Barani mentions construction of huge fortification walls at Bhatner and Bhatinda under the aegis of Sher Khan Sunqar who also built a huge dome (*gumbad*) during the reign of Nasiruddin Mahmud (1246-66).

**Planned City: Hissar Firuza**

Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq was a great builder. One of the planned royal cities built by Firuz Shah was Hissar Firuza. Firuz created the city in the desert zone probably for his hunting operations out of the two villages Laras [Kadas] Buzurg and Laras [Kadas] Khurd which perhaps did not have habitation instead where animals were largely housed. Afif mentions the presence of fifty and forty such sheds respectively in those villages. Since the place also fell on trade route to Iran and Khorasan Afif mentions that one of the objective of Firuz was to facilitate the travellers, particularly in the summer season, for lack of water resources in the region. Firuz himself had supervised the construction and it took almost two and half years to complete. It, however, does not appear to be a ‘garrison town’ instead it appears to be a planned city where sufficient spaces were also allotted by the Sultan to his nobles to build their quarters. Afif records that, ‘Like the Sultan, the *Maliks* and *Khans* and courtiers also built their residences like beautiful and majestic houses’ (Afif, 2015: 92). To maintain the perennial water supply of the palace and the region Firuz brought two canals Rajabwah and Ulughkhani. The city was provided with beautiful pleasure gardens and orchards. Quickly the city overtook the next door Hansi and the *shiq* headquarter. Under Firuz now it was Hissar that replaced Hansi as *shiq* headquarter and under its jurisdiction were placed the towns of Agroha, Hansi, Fatehabad, Sarsuti, Salora and Khizrabad. In the words of Afif, soon it became a ‘majestic city’ (*shahr-i muazzam*) (Afif, 2015: 90-93).
Tughlaqabad

Fortification Plan of the Tughluqabad Fort, the City Complex and the Adilabad Fort


Planned City: Deogir/Daulatabad

Ibn Battuta (Gibb, 1929: 227) records that ‘Dawlat Abad [is] the enormous city which rivals Delhi, the capital, in importance and in spaciousness of its planning.’ He informs that the city was divided into three sections: first Daulatabad proper – where resided the Sultan and his retinues; second was Kataka; and the third is the citadel. Ibn Battuta also praises its ‘spacious bazaar for singers and singing-girls, [and] containing numerous shops’. The bazaars were provided with ‘numerous mosques’. The town was full of rich merchants dealing primarily in jewels. The significant impact of Muhammad bin Tughluq’s transfer of capital was that, apart from having achieved the status of the second metropolitan city as mentioned by Ibn Battuta, it emerged as ‘cultural nucleus’ in south India.
**17.6.3 Cosmopolitan Cities**

The major transition in morphology of towns occurred with the expansion of coastal and overland trade, Arab invasion of Sind in 712 and finally with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. It facilitated relaxation in caste stringency. The cities gradually got transformed from a ‘caste based’ into a ‘cosmopolitan urban centres’. Mohammad Habib argues that the invaders, who hardly believed in caste hierarchies opened the city gates for all irrespective of caste and creed, which he termed as ‘urban revolution’. This completely transformed the cityscape. Earlier, as mentioned by Al-Biruni, people of lower castes including artisanal classes were not permitted to live within the city walls. However, as early as mid-fourteenth century, records Isami (1350), tanners were living in their huts in the vicinity of the Royal Palace in Lahore, clearly suggestive of the fact that social segregation of earlier type within the cities was gradually fading away.
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In medieval Europe merchant towns ‘transcended religious and sectoral considerations’ thus moved fast towards ‘secularism’ (Naqvi, 369). However, at least in Gujarat and other port and trading towns these trends were quite visible during the early Sultanate period. Gujarat was hub of artisans, workers, Muslim traders, Zoroastrians, Hindu business community and the aristocracy. Awfi, who hailed from Bukhara, visited Cambay in 1220 was astonished to see the religious freedom enjoyed by Muslims and Zoroastrians in the kingdom of Rai of Gujarat (Siddiqui, 2012: 42). Ibn Battuta mentions Cambay among the finest cities of Sultanate. Cambay was thronged by Irani merchants who established their permanent settlements in the city and carried on trade across India and China. The merchants of Kirman and Qazvin had permanent settlements at Cambay as is evident from the presence of their tombs in the city:

1. **Epitaph AH 699/CE1300**

   Line 3: This is the grave of the weak creature, the stranger (or emigrant), the one who is called unto Allah’s mercy and pardoned,

   Line 4: The sinful, the dependent on the mercy of Allah the Exalted, Kamalu’d-Din

   Line 5: Suliman son of Ahmad son of Husain son of bi Sharf al-Bammi (lit. of Bamm [a famous fortress-town between Kirman and Zahidan in the Kirman province of Iran]), may Allah cover him

   Line 6: with (His) mercy and pleasure and settle him in the abode of Paradise. He died on Mon-

   Line 7: day, last day of (the month of) Jumada the First (of the) year (A.H.) nine and ninety and six hundred (last day i.e. 30 Jumada I, 699=22 February 1300).

