

Urban Growth Of 17th-18th Century Rajasthan with Special Reference to Services Provided by Ironsmiths and Weavers

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Article Info

Volume 83

Page Number: 613 - 616

Publication Issue:

July - August 2020

Abstract:

Urbanization forms one of the most important watersheds in the phases of historical growth and events. No study of historical processes, whatever be their origin, will bring us at least close to historical truth without analyzing the human factor or making a socio-psychological portrait of those people who were the main acting force of the process under review. An attempt has been made in this paper to highlight the contribution made by professional class in the urbanization of Rajasthan during the aforesaid period. The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Urbanization is a natural consequence of socio-economic change, but the said paper tries to analyze how professional groups (especially ironsmiths and weavers) were instrumental in the said process. The state provided various facilities to professional groups like space for shops, residence, exemption from cesses, etc. and encouraged them to come and settle down in different areas of Rajasthan. The professional groups accepted the invitation of the state and flocked to the towns and cities, thus giving rise to urban population. They played a significant role as they were the back-bone behind the development and growth of towns and markets. The aforesaid study shows the position and role of ironsmiths and weavers in the acceleration of urban growth during the period under discussion.

Article History

Article Received: 06 June 2020

Revised: 29 June 2020

Accepted: 14 July 2020

Publication: 25 July 2020

Keywords: Different commodities, Iron industry, Julaha, Luhar, Pattis, Textile industry, Urbanization.

I. Introduction

The term urbanization means a process through which an urban settlement comes into existence. The shift of population from rural to urban areas, removal of rural characteristics of an area and the process associated with the formation of towns and cities also speak of the urbanization process. Urban settlements emerge due to their historical geography, exploitation of natural resources and

human activities of varied nature carried out in the agrarian and non-agrarian sectors in a particular period of time. When an economy moves from being agricultural driven to an industrial or service driven, it experiences high rate of urbanization. There were several factors responsible for the emergence of urbanization in medieval Rajasthan, but the role of professional groups should not be ignored and underestimated. The study of role played by professional groups (particularly

ironsmiths and weavers) is quite interesting. In the urbanization of Rajasthan during 17th-18th century, professional groups played a significant role as they gave their best in the form of their skills and production. In medieval Rajasthan, there were different professional groups like calico printers, dyers, potters, barbers, cotton carders, carpenters, goldsmiths, tailors, copper and bronze casters, stone cutters, ironsmiths, weavers, physicians, usurers, merchants, betel sellers, dancers, etc., who conducted their business and contributed in the process under study. In the said paper, ironsmiths (luhars) and weavers (julahas) have been given much stress. Besides the professional class, the state also did its part in the aforesaid study. The state provided different facilities and opportunities to the professional groups, in this way helped in the emergence of towns and markets thus accelerated the process of urban growth.

II. Role of Ironsmiths and Weavers

It is true that after the downfall and breakup of the Mughal Empire, the Rajput states made their position and base strong and secure by paying much heed and emphasis towards the re-organization of their army. There was also rise of petty principalities, adventurers and free booters in Rajputana and they all needed arms and ammunition, this in turn, stimulated and enhanced the iron production and iron industry¹. It is necessary and very interesting to mention that who were associated with this? One of the important sets of artisans i.e., luhars (iron smiths) were associated with iron production and they contributed a lot in the emergence of iron industry, in this way in the process of urbanization. The ironsmiths gave their full attention and effort in the arms manufacturing in the towns and they enlarged and increased the population of the towns, in this way proved fruitful for urban growth. The position of iron smiths was good as they were employed in the

state karkhanas. It should be kept in mind that the iron smiths not only produced for the state and the military purposes, but they also produced for the domestic purposes as well.

Different items were manufactured by ironsmiths as evident through sources. For instance, knives, scissors, iron pots for cooking, ladle, griddle, sieve, buckets, etc². Not only these, many other items were produced by them which were very valuable and useful like a pair of pincers, clamps, etc³. These items were made for masonry purposes and were indeed very beneficial for craftsmen particularly for masons. We also find reference of heavy chains, being produced, in order to tie the horses and camels⁴. Through the examination of sources, we came to know that the ironsmiths were also manufacturing iron boxes of good quality at Pali and Nagaur regions of Rajasthan. Some delicate items (like kalamdan) were also manufactured as evident through sources⁵. In the area of Nagaur, the wire of musical instrument guitar was also made. Many weapons like swords, daggers, canons, etc. were casted and manufactured by iron smiths⁶. It is a fact that the Rajputs used lances and swords in good quantity in war, so these were produced in good quantity by iron smiths⁷. They had a great skill and the state needed their skill as evident through the source that they were called from Baran to Nanta as were considered to be expert in making the iron fittings for gates⁸. It is a clear indication of a good role played by iron smiths in the urbanization of Rajasthan during the period under study. They stimulated the iron production and iron industry, in this way enhanced and accelerated the process of urban growth.

