UNIT 23  URBAN PATTERNS IN MEDIEVAL DECCAN*

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23.1 INTRODUCTION

Studies on urbanisation of the Deccan have, on the whole, been rather limited, leading often to the impression that there was very little urbanisation in the region. This is far from being the case, for there were, historically, a large number of urban settlements visible here from fairly early time. Ranabir Chakravarti has, for instance, pointed to the presence of inscriptions to the existence of terms such as mandapikā, petha or penthā, nagaram, and śulkasthāna, all of which refer to market centres. We can therefore talk of the existence of a large number of small urban centres in the region.

A question that needs to be asked is whether such small centres were characteristic of the Deccan. A corollary to this would be whether there were large urban centres as well. The answer to both questions would be ‘yes’. Given the geography of the Deccan, there were a large number of smaller centres that can be identified. Sources from Maharashtra, for example, refer to kasbas(qasbas), peths and mire. Kasbas were understood to be places that had a permanent market. Thus, an urban centre could have both a kasba (a permanent market) and a peth (a local or semi-permanent market) within it. In modern times, the city of Pune has within it a number of localities which have the name of a day of the week as a prefix, and peth as a suffix – Shukrawarpeth, for example. At some time in the history of the city, therefore, it is clear these areas were the scene of local markets. Bhakti literature of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, especially of the Mahanubhav cult, has references to hat and to evening bazaars held in larger settlements, and also makes mention of the number of buyers and sellers that thronged these markets.

A further aspect of consideration is whether one can take the entire Deccan as a single unit for studying urban patterns, or whether one would have to distinguish the kinds of urban settlements that made their appearance in the different geographical sub-regions of the plateau proper, the eastern and western coastal strips, and the hilly terrains bordering the plateau. In addition, one would also have to take into account the various political regimes that came up, and the capitals or provincial administrative centres that they established.

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It is clear that in addition to markets and trade routes, urban settlements grew around forts as well. According to the Persian text *Burhan-i Maasir* forts were of two kinds, *Qalah* being a fort on a hill while *Hisar* was a fort on a plain; to these can be added the sea-forts along the coastal tract. Obviously around hill forts there could not be large scale urban settlements, but towns do seem to have grown up nearby. We have, for example, the fort and town of Penukonda in Andhra Pradesh where the fort was on the hill and the town below, but the town too was surrounded by a wall. Similar to this is the city of Junnar in Maharashtra, which is located on the plain below Shivneri fort. In contrast to this was the fort of Daulatabad, where it appears that the urban area was located a short distance away.

When one is talking of urbanisation in the Deccan, it is necessary to keep in mind the geography of the region, and the political systems that came into existence during the medieval period. Urbanisation has always been seen in tandem with the existence and spread of state systems, and therefore, we have to keep in mind the capitals of these states, as new or expanding urban centres under the Deccani rulers.

In the period up to the 14th century (till the establishment of the Bahmani Sultanate), among the most important of the Deccan rulers were the Chalukyas, who ruled first from Badami (modern Karnataka), and later from Kalyani (modern Basavakalyan). Neither of these two cities is today a particularly large urban centre, but between the 10th and probably the 12th centuries, they were fairly large centres. Basavakalyan, in particular, going by the descriptions that one finds in Virasaiva poetry, was a large and populous city, well laid out, and with a great many markets in it. Other medieval kingdoms included the Kakatiyas, who established their capital at Warangal, in modern Andhra Pradesh, The Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta, and the Yadavas of Devagiri. All of these cities, while perhaps not as large as some of those on the north Indian plains, were nevertheless important centres.

With the establishment of the Bahmani sultanate, newer centres came into existence. The Bahmanis first established their capital at Gulbarga, and later moved to Bidar. Bidar fort remains today a testament to the engineering skills of the time, not just in size, but also in layout and in water management systems. The subsequent establishment of the successor states of the Bahmanis resulted in new urban centres, for new capital cities came up at Ahmadnagar, Golconda, Hyderabad, Bijapur, and many others. As is well known, the Qutb Shahis of Golconda and the Adil Shahis of Bijapur were the longest lasting, and their cities were probably among the largest.

### 23.2 GOLCONDA

The fort of Golconda encompassed within its walls the city of Golconda as well. It is usually assumed that the Sultans established the fortress, but they apparently added to a mud fort that had been built there earlier by the Kakatiyas, to make it one of the largest and strongest forts of the Deccan. Using the natural rocky landscape, walls were added, and a large area was enclosed. Technologically, too, the fort was distinctive, for it included a method for bringing water from quite a distance (from an area today known as *Durgam Cheruvu*, meaning ‘hidden lake’) which lies about 6 km from the fort. There was also a method of transmitting sound, for the sound of a clap when standing right at the centre of the dome at the entrance of the fort can be heard at the top, at the citadel.

