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## **Economic development from 1200 to 1526 during sultanate empire**

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### **Abstract**

Without any shadow of doubts, it can be alleged that the establishment of Delhi sultanate that started in the thirteenth century and its continued existence until the beginning of sixteenth century was a period of continuous series of political, economic and social changes and gradual developments throughout the Indian sub-continent. The presence of sultanate was the journey of encounter of the two diverse life styles, one being predominantly sedentary-agrarian indigenous population while the other central Asian pastoral-nomadic. In the present article, an attempt has been made to unwind convoluted threads of economic and social interaction as a result of coming together of the two separate backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Economy, sultanate, agrarian, industry, revolution, prosperity

### **Introduction**

It is an established fact that the time period from 1200 to 1526 is generally hailed as the time period of Delhi sultanate. During this time period, the main occupation of the people was agriculture. Although the methods adopted by people of agriculture were old and traditional, the land was cultivated during that period. As a result of that, there was excessive production of harvests. Firoj Shah Tughlaq emphasized on the improvements in the field of agriculture. During the time period of Delhi sultanate, there was no much more difference was witnessed in the condition of farmers. During this era, many types of industries were prevalent. There was also prosperity as far as the foreign trade is concerned. During this period, India also got prosperity in the field of technological development. India was popular in the whole world for its excessive wealth, due to which Mahmood Gajnavi and Mohamad Gauri attacked a number of times on India. The foreigner invaded India to rob its money, gold and wealth. The sultans of Delhi spent a huge amount of money on wars and life of luxury, but even after that lot of wealth remained intact with them.

During the time period between 1200 to 1526, development was witnessed in every walk of economic life. We can discuss the development in economic fields on the basis of following area.

### **Economic Development**

The following development took place in the economic field.

#### **Agriculture**

Right from the beginning, India has always been an agricultural country. During the time period of Delhi sultanate, the main occupation of the people was agriculture. Most of the land during this period was cultivated. Wheat, rice, sugarcane, and cotton were the chief crops. During the sixteenth century, the production of potato and tobacco started on large scale. During the Delhi sultanate period, Bengal was famous for cotton, Allahabad and Sirsa were popular for the production of rice, and Firozabad was known for wheat. Apart from the production of crops, there was excessive production of fruits. In Indian fruits, mango was the popular fruit. Besides, grapes, apple, oranges, melon, coconut and pomegranate were popular fruits at that time. During the Delhi sultanate period, Firoz Shah Tughlaq is primarily known for the encouragement of agriculture.

Old methods of agriculture were adopted by people during the Delhi sultanate period. The farmers were totally unfamiliar with the latest methods of agriculture.

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The farmers were dependent largely on rain for the production of crops. Besides, wells and rivers were also the sources of water for crops. During the Delhi sultanate period, there was excessive production of the crops which was used not only for fulfilling the needs of the people but also for export to other regions. But, the condition of the farmers was getting deplorable during this period and, as a result of that, they faced a number of hardships and problems in their lives. Except, Firoz Shah Tughlaq, no sultan of Delhi paid heed towards the agriculture reforms.

### Industry

Industry was the second occupation of the people during the sultanate period. Generally, two types of industries were prevalent : first, those which were under the control of government which were run to fulfil the needs of sultan and their workers in these industries costly and exceptional goods were produced; second type of industries were run by the people themselves and were under their control. The brief description of industries during the sultanate period is as follow:

- i) **Textile industry:** Textile industry was the most famous industry during this period where cotton, silk and woolen clothes were produced. At that time, the production of cotton was in abundance in India. For woolen clothes, sheep from the mountainous areas were reared, but the wool of superior quality was imported from the foreign countries. Silk was mainly produced in Bengal, but the good quality silk was imported from foreign countries. At that time, the production of supreme quality clothes was at its peak in India. Bengal and Gujrat were the famous centres of cloth at that time. Besides, in Banaras, Orisa, Malwa, Delhi, Agra, Lahore, Multan and Devgiri were famous for special kinds of clothes.
- ii) **Metal industry:** Apart from textile industry, metal industry was the second type of industry that was famous during the sultanate period. Indian people were well versed in the use of various types of metals. There was a great demand of objects and goods produced by Indian people in the foreign countries.
- iii) **Leather Industry:** It was one of the most famous industries during the sultanate period. It was also the profession of a number of people. During that period, many goods were produced by means of leather. To export the sugar, the bags of leather were produced by the people. People also used to use the clothes made of leather. The most famous places for the production of leather include Gujrat, Bengal, Delhi and Assam.
- iv) **Sugar Industry:** During the sultanate period, sugar industry was also the most famous and prosperous one. The main reason behind it was that sugar was used by a vast majority of people. Sugarcane was also present in abundance during that period. At that time, the sugar industry was so popular that sugar was exported to foreign countries. Although, the sugar industry was spread to every part of country, yet the sugar of good quality was produced in Delhi, Lahore, Bengal and Agra.
- v) **Paper Industry:** Although during the sultanate period, there are ample evidences of the use of paper, but it was not a very popular and prosperous during this age. Amir Khusro has described the production of paper in Shami and Syria. The views of Nocolikoti make it clear that

paper was produced in Gujrat. Besides, in Agra, Lahore, Gaya and Syalkott, we find some evidences of paper industry. In Delhi, there used to be a big market of selling of books. There is no doubt in denying the fact that there was no demand for paper at that time.

- vi) **Stone and Brick Industry:** During the sultanate period, stone and brick industry was very famous. Indian architectures were famous far and wide in making buildings. So, they were in great demand. Turk sultans were also the great lovers of this art who got constructed a number of palaces, mosques and cities. In this period, coloured bricks were in fashion.
- vii) **Other Industries:** Apart from the above mentioned industries during the sultanate period, other industries related to glass, wood, ships and perfumes were famous.

Apart from this, this period also witnessed rise in the field of trade and commerce. During the sultanate period, the most important centres of trade and commerce include Delhi, Lahore, Multan, Devgiri, Calicut and Vijaynagar. The people belonging to Marwari, Gujraji, Multani and Chetty communities were the leading among the tradesmen and commerce. The Sultans of Delhi encouraged the trade and commerce of the day by making inns and roads as well as made these ways safe from robbers and thieves. Foreign trade and commerce was carried by two ways. In that period, India had its trade and commerce with the countries like Burma, china, Nepal, Afghanistan, Java and Sumatra. The export of the country was more than import during sultanate period.

It is an established fact that during the sultanate period, the value of India's exports was much greater than that of the imports and the balance of trade was always in favour of India. So it can fairly be ascertained that although State, during the Delhi Sultanate period, did not appropriate a comprehensive economic policy with the object of promoting the material condition of the people in general, yet the volume of trade, both internal and external, carried out by the people of the country, was enormous.

In short it can be safely and rightly aver that the prosperity of that time can be testified by contemporary, both India and foreign, sources. Marco Polo, who visited Southern India between 1218 and 1293; Ibn Batuta, who travelled in most parts of India between 1334 and 1342; and Mahuan, a Chinese, who visited Bengal in 1406, all of them, have left an account of India that shows that both industrially and economically, India was prosperous and that there was a great abundance of all the necessaries of life.

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