

ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF SURAT

- It was **one of the most important urban centres** of medieval Gujarat.
- Situated at the bank of the **river Tapti**.
- When **Mahmud Begada** included Tapti valley in his powerful Gujarat kingdom, Surat got considerable amount of economic stimulation in the early part of the 16th century.
- The **rise of the Portuguese led to the rise of Surat**, as an alternative port of the Portuguese in Gujarat and was fortified.
- Situated near to the much more developed **port of Cambay**; the siltation of Cambay

Surat Under the Mughals

- But **prosperity of Surat was a gift of the Mughals**.
- By the time the **Mughals conquered Surat in 1573**, it was the most important outlet (প্রবেশপথ) for the vast hinterland of North India and northern Deccan.
- Surat was made by the Mughals the port of embarkation for **the Hajj pilgrimage**.
- This made Surat earn the title of ***Bandar-i Mubarak* (the blessed port)**.
- The **conquest of Khandesh in 1601** and its annexation to the Mughal empire further contributed to the enhancement of the importance of the port.
- **It opened an alternative safer and cheaper route to Agra** through Burhanpur, Malwa and Gwalior, compared to the route through Broach, Cambay, Ahmadabad and Ajmer.

Administration of Surat under the Mughals

- The administrative jurisdiction over the city and its dependent *mahals* (or *parganas*, territorial units for revenue collection purposes) was delegated to a ***mutasaddi* (governor)** and a ***qiladar* (commander of the castle)**, both appointed by the Mughal Emperor.
- The former was responsible for the collection of revenue and general administration while the latter exercised control over the military affairs and was responsible for the defence of the city.
- There was a gradual transformation of the imperial family and ruling elite into artful maritime merchants.

Trade and Commerce

- The prosperity of Surat is also indebted to the **liberation of the Persian trade under the Safavids and resurgence of commerce in the Red Sea under the Ottomans**.
- The port also acted as an entrepot connecting the **southeast Asian ports of Sumatra and Java with the West Asian ports of Mokha, Jeddah and Basra**.
- The **Red Sea route was the most important** for the Gujarati traders, especially for Surat.

Composition of the Urban Society

- Surat was inhabited by the most enterprising trading community of Gujarat – **the banias**.
- **The Portuguese, French, Dutch and the English, often employed Parsees as chief broker.**
- **The Muslim merchants were generally the ship-owning merchants of Gujarat.**
- The Muslims were divided into different sects of which the **Bohras and the Chellabies** were economically well-off.
- The most famous among the Bohra merchants of Surat was **Abdul Ghafur** who headed the *jamayat* (the social organisation) of the Bohras.

The Europeans and Surat

- The advent of the European trade in the seventeenth century was an event of major commercial and urban importance for Surat.
- The English infused close to £10 million in goods and cash
- The English naval strength was also a source of income for the Surat establishment.
- The Dutch with their monopolistic control over the spice producing areas of southeast Asia proved to be one of the most decisive European competitors of the English.
- In 1634, the Dutch decided to close all their Asian factories except Surat and Batavia.
- The Dutch had cordial as well as conflict ridden relationship with the Mughals as well as the Indian merchant community.

Urbanisation of Surat

- The urban centre of Surat grew vertically more than horizontally.
- **The city was fortified**, but the distance between two bastions, out of its three, was not uniform, making **the defence of the city weak**.
- **The ditch around the fort was deep but not very broad.**
- **The fort stationed approximately 200 Mughal troops.**
- Thomas Herbert, who visited the city of Surat in 1627, says that the town was enclosed by a mud wall.
- **After the first attack on Surat by the Marathas, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb had ordered a strong wall of ten feet thick and ten feet high to be built.**
- This wall was called *Sheherpanah* or “The Safety of the City” and took fifteen years to be completed.
- John Fryer who visited the city in 1674, claimed that seven hundred men had been assigned at this period for construction of the walls.
- But even then, this wall was often criticised to be not strong enough.
- **In 1717, Farrukhsiyar ordered** an extensive wall around the city and this was known as *Alampanah* or the outer wall and the earlier wall was now known as the inner wall.

- **The wall had three chief gates** with one leading to Variav and Cambay, one to Burhanpur and the other one to Navasari.
- Like most of the urban centres of India, important buildings such as **the castle, the custom house, the mint and the *darbar*** formed the core of the city.
- **Between the walls well laid out gardens** were maintained by both Hindu and Muslim residents of the city.
- The people of the city generally **lived according to their caste and profession, with the lowest caste residing at one end of the city.**
- There were **several mosques** around the city.
- Among the public works of Surat one of the most famous was **Gopi Talao or Gopi Tank.**
- It was an **artificial tank** which had been widely discussed in the writings of the contemporary foreign travellers.
- It was nearly **a mile in length.**
- The government had also constructed *hammams* for baths for the common people.
- The Mughal mansions were **mostly built of stones** and the houses of wealthy merchants were **built with bricks and had gardens around them.**
- The majority of townsmen, however, **lived in houses made of bamboo and roofed with palm leaves.**
- **The city was very congested and lacked sewerage.**
- An **epidemic** had spread in the city in 1680s, the effects of which can be seen in the 18th century as well.
- As European factories were set up in Surat, artisans and weavers from the adjacent regions often migrated in the city, thus leading **to the rise of suburbs** of the urban centre.
- The city was **facing water crisis.**
- The city was often **not cleaned and there was water logging** during the rainy season, resulting in unhealthy conditions of living.

Decline of Surat in the 18th Century

- The decline of Surat's prosperity cannot be attributed to a single factor.
- A series of factors, not only at indigenous level but also in international scenario led to the decline of Surat.

Factors of the Decline of Surat

- One of the most important reasons being the simultaneous weakening and collapse of three powers of Asia – **the Safavids, the Ottomans and the Mughals.**
- The economy of Surat was heavily dependent on the trade between the West Asia and Gujarat.
- With the **decline of economy in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea**, the economy of Surat also got affected.

- **With the decline of the Mughal nobility the trade in luxury items also experienced a downfall.**
- With the decline of the Mughals, the administrative system devised by the Mughals also collapsed; this affected the flow of the city revenues.
- **The most serious challenge faced by Surat was from the Marathas.**
- In his continuous strikes against the Mughals, **Shivaji attacked Surat in 1644.**
- The Maratha leader left the city in ruins and shambles.
- He had plundered around two and half millions of rupees, gold, silver, pearls, rubies, diamonds, rubies and other precious stones from the houses of the rich merchants and traders.
- The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb was furious at the incapability of the Mughal governor in defending the city and ordered to fortify the city.
- As a token of appreciation for the courage shown by the Europeans in defending the city, he remitted a part of the custom duties for them.
- The Marathas sacked Surat **again in 1670.**
- The Marathas plundered houses and *sarais*, burnt down half of the town and retreated after two days carrying enormous amount of wealth.
- **Streynsham Master**, an English stationed at Surat, claimed, ‘No sooner Sevagy was gone but the poor people of Surat fell on plundering what was left, in so much that there was not a house, great or small...which was not ransacked.’
- The **growth of Bombay** also proved detrimental to the recovery of Surat’s economy.
- Till 1673, the ships from Europe mostly anchored in Surat.