Within the fort was located an armoury and stables, and of course, the necessary royal enclosures. Beyond the first set of walls lay the town, also enclosed. Many of the walls still exist, even though the fort itself was largely destroyed in the 17th century. A short
distance away from the fort are to be seen the tombs of the Qutb Shahi sultans, in the typical Deccani style of architecture, comprising of large domes, set atop a square structure.

The ramparts of the old city can still be seen. It appears that there were three lines of walls – one surrounding the citadel, one enclosing the city, at the bottom of the rocky incline on which the fort is placed, and one on the plain below, but on the fort side of the river Musi.

Figure 23.1: Note the walls of the Golconda Fort, which fit into the landscape of the area. Photograph by Radhika Seshan

Figure 23.2: The central area of the Golconda Fort, with the zenana in the background, and a fountain in the central courtyard. Photograph by Radhika Seshan
Figure 23.3: Another view of the inside of the Golconda Fort.
Photograph by Radhika Seshan

Figure 23.4: The city of Hyderabad in the background; note the line of the walls, and the path alongside.
Photograph by Radhika Seshan
Golconda was for a long time the capital of the kingdom, but in the late 16th century, the fort apparently started becoming too crowded. The Sultan then decided to establish a new city, called Bhagnagar (according to local legend, in memory of a legendary dancer and his paramour, Bhagmati), or Hyderabad. This city was on the plain below the rocks on which the fort was located, and was, in its own time, one of the richest in India.

In its layout, Hyderabad’s old city is very similar to other old cities, in that it has a single defined political and economic centre (the area around the Charminar), and nearby, the markets. It is possible to see in this layout itself the economic functions of the city, with the old chudi bazaar on one side of the Charminar, and lanes with different kinds of products radiating in other directions. The older markets, as well as the houses of the nobles, can still be seen.

However, within the fort, it is rather difficult to identify the market areas or the residential quarters of the nobles. What remains today is a large number of houses, most of which seem to belong to the 20th century, and the fort itself, as a distinct historical (and tourist) location.

### 23.3 BIJAPUR

Like Golconda, Bijapur too was an old city, which came back into prominence when the Adil Shahi Sultans made it their capital. Bijapur seems to be a derivative from the original name of Vijayapura, city of victory (the modern railway station has this name), but the name of Bijapur is much better remembered. This city is located on a plain, and is surrounded by a wall. Also like Golconda, the city and fort both lay within the walls; and the tombs of the Adil Shahi sultans are also located within the walls. Bijapur today is seen as almost synonymous with the Gol Gumbaz (the tomb of Muhammad Adil Shah [d. 1656]), the monument with the largest dome in India.
Given the rather dry nature of the region, water supply was obviously a prime concern. This seems to have been met by the construction of two large tanks within the city walls, known as *Taj Bawdi* and *Chand Bawdi*.
One of the most detailed descriptions of Bijapur comes from Asad Beg, the envoy whom Akbar sent to the Deccan. Among other things, he commented on the bazaar that was near the house in which he lived, and remarked on the bazaar itself, saying that “Before each shop was a beautiful green tree, and the whole bazaar was extremely clean”. He went on to say that the bazaar was filled with a variety of goods.

Ferishta’s account gives us considerable information about the growth of the city. As Bijapur grew, the Adil Shahi Sultans established a new market area just outside the city, which was called Shahpur. This was followed by the establishment of yet another suburb, Nauraspur, about 4 kilometres away from the fort, at the end of the 16th century. A 19th century history of Bijapur, that of J. D. B. Gribble, says that “excluding the citadel, Bijapur within walls, during the days of the monarchy, seems to have been divided into thirty-three wards or peths”.

What needs to be underlined about both these cities is the continuity of occupation, and the economic and political vibrancy. To these must be added the craft expertise visible in the monuments still extant, and in the descriptions of the bazaars and the goods from travellers like the Frenchman Abbé Carré in the 17th century, his slightly earlier countryman Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, as well as a host of others. Even if we do not get details about urban planning and layout, it is possible to match the existing structures with the earlier descriptions, so as to understand not just the nature of urbanisation in the Deccan, but also the continued history of urbanisation in this region.