2. **Epitaph AH700/CE1301**

   Line 3: This is the grave of the weak creature, hopeful of the mercy of Allah.

   Line 4: the Exalted, Taju’d-Din Muhammad son of Muhammad a’z-Zakariyya al-Qazwin (lit. of Qazwin [famous city and a province in Iran]),

   Line 5: may Allah cover him with (His) mercy and pleasure and settle him in the abode of Paradise.

   Line 6: And he died on Monday, the ninth of the month of Jumada the Second (of the) year (A.H.) 700 (9 Jumada II 700=19 February 1301).


India also became hub of migrant Muslim population on account of destabilised conditions in Central Asia and Persia on account of Mongol and Turk onslaught. This changed the character of Indian cities which now thronged with learned and sufisf migrants from Persia, Khurasan and Central Asia. Metropolis cities like Delhi, Multan, and Lahore developed into centres of ‘international culture’. Hasan Nizami applauds the cosmopolitan character of Delhi that it ‘is considered the Qibla of good fortune by people all over the world’. A poet from Bukhara, when he took refuge in Iltutmish’s court recounts, ‘People sought refuge at your court against the tyranny perpetrated by the infidels of China (Mongols)’ (*Qasida* quoted in Muhammad Bihamad Khani’s *Tarikh-i Muhammadi* cited from Siddiqui, 2012: 116). Abu Bakr al-Kasani who translated from Arabic to Persian Al-Biruni’s work on *tib* (medicine) at the encouragement of Iltutmish’s wazir Nizam-ul Mulk, who was a migrant from Kasan (in Central Asia) was full of praise of the patronage provided by Ilutmish to the migrants:

I decided to study the conditions and found the metropolis rich in wealth and full of people of learning and talent; in fact it had turned into a centre of culture. Everyone of them who had been attracted by the Sultan’s generosity was constrained to come here. The *ashraf* (social elite) from Khurasan and Mavraulnahr (Transoxiana) who were driven away by the vicissitudes of circumstances in their own lands got refuge under the patronage of the Sultan. Everyone of them is full of praise for the Sultan for his generosity and love for justice (Siddiqui, 2012: 167).
Under the patronage of royal courts and elites various sciences flourished in the cities. Mian Bhua, wzir of Sultan Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489-1517) compiled Tib-i Sikandarshahi based on translation of Sanskrit works on medicine. Sultan Sikandar Lodi himself was a great music expert and enthusiast. At the encouragement of Mian Bhua, Umar bin Yahya al Kabuli compiled Lahjat-i Sikandar Shahi, work based on classical Sanskrit texts on Indian music.

Ibn Battuta travelled from Sind, Multan to Gujarat, Konkan and Malabar coasts thence to China via Maldives mentions the cities that he visited were full of not only Muslim population, mosques, etc. but also foreigners were also appointed at high posts in these cities. He records that the governor of Lahari, Fasihuddin was earlier qazi of Herat. He informs that people from Yemen and Fars and other countries throng there. When Ibn Battuta entered Calicut he found people from across the world, China, Sumatra (Java), Ceylon (Saylan), Maldive Islands, Yemen and Fars throng there. Ibn Battuta calls Calicut harbour as ‘one of the largest in the world’. The head of the Calicut, mentioned by Ibn Battuta, was Ibrahim from Bahren. Manjarur (Mangalore) is mentioned by Ibn Battuta as the largest city in Malabar where ‘merchants from Fars and Yemen disembark’.

Similarly, Panderani (on Malabar Coast) is described by Ibn Battuta, ‘a large and beautiful city with garden and bazaars. There are three Muslim quarters each of which has a mosque, while the congregational mosque lies on the coast. It is wonderful, and has observation galleries and halls overlooking the sea. The judge (qazi) and the orator (khatib) of the city is a man from Oman’ (Husain, 1976: 188).