The second part of the present study deals with the role and contribution of weavers in the aforesaid process in the Rajasthan during the said period. The weavers also played a significant role and rendered a meritorious service in the urban growth of Rajasthan during 17th-18th century. They served as lifelines to the towns and proved

very instrumental in the said process. The cotton textile production has been considered to be present in almost all parts of India⁹. In the state of Rajasthan, cotton was produced on a large scale and it was a major craft practiced by weavers¹⁰. We find reference of weavers coming from different places to learn and experience skill¹¹. Weavers from Multan, Bihar, Patan, Jaldal, Sultanpur, Bidar, etc., were working in Patti of julaha Kalu in kasba Barod in 1751¹². It speaks of migration and shows how they enlarged the towns and cities and expanded the population of Rajasthan during the period under study. In Rajasthan weaving was practiced at many places. For instance, in Kota, due to availability of black soil, weaving and spinning was practiced on a large scale as it was considered a major craft¹³. Besides Kota, weaving was practiced at many other places like Sanganer, Pali, Nagaur, Marwar, Amber, Sangod (Qasba Sangod is near Ujar river) etc.¹⁴. Among the artisanal classes, weaver class was the leading professional class that had dominated the certain areas in Rajasthan¹⁵. It was through their efforts and skill that the textile industry in Rajasthan flourished during 17th-18th century. Their services gave fillip to textile production and textile industry, in this way boosted the urban growth. They proved fruitful for the urban growth of Rajasthan during the period under discussion.

As already mentioned there were a good number of weavers living and residing in pattis (in one patti, there used to be five weaver families. Sometimes even 30 weaver families) and in some kasbas, pattis of julahas were training and exchange of skill centres, besides manufacturing a variety of materials¹⁶. It shows the kind of mobility which skill and profession had acquired by this time¹⁷. Through the examination of Jodhpur Records, we came to know that in the promotion and development of weaving industry, good interest was taken by the state. In Nagaur region of Rajasthan when weavers were not

available and present in good numbers, an invitation was sent to weavers to come and settle down in the Nagaur region of Rajasthan and they were given certain facilities particularly concession of taxes. The weavers came from different areas with their kith and kin and enlarged the population of the said area. Nagaur was a well-known centre of cotton cloth production. Besides cotton clothes, woolen clothes were also produced during the Mughal times¹⁸. Even the rulers of Jodhpur used to purchase cloths from Nagaur¹⁹. We have reference of the city- Akola in Mewar and Jalrapatan town where decrees were issued by the state for the benefit of professional class²⁰. The state abolished duties and taxes and granted privileges and immunities to the inhabitants of the city Akola and town Jalrapatan²¹. Pali and Sanganer were also important centres of weaving and spinning. We find that there was a good production of cotton and cotton clothes. Wool was also produced on a large scale. Weavers were also present in qasba Sangod as evident through the sources that out of 17 castes recorded, the julaha was the leading one and they were conducting their business in a better way. In trade of Bikaner state, wool production had a tremendous share. There was a constant production of wool and woolen products which generated amount of revenue in state treasury. Bikaner state used to export wool and woolen to other states of Rajputana and also to central India. In the state of Bikaner, we find reference of Paisar and Naikar (these terms were used for import and export)²². Sixty-six camels laden with wool were carried by Mukand Dass Parakh and Ratanshi Dhamani from Bikaner to Jaipur²³. Growth of trade and commerce and growth of service oriented economy boosts urbanization process. Weavers gave fillip to economy through the production of clothes.

III. Conclusion:

In the back-drop of the fore-going discussions and facts narrated, we are safely able to say that in

the urbanization of the Rajasthan during the aforesaid period, professional groups especially ironsmiths and weavers rendered a meritorious service in the form of their skills and production. They gave their best in the emergence of towns, markets and industries (iron and textile). The role of the state cannot be underestimated who was keen enough in the said process by providing various facilities and opportunities which were absorbed by the professional class, hence helped in the development and flourishing of towns and markets. On the basis of above evidences and discussion, it can be suggested that in the acceleration of urbanization process of medieval Rajasthan, good service was given by professional class. In nutshell, we can say that no study of medieval crafts (particularly 17th-18th century) will be adequate if the people who were involved in these activities are forgotten or there would be no complete knowledge of urbanization and urban industries in medieval India, if the social-structure and corporate organization of the artisans is not considered.

IV. NOTES AND REFERENCES

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