23.4 INDUSTRIAL CITIES OF THE DECCAN

In the Deccan towns received special boost as a result of the blooming textiles, saltpetre and diamond mining industries in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries.

23.4.1 Textile Centres

There was a great demand for urban industrial products for exports as well as for the developed cities and towns in the Deccan during the period under review. The most important of the urban industries were cotton and silk weaving industry.
Throughout the seventeenth century Aurangabad, for instance, was famous for white cotton cloth and silk-stuff, and Burhanpur for fine white and printed cloth, which was exported in large quantities by Persian and Armenian merchants to Persia, Arabia and Turkey.

Burhanpur was founded in 1398-99 by the Faruqi ruler of Khandesh Sultan Nasir Khan and named after the famous Chishti sufi saint Burhan al-Din Gharib. It remained all though an important sufi centre as well as an important centre of Indo-Persian learning. It enjoyed the patronage of Abdul Rahim Khan-i Khanan, the famous noble of Akbar who himself was a scholar of great repute. It was flocked by number of scholars from Persia (Isfahan and Shiraz) – Khwaja Ahmad Shirazi, Mohammad Baqar Kashani, Mirza Mohammad Isfahani. A number of monuments built by Khan-i Khanan still survive to date. Like other Deccani forts, the city spread was in the valley (Tapti) along the river front while the fort (Asir) was situated on the hill miles away, on the top. The immediate hinterland was Adilabad _pargana_, a rich cotton growing regions of India. Throughout the Mughal period it enjoyed a great reputation for its rich textiles – brocade, flowered silk, gold and silver embroidery. The merchants presence could well be attested to by the presence of _caravanserais_ in the city where merchants were housed and which provides places for the transit of goods (Gordon, 2008: 286). French traveller Tavernier (Vol. I:42-43) who visited Burhanpur in 1677 writes:

There is a considerable trade in this town, and both at Brampore itself and in all the province an enormous quantity of very transparent Muslins are made, which are exported to Persia, Turkey, Muscovie, Poland, Arabia, Grand Cairo, and other places. Some of these are dyed various colours and ornamented with flowers, and women make veils and scarfs of them; they also serve for the covers of beds, and for handkerchiefs,…There are other fabrics, which are allowed to remain white, with a stripe or two of gold or silver running the whole length of the piece, and at each of the ends, from the breadth of one inch up to twelve or fifteen – in some more, and in others less – it is a tissue of gold, silver, and of silk with flowers, and there is no reverse, one side being as beautiful as the other…Some of these fabrics are all banded, half cotton and half gold or silver, such pieces being called ornis.

However, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries Burhanpur faced the Maratha onslaught. They captured the fort and sacked the city twice in 1685 and 1698 which forced the merchants to bypass the Burhanpur route. In 1711, Dutch preferred to follow more westerly route, bypassing Burhanpur. It had deep impact on the fortunes of the flourishing city and its trade and manufactures; and the city shrank; though the textile production continued and formed major craft of the city. The late Mughal documents speak about the presence of nine wholesale markets of various commodity (cloth, cattle/horses, gold/silver jewelley, metal, leather etc.) in the city (Gordon, 2008: 295-296).

Specially the cities of Qutub Shahi kingdom produced a large quantity of printed cloth which was claimed to be the best to be found in India. They also manufactured all sorts of calicoes which were as cheap and plentiful as in any other part of India, but different in texture and pattern from those of other regions. The painted cloth of these cities was also quite famous all over India due to the special dyestuff called _chay_, which was produced only in the eastern Deccan, and monopolised as a rule by the king.

The Adil Shahi sultanate had a flourishing cotton and silk weaving industry. Cotton was produced in the uplands of Deccan and Kanara, and silk required by the weavers was imported from China. The curious feature of this industry in the northern part of kingdom was that it was situated around the ports, so that the cotton required for it had to be transported from the Deccan uplands. It is possible that in the uplands also there were
towns where the weaving industries flourished, but as the foreign travellers, who are often the major sources of information on the industries of the time restricted their observation to the coast, they do not mention any of the internal centres. The ports of the Konkan around which the industry flourished were Chaul, Dabhol, Rajapur and Vengurla, where the cotton weaving industry survives to this day. At these centres cotton and silk stuffs were manufactured in great abundance and of many varieties and various colours. The cotton goods of these places were in great demand in Persia, Arabia and some parts of East Africa. The state took active interest in the weaving industry and the weavers were granted exemption from certain taxes. In the Southern part of the kingdom the English factors found the cotton industry flourishing at Hubli and Lakshmeshwar and in the country behind Karwar.