### 17.6.4 Changing Demography

Demographic mobility was closely linked with the process of urbanisation. Newly built towns and metropolis attracted in large numbers artisans, learned men, traders and merchants for better prospects. When Jalaluddin Khalji established his capital at Kilokhari (shahr-i nau) it was rapidly surrounded by nobles’ mansions, traders and shopkeepers. When foundation of Ahmadabad was laid in 1410, artisans, masons, merchants made it as their permanent abode. When Sikandar Lodi made Agra his capital in 1506, the royal karkhanas attracted artisans – ironsmiths from Rapri, stone cutters from Nagaur – who permanently got settled there (Siddiqui, 2012:114).

While the new towns settled with dominant Muslim population, old towns also saw sizable shift in its demography. There was a huge wave of migration from Central Asia and Iran to India following the massacre by the Mongols. Sadiduddin Awfi, a refugee from Bukhara is full of praise of Sultan Iltutmish who extended liberal support to the migrants:

> The power, grandeur and magnanimity of the religion sustaining monarch turned his dominions into a safe haven for the Muslim refugees. The Sultan went out of his way to help those who fled tyranny and oppression of the infidel Tatars [i.e.Mongols]…The Sultan [Iltutmish] granted them shelter and made arrangements for their comfortable living. Every Muslim is safe and free from worry and fear (Siddiqui, 2012: 122-123).

Isami also speaks aloud of Delhi becoming refuge of migrant population across Asia:

> In that city one splendour becomes evident, yes, there is delight in the new city. Many genuine descendants of Prophet (PBH) arrived from Arabia, many traders from Khurasan, many painters from China, many learned men natives of Bukhara, many ascetic and devotees from every clime, from every kingdom and of every sort, artisans from every town and every race,…Many assayers, knowledgeable in precious gems, numberless sellers of jewels, scholars versed in greek sciences [hakiman-i-yunan] and physicians from Rum [Anatolia or Asia Minor], many learned men from every part. In that city they came like moths gathering around a candle (Siddiqui, 2012: 123).
Muslim literati and other migrants coming from diverse backgrounds and traditions and groups turned Delhi into a vibrant cultural centre, surpassing Baghdad and Cairo, and competing with Constantinople, comments Barani. In the late twelfth century when Ghuzz Turks occupied Ghazna, forced elites and the Sultan Nasiruddin Qubacha to migrate to Lahore, this led to Lahore emerging as a prominent centre of Muslim learning and culture. During Ilutmish’s reign eminent scholar Majuddin Abul Maali Muhammad Jajarmi not only engaged in translation of Al-Ghazali’s *Ihya-ul Ulum-id Din* into Persian but also taught people religious sciences in Lahore. His lectures were attended by scholars, traders and elites alike in Lahore. However, the political disturbances, particularly, two waves of onslaught, Mongols and Turkish, did prove detrimental to the flourishing towns like Lahore (three consecutive attacks of Mongols completely shook the city and it could not recover its past glory till as late as the Lodis).

**17.7 NEW URBAN ETHOS**

When the immigrants mingled with the local populace, argues I.H. Siddiqui, it ‘enriched the urban culture’ and led to the ‘establishment of a symbiotic relationship between the followers of anthropocentric and cosmocentric traditions’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 27). Boost to this syncretic tradition was further provided by *sufi* centres which were largely located in the suburbs of the cities. Slaves were also brought up as Muslims who contributed a great deal to the strength of Muslim population. When Al-Kasani translated Al-Biruni’s *Kitab-ul Saidna* from Arabic to Persian he not only translated technical words into Persian but also provided its Indian equivalents for certain medicines, suggestive of the fact that fusion of Indo-Muslim culture began much early since the very inception of Sultanate.

**17.7.1 New Urban Groups**

With the establishment of the Sultanate, political re-adjustments brought emergence of new ‘elite’ groups in the urban centres. Initially Turks dominated the city life. Later, in the process of eradication of Turkan-i Chihilgani (the select group of Forty) Balban brought to the fore a new group, the Afghans, who were a Turkish tribe settled long before in the region of Afghanistan. Amir Khusrau in his *Tuhfat-ul Sighar* calls them ‘uncultured people not fit to reside in the midst of civilized people’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 106). Later with their rise in the aristocracy Amir Khusrau mentions them as ‘boastful persons bereft of excellence’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 107). Their settlements began on a large scale during Balban’s reign, when after Kateharia rebellion Balban tried to clear the jungle around Delhi and got the Afghans settled down in the area as incharge of various thanas. By the time of Muhammad bin Tughluq’s reign they emerged as a ‘prominent’ social group and by the turn of the century emerged strong enough to establish their own sovereign state at Delhi (the Lodis).