Calicoes and Muslins were the principal varieties of cotton cloth produced in the Deccan. The weaving of the first variety was fairly common throughout India, but the muslin industry was localised in Deccan and Bengal. On the Konkan coast, Dabhol, Rajapur and Chaul specialised in calicoes and muslins, while Vengurla produced coarse cotton cloth for the home market. The southern centers of the weaving industry also produced calicoes and, in addition, seem to have specialised in carpet weaving and allied industries. It also seems that the saries and other cloths required by women were produced in and around Dharwar.

About the organisation of the cotton weaving industry we have very little information. It seems probable that it was financed by the middleman or the Bania who kept in close touch with the market and requirements of the exporters. The English went to the market towns for the purchase of pepper, cotton goods, etc., and usually entered into negotiations with a local merchant whom they appointed as their broker. A prominent figure in the markets of Bijapur was Benidas the broker employed by the English. Bimaldas and Vitthal Gomati were two other brokers who did business for the English factors. The brokers were financed by the foreign traders, and the producers of pepper and the cotton weavers were in turn financed by the brokers. The English factors found that the calicoes manufactured by the weavers were of short dimensions only and if they wanted large sized cloth, the only alternative before them was to finance the weavers with the cost of altering their looms in order to make the cloth broader. This shows that the weaving industry depended for its finance on an outside agency.

Cotton goods manufactured in a number of cities in the Bijapur kingdom were carried to Persia, Arabia and Mozambique in East Africa by Muslim and Portuguese traders. During the first half of the seventeenth century both Dabhol and Rajapur sent out large quantities of cotton cloths to Persia and Arabia, but the English merchants who carried on this trade considered the cloth as too fine for England. In the Kanara country also cotton cloth was produced at Hubli and Lakshameshwar and was exported by the English from Karwar. After the loss of Chaul, Karwar became the greatest port of Bijapur on the west coast. “The finest muslins of western India were exported from here. The weaving country was inland, to the east of Sahyadris, at Hubli (in Dharwar district), and at other centres, where the English East India Company had agents and employed as many as 50,000 weavers.”

Many kind of rich cloths were in demand in the kingdom by small minority mostly the nobility. These were velvets, satins, scarlet cloths and damasks. These came mostly from Arabia, though Caesar Frederick notices a certain amount of velvet and scarlet cloths imported at Chaul from Portugal. Some quantities of woollen cloth were imported into Goa and thence into Bijapur by the Portuguese. During the seventeenth century English merchants found that there was a demand in the kingdom for broad cloth. No mention of this variety is found in the accounts of travellers during the sixteenth century.
It seems probable, therefore, that the English were the first to introduce it into the kingdom. At any rate they developed the trade in this commodity to a considerable extent. It was brought to Rajapur and Dabhol and transported inland to Raybag, the most important mart in the kingdom. The silk weaving industry of Chaul and Dabhol was supplied with its raw material from China.

23.4.2 Saltpetre and Gunpowder Production Centres

Saltpetre was produced in considerable quantities in different parts of the Deccan. The English factors made more than one attempt to refine saltpetre locally and then export it, but the experiment failed as the cost of refining proved too excessive. They therefore continued to buy and export unrefined saltpetre.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam argues that the coastal trade in rice and saltpetre was on a large scale in the seventeenth century and should be included among the profitable commodities of Portuguese trade. However, according to Afzal Ahmed these were not the general items of trade on which a profit might be earned, but were rather bought to be supplied to the war affected areas for the consumption of the soldiers and the Portuguese residing in those part, and profits of this trade were made by the local Indian producers and by the ‘married and settled merchants’ and not by the Portuguese Estado da India. Some of the producers might have belonged to the Bijapur sultanate.

The coastal trade in rice, saltpetre and other commodities of prime necessity, which reached peak during the period between 1628 and 1663, was mostly to supply the Portuguese war-affected area, including Muscat in the Persian Gulf, Malacca and the ports on India and Ceylon. They were never commodities which could yield the Portuguese treasury any extra income, except for the taxes they could levy over their transactions. A partial exception is the case of saltpetre, which was acquired from various regions of India to produce gunpowder for both the Portuguese and the Indian rulers in exchange for diplomatic favours against the Dutch and the English.

The increase in demand for both the items was due mainly to the prevailing circumstances during three decades of war. However, among these, rice certainly turned out to be a very important commodity in shaping Portuguese diplomacy with the rulers of Kanara and Bijapur. At least in the case of the Kanara region, where rice was produced in abundance, it gave a very powerful instrument to the Nayakas who used to bargain the prices of pepper against the purchase of rice and to a lesser extent saltpetre.

On the other hand, although the saltpetre had to be purchased, the gunpowder gave the Portuguese a commanding position in local diplomacy, thanks to the perpetual rivalry between the Mughals and the states of Ahmadnagar and Bijapur. In return for its supply, the Portuguese were able to insist on the expulsion of the Dutch and the English from their territories. The sultans of Bijapur and Ahmadnagar urgently needed gunpowder, when, as happened often during the wars with the Mughal, their factories were not able to produce sufficient to supply their forces. However, the largest part of the gunpowder was used by the Portuguese themselves during their wars against the Dutch and the local states such as Kanara and Bijapur.

A certain amount of borax was also produced in the Adil Shahi kingdom and most of it seems to have been used for dyeing cotton goods, but some quantities of it were occasionally bought by the English merchants for export. The centre of the saltpetre and borax trade was Raybag. At Mirjan, a port twenty five miles south-east of Karwar, saltpeter was shipped for Surat.

The kingdom of Bijapur, like the Qutb Shahi kingdom, possessed iron deposits though
on a modest scale. Vijayanagar had a good supply of iron and saltpetre and the kingdom of Bijapur used to import considerable quantities of these commodities from there. Bijapur undoubtedly benefited from the iron deposits in Vijayanagar when it annexed much of the territory belonging to it.

23.4.3 Diamond Industries and the Urban Growth

The most famous industry in the Adil Shahi and Qutub Shahi kingdom was diamond mining. The most important mines of the former kingdom were at Raolconda, and those of the latter kingdom were located at Kulur on the Krishna. The mines were leased out by the king to merchants on payment of a certain amount of money, who employed a number of miners, whose total number were located at Kulur was reported at 30,000 to 60,000, and the town's population at 100,000. Stones of more than 10 carats formerly belonged to the king, and one of such diamonds mined at Kulur was the famous koh-i-nur.

The existence of diamond mines in the ‘Adil Shahi kingdom has been noted by all the travellers who visited the kingdom during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were in all fifteen diamond mines in the kingdom of Bijapur the principal of which was situated near Ramalakota or Raolkonda as it is called by Tavernier and the English merchants. The diamonds produced from the Bijapur mines were generally good, but in size and weight they were not equal to the Golconda diamond. There were numerous diamond cutters near the mines to cut and polish the diamonds. But their work was of a crude kind and they were unable to give the diamonds such “lively polish” as the craftsmen of Europe did.

The diamond mining industry was in the hands of Gujarati merchants. The mines were the king’s property and were farmed to intending prospectors. Many labourers flocked to the mines and were employed by the prospectors. There were also a number of skilled workmen to prepare the diamonds for the market after they were dug out of the mines. The finished product was sent by the merchants to their agents in Surat, Goa, Bijapur, Agra, Delhi and other places. Tavernier found a high sense of business honesty among the diamond merchants. The Bijapur diamond prospectors were a prosperous community and were apparently much better off than their counterparts in Golconda.

It seems that by 1663, the output from the Ramalakota (Raolkonda) mines had reduced considerably, for the Dutch East India Company’s chief factor, Pieter de Lange, observes: ‘But now nothing of more interest [is] to be found’. He writes that one famous courtier, Balasahap (Balasaheb), of the Bijapur court had begun mining his lands situated around Minismoel in the hope that ‘what is lost in Rauwelcotte, appear there to be gained again’. It was hoped that it would yield a ‘good quantity of flatten or white small diamonds (wit bort)’.

The rulers of the kingdom of Bijapur and Golconda held proprietary rights over the mines in their territories. The mining of diamonds and its trade provided these rulers with the prospect of enormous profits. The rulers supervised the working of the mines through their officials. However, it seems that the ruler of Bijapur was often unhappy with his governors in respect to the management and income of the diamond mines.