The Mongols who accepted Islam, also known as neo-Muslims (*Nav-Musalmans*) settled down in different parts of the Sultanate during Alauddin Khalji’s reign (Siddiqui, 2012b:141). A number of villages were granted to them around Delhi and their settlement came to be known as Mughalpura (modern Mongolpuri), though they suffered greatly following large scale massacre of them at the hands of Alauddin Khalji during the closing years of his reign.

Similarly, Hindu peasant caste of Kambos, embraced Islam under the influence of Suhrawardi saint Bahauddin Zakariya of Multan. They soon enjoyed prominence in learning. By 15th century many of the Kambos distinguished themselves as *ulema* (scholar) and *mashaikhs* (*sufi* saints) and emerged prominent enough that their voices were well heard by the Sultan. Shaikh Jamali, son-in-law of Shaikh Samarddin Kambo was a poet at the court of Sultan Sikander Lodi.
17.7.2 Institution of Slavery and a New Urban Culture

The institution of slavery was also instrumental in bringing changes in the urban life. The slave population in Sultanate towns was considerable. By 13-14th centuries urban population of Delhi was around four lakhs. Afif reports Alauddin had 50,000 slaves and Firuz Shah maintained 1,80,000 of them, which is clearly suggestive of a considerable slave population in Delhi. This number would swell if we take into consideration slaves maintained by the nobles. Innumerable slaves played important role in the urban socio-political life of the Sultanate cities. Malik Kafur, hero of Alauddin’s southern campaigns, was his slave. Similarly, founder of the Sharqi kingdom of Jaunpur, Malik-us Sharq Khwaja-i Jahan was Firuz’s slave.

Each prominent city had specialised slave (and cattle) market known as nakhas. About the nakhas of Delhi Amir Khusrau in his Ifaz-i Khusravi mentions ‘the nakhas are like a flowing river’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 52). It was filled with both Indian and foreign slaves. Slaves were so numerous and cheap in the city that Ibn Battuta comments that no one was ready to buy female captives. Urban elites, nobles, foreign merchants and even laymen took active part in the slave trade. Minhaj-us Siraj mentions when his sister faced financial crisis in Khurasan he sent fifty slaves over to be sold by her. Slave labour emerged as a significant component of urban labour during the Sultanate period. Nur Turk’s slave worked as cotton carder to subsist his master. However, groups of elite slaves were employed as muqtis and soldiers. Afif mentions Firuz Shah’s slaves largely employed to take care of elephants and also as royal night guards and bodyguards; forty thousand slaves alone were employed ‘in the royal palace and for attendance during the royal processions’. Firuz Shah employed 12,000 slaves in the karkhanas. They held posts like abdar (incharge of water), jamadar (incharge of dresses), chitrdar (incharge of royal canopy) pardahdar (incharge of curtains), sharabdar (incharge of drinks), shamadar (incharge of light), itrdar (incharge of perfumery), etc. Some of the slaves bought from the foreign markets were experts in various arts. Firuz Shah trained four thousand of his slaves for construction. They were from Turkestan, China, East European countries and Africa. From the very establishment of the Sultanate, Delhi Sultans employed foreign slaves, both Turks and non-Turks in huge numbers and trained them in the art of warfare. Amir Khusrau mentions Russian soldiers in the army of Ghazi Malik (future Muhammad bin Tughluq) in Dipalpur. Chinese emperor sent 100 slaves to Muhammad bin Tughluq. In return Muhammad bin Tughluq also sent 100 dancing girls to the Chinese emperor through Ibn Battuta. Naqshagaran-i chin (painters from China), mentioned by Isami were probably slaves bought by Iltutmish to beautify his palace. The slant eyes of the Turkish and Chinese girls were greatly fancied in the elite circles. Amir Khusrau writes, ‘beautiful Turkish girls between the age of 17 and 18 were presented, who were so beautiful that they could provide the old sun with a new covering of light by the shade of their faces’ (Siddiqui, 2012: 33). Ibn Battuta also frequently mentions royal slave singers and dancers. Khan-i Jahan Maqbul had in his harem slave girls from across the world, including Europe. Thus slaves formed active partners of the City’s socio-economic and political life.