There was a good market in diamonds in Jinji and Vellore dating from Vijayanagar times, but it seems to have declined after the fall of Vijayanagar. It is difficult to identify where the diamonds came from, but contemporary records speak of them as being mined in the territory of Jinji and the previous Vijayanagar kings. Later the country passed under Bijapur rule. A report of 1685 speaks of a number of wealthy merchants descending on Vellore for the diamond auctions and buying stones, large and small, for
Traders from Bijapur, Vellore, Goa and other places had their factors in Jinji. Prior to the contract of 1643, signed between the Vijayanagar Emperor and the Dutch Company, the diamonds were purchased at Jinji and taken to Goa, from where they were sent to Portugal. It was common practice to lease the diamond fields on certain conditions. Around 1615, the two diamond mines of Banganapalle and Cottecotte were leased out for approximately 200,000 reals of eight that is 400,000 rupees. The lease was based on condition of delivery of all the stones, which weighed from 4 to 25 mangelins, to the king. Apart from the payment to the governor of the place and the obligatory parting with diamonds above specified weights, the merchants also paid two percent on all purchases to the King, who receives also a royalty from the merchants for permission to mine. The rates were 2 pagodas per diem for 50 men and 4 pagodas for employing 100 men.

The mine would naturally have greatly affected the economy of the surrounding villages by drawing their population to work in them. However, we do not know if such workers were converted into wage labourers in the modern sense of the word. The available evidence about labourers and their conditions in the diamond fields shows that their number was considerable and that they were paid low wages. Tavernier mentions that, the wages of workers at Raolconda mines, “these poor people only earn 3 pagodas per annum; i.e. equal to about one rupee or 27 pence per mensem or less than a penny a day.” This was perhaps due to the lack of development of mining technology. Simple tools were used by employing semi-skilled and unskilled labour. Our sources do suggest some development in mining engineering.

In 1615, Willem den Dorst, the chief factor of Dutch East India Company on Coromandel, submitted a report about the prospects of this trade in Coromandel. He reported that ‘Sensier’ (Jinji) had emerged as an important market for the diamond trade, and that merchant from Bijapur, Goa, Jinji and Vellore were trading there. He writes that ‘due to wars elsewhere, merchants, with their households and families had migrated to Gingi. Some of them kept their factors, mostly Brahmans, to purchase diamonds there’. He reported that he had seen 300-400 carats of diamonds with their merchants, and estimated that one could annually collect diamonds worth 100,000 reals of eight or even more. He had himself purchased diamonds from Bijapur merchants and had found that it was 18 to 20 per cent cheaper to purchase diamonds in Jinji. He explains that this was because the European currency yielded an 18 per cent profit when exchanged with local currency.

In September 1615, the factor Leonard Wolff was deputed to secure the rights to trade in diamonds in Bijapur. But this mission failed. Then Pieter Gillisz was sent, but he also failed in his endeavour. However the mission under Willem den Dorst purchased diamonds worth 6,000-7,000 pagodas in March 1616.

In Bijapur there were 15 mines, of which only those yielding the smallest stones were allowed by the Sultan to be worked, partly to prevent large stones becoming too common, and partly to avoid exciting Aurangzeb’s cupidity. There seems to be some more mines out of the list mentioned by Tavernier. Varthema also talked about the diamonds of Bijapur, and said that there was “a mountain in the kingdom of Bijapur where they dig out diamonds, which mountain is a league distant from the city, and is surrounded by a wall, and is kept by a strong guard.”

Thus these small manufacturing towns of the Deccan owed much to their existence and growth to the ‘networking’ with the hinterland vis-a-vis the trading routes and the
ports across India and the Indian Ocean what Stewart Gordon (2008: 297-298) has rightly illustrated and concludes in the context of Burhanpur:

The analysis of the city of Burhanpur suggests a series of non-contiguous networks that shifted overtime…the network of military recruitment…

The basic supply network was more stable…

The network of Sufi shrines, once established seem to have been stable throughout the period…

Burhanpur’s demand network arose and fell with its prosperity. Like any capital of small Indian kingdom Burhanpur, under the Farukhis, benefitted from taxes that came to the king. Though its nobility was small, it was the centre of demand for high-end craft skills and arts – weaving, iron work, painting, book production, musical instrument making. The skilled craftsmen who serviced the court were part of a network that included such courts across much of India at the time. These small centres were the refuge from turbulent times for skilled craftsmen. A small city like Burhanpur was also the repository of courtly customs and knowledge…The network of such men went beyond India and included jurists and clerics from Central Asia, Persia, Afghanistan, and the middle East…

In its glory days, Burhanpur was connected to astonishing far-flung networks. A small number of specialized cotton fabrics multiplied to many varieties, all with specific local and distant markets. The streams of fabrics from Burhanpur joined those from the contemporary production centres of the Ganges Valley, Malwa, and Gujarat. This textile network was as much about information that flowed backing as it was about production. India’s exporters knew what sorts of cloth sold in Poland or Africa – length, fineness, uses, colors and anticipated prices.

Maratha conquest in the middle decades of the eighteenth century brought great changes in Burhanpur’s networks. Fewer varieties of cloth were produced though they still travelled far…

23.5 MANUFACTURING TOWN: BIDAR

We have discussed the growth of the capital city Bidar (founded by Ahmad I in circa 1424 CE) in Unit 18 Section 7. Here our purpose is to discuss the emergence of Bidar as a manufacturing centre in the 16-18th centuries. The town of Bidar is known for its bidri work. The Bahamanids encouraged local industries and popularised them to such an extent that goods were perpetually sent to foreign countries. However, other than bidri the town and the district is known for its cotton and silk, and iron and steel works. Paithan, Daulatabad, Gulbarga and Khidki produced good silken cloth at low prices. Mashor, Himroo, Saris, Dhotis, Mulmul and various other kinds of cloth were manufactured, which became very popular with foreign traders and local Amirs. Bidar became a centre of pot manufacturing industries. Even today the Bidri work industry is alive and produces rare specimens of art and skill.

The Bahamani Government had regular trade relations with Persia, Arabia, Africa, Europe and the countries of the Far East. The main outlets for the Bahamanids were Goa, Dabhol, Mahim and Masulipatam which were first-class ports under their control. Nikitin describes Dabhol in very glowing terms. Ferishta mentions that the Bahamanids had many ships which were used for commercial purposes. These ships exported textiles, Bidri work, Warangal carpets and other Indian merchandise and brought gold, spices, china goods, perfumes, drugs, horses, pearls, and slaves (Sinha, 1964: 151-153).

The origin of bidriware is linked to the Bahmani dynasty of the Deccan. It is believed that the technique was introduced to the Bahamani Kingdom from Iran (in one version,
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via Iraq, Ajmer and Bijapur) (Stronge, 1985: 15). This craft was introduced in Bidar during the rule of Bahmanis. It is stated that king Ahmad Shah Wali brought some skilled workers from Iran for the construction of Rangin Mahal, and some of them were experts in gold and silver work. Abdul bin Kaiser was proficient in inlaying silver and gold on zinc alloy and in making fine articles of artistic excellence. The then Sultan, taking keen interest in this handicraft, started a training centre in the Mahmud Gawan Madrasa (college) located in Bidar (Yazdani, 1992: 20-21). Enjoying royal patronage, this craft reached a high degree of excellence. Most of the craftsmen trained in this school took to this industry. Thus this craft, which flourished under the Royal patronage of the Bahamani monarchs, the nobility and other rich families, reached a high degree of excellence (Gazetter of Bidar, 1977: 187). There is so far no evidence whatsoever for the production of metal objects by the technique we know as Bidri before the 17th century (Stronge, 1985: 16). So far, the earliest unambiguous reference to Bidriware is in the Chahar Gulshan, a history of India written in Persian in 1759. There seems to be no other written reference to Bidri from then until the 1809 account of the industry at Purnea. However, there is a small body of material evidence for the industry from the 17th century, in the form of actual pieces or representations of them in painting and considerably more for the 18th century.

Bidriware: The Technique

Process: The basic materials required in Bidri industry are zinc, copper, silver and a particle type of earth. The process of production may be divided into 4 main stages viz. casting, engraving, inlaying and oxidizing.

Techniques of Ornamentation: There are five main types of inlay for ornamenting Bidriware objects. According to the process used for the inlay, the work is known as Tarkashi (if only wire is inlaid), Tehnishan (if the inlay looks flush with the surface of the object); Mahtabi or Aftabi (if the design look black against the overlaid metal sheet); Zarnishan (if the inlaid pieces are in low relief); and Zarbuland (if the inlaid pieces are in high relief) (Mittal, 2011: 16-19).

Unique feature: A unique aspect of the Bidriware craft is the soil used to ornament the art objects. This soil, which has not received rain or sunlight for centuries, is collected by artisans from the inner areas of the Bidar fort. The soil contains ingredients that give a lustrous black colour to Bidriware. The paucity of raw materials impedes the mass production of Bidriware artifacts. The intricate nature of the Bidriware craft demands pains taking efforts from the artists. Bidri craft is metal work where objects are cast from an alloy in which zinc predominates with small amounts of lead as well as copper and tin. The traditional artifacts made are the hookahs, goblets, vases, caskets, jewellery and various other decorative accessories (Handicrafts Bidriware of Bidar: 1-5).