17.8 ARTISANS AND LABOUR

Muhammad Habib has argued that Islam broke caste restriction/barriers facilitating the inter-craft mobility of population. Habib (1952: 55-70) argues, ‘The new regime wanted the workers, along with their families and the workshops, inside the city-walls; their presence was indispensable to the work of the new regime…Their services were needed for government as well as for industrial purposes…‘ The spurt in urban activities attracted artisans and labourers to the cities. The vibrancy in urban centres provided spaces for
artisanal classes. Ibn Battuta mentions multitude of labourers available in every lane of Delhi. Introduction of new crafts and modification of indigenous crafts as a result of introduction of new technologies and of infusion of new scientific ideas and crafts, facilitated the emergence and expansion of urban based new artisanal crafts. Large slave population taught and trained in the new crafts led to the emergence of new artisanal classes/castes in the due course. With the spread of wine distillation during the Sultanate period Kalal’s (liquor brewer) prosperity increased. Many of them accepted Islam (Khummar) and got educated and rose to prominence during Muhammad bin Tughluq’s reign. Aziz Khummar enjoyed the position of revenue collector of Amroha and governorship of Malwa during Muhammad bin Tughluq’s reign. Similarly founder of the Gujarat Sultanate, Zafar Khan was a Kalal. Whenever, new capital town was built it attracted artisans, traders and shopkeepers to do business in the bazaars. When Sultan Lodi made Agra his capital (1506) it attracted skilled workers and artisans from different parts of India to settle down there – ironsmiths from Rapri, stonecutters from Nagaur along with sarrafs and merchants (Siddiqui, 2012a: 114).

17.9 TRADE AND URBAN CENTRES

Trade routes played an important role in the growth of medieval towns. Many villages along the routes in due course emerged into towns and cities of caravan traffic. Makran region, bordering Iran in the west, was largely a barren desert inhabited by pastoral tribes. However, later in the 7th century it attracted Arab traders, and on account of its geographical location (being on the trade route along India, Iran and Khurasan), served as an important link for both overseas and overland trade route; Soon pastoral economy of the Makran region transformed into a highly vibrant monetised economy which urbanised the entire region. New towns emerged in the region. Sehwan in Sind, situated on the land route to India emerged out to be an important entrepot. Similarly, Lahari Bandar in Sind and Cambay in Gujarat, on account of being important ports emerged into prominence, thronged by the merchants coming from al-Yaman and Fars, etc. Many villages along the routes in due course emerged into towns and cities of caravan traffic. Merchants also involved themselves in construction activities, thus facilitating the growth of towns. Khwaja Ishaque established a khanqah in Cambay where free food was served to travellers and poor. Hansi and Sirsuti (modern Sirsa) on account of theirs being on important trade route from Delhi to Pakpattan to Multan soon emerged as important towns. Even Sirsuti (Sirsa) emerged as centre of rice exports to Delhi and Multan. Ibn Battuta mentions it as a provincial headquarter, fortified and famous for its buildings, madrasas, etc. Similarly, many towns emerged on route between Delhi to Deogir during Muhammad Tughluq’s reign, particularly Chanderi, initially a shiq, soon thronged by merchants that led to the emergence of big bazaars. Such became the splendour of the city that it had 14,000 stone mansions, many bazaars, caravan sarais and hundreds of mosques (Siddiqui, 1962: 58). Nagaur, apart from being an important sufi centre, also owed its prominence to being an important centre on route linking Gujarat with Delhi. It was frequented by merchant caravans. Rizqullah Mushtaqi informs us that it was a prominent centre of trade for war horses, weapons and fine cloth in the 15th century.

17.10 SUMMARY

Sultanate cities while on the one hand showed continuum and further accelleration of the process of urbanisation that began in the tenth century; on the other hand there appeared marked changes in the morphology of the town. The earlier dominant landscape with temples and corbelled buildings gave way to mosques, tombs and arcuate structures.
The cities started becoming more cosmopolitan in character. New features, new terminologies also appeared — khanqahs, thanas, qasbas, which further facilitated the urbanisation process. Soon Indian cities were thronged not only by the merchants from central Asia and Persia, instead, Mongol invasion forced the literati to migrate that resulted in the emergence of Indian cities as centres of learning and cultural activities surpassing cities like Bukhara and Khurasan.

17.11 EXERCISES

1) What are the markers of a so-called ‘Islamic city’? How were the cities represented in the Sultanate Persian texts?

2) Critically examine various debates pertaining to the rise of towns in the Sultanate period.

3) Discuss the process of urbanisation under the Delhi Sultans.

4) What were the features of medieval towns? Discuss.

5) Analyse the emergence of new social groups. To what extent institution of slavery and various new groups altered the medieval town landscape?

6) ‘Sultanate cities were primarily garrison towns.’ Comment.

17.12 REFERENCES

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