Bidriware in 17th and 18th Centuries

Bidri also begins to appear in painting in the 17th century. Jagdish Mittal refers to a picture of about 1625 in the State Museum, Hyderabad which apparently shows a huqqa inlaid with silver and brass. In the 18th century, the picture begins to come into focus, particular centres of production can be established beyond doubt. Apart from its evidence from the Chahar Gulshan, it is also known from an illustration to an atlas produced in Faizabad in 1770. This was commissioned by a French officer, Colonel Jean Baptist Gentil, who served a military adviser to the Nawab of Oudh from 1763-75. During this period he employed local artists to produce a series of illustrated works concerned with the political and social history of India. The first was an atlas, now in India office library, which includes a map of the subah of Bidar. Drawings are included on either side of the map; these now; for the most part, representatives of the different Sufi Orders, but also include a Bidri craftsman and the ware produced at Bidar (Patel, 2009: 76).
Bidri exhibited in 1851 for special praise and included a page of details of decoration on huqquas which, Owen Jones thought, were all remarkable for great elegance of outline, and for such judicious treatment of the surface decoration that every ornament tended to further develop the general form. Exhibitions, museums all were tangible-business at Bidar was booming with the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition Catalogue (1886: 291).

In Hyderabad State, which included Bidar, the Bidri industry flourished under the Asaf Jahi rulers from the early 18th until the mid-20th century. An added incentive to these artisans was that apart from personal use by the local nobles, there was a prevailing custom of presenting a set of Bidriware to the bridegroom at the time of marriage. As Mukharji (1974: 183) notes, “no dowry is considered complete among the better class of Muhammadans, unless a complete set of Bidriware, from bed-legs to a spittoon, is included”. The Bidri industry was not in good shape in the early 19th century. Heyne (1817: 227) mentions “the men (Bidri workers) complained of want, in an employment which in former times had been the means of subsisting a numerous class of their own caste, now scarcely yielded food for five families that remained” but we are convinced by the exquisite quality of a hookah base in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum – dated 1818 that there were still meticulous craftsmen at this time. Instead, it seems that it was patronage that was lacking, either because of economic hardship or changing tastes.
A great incentive to Indian craftsmen was the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in London, in 1851, and the Paris Universal Exposition of 1855. The admiration expressed by the visitors for the excellence shown by Indian craftsmen in the elegant shape of the objects, refinement in execution, as well as vitality, freshness and richness of design, was encouraging to the Bidri artisans as well. Fascinated by the works displayed in the exhibition, Sir Owen Jones singled Bidri in his book Grammar of Ornament, published in 1856. A few years later, the Nizam had some fine specimens made for presentation to the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII), when he visited India in 1875-76. These objects were first displayed in the Indian Section of the South Kensington Museum, London, lent to the Paris Universal Exposition of 1878 and later exhibited in the United States of America (Wilkinson, 1999: 5). To revive this craft, in 1913 the Nizam’s government started a training school for Bidri work at Bidar with these artisan’s as instructors. The school was merged with a local High School in 1938 (Gowd, 1967: 4).
Thus the walled capital town of Bidar though already achieved importance under the Bahmanids and the Barid Shahis, the vitality of the town as a celebrated production centre of manufacture of Bidriware which leaves a distinct mark on the growth of the town of Bidar itself which attracted the artisans from nearby who provided the vibrancy to the city life. Unfortunately, being an ‘elite’ craft it always showed signs of anxiety in the absence of royal patronage. Sadly, there is not much demand now for these beautiful manufactures, and the industry is fast dwindling.

23.6 SUMMARY

The cities of the medieval Deccan were multifaceted. The cities like Goconda and Bijapur were prominently capital towns and emerged into prominence as fortified centres of power where stationed the Sultan, the bureaucracy, the elites, sufis, artisans, traders and merchants. The Deccan had a network of a number of small manufacturing towns known for its textiles (Burhanpur and Aurangabad), diamond mining (Raolconda, Kural), and saltpetre and gunpowder (Raybag, Mirjan). All connected to and flourished through a web of networks across India and Indian Ocean. However, from the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth centuries onwards this network started showing breaks that had deep impact on the fate of these small towns and started showing fall in their fortunes and existence.

23.7 EXERCISES

1) Trace the development of medieval urban centres along the forts in the Deccan with special reference to Golconda.

2) Analyse the growth of fort towns of Bijapur and Golconda.

3) Discuss the growth of chief industrial cities in the Deccan. How did textiles, saltpetre and diamond mining facilitated the growth of these towns?

4) Critically examine the emergence of Bidar as a manufacturing town.

5) Highlight the importance of bidriware in the rise and growth of the town of Bidar.

23.8 REFERENCES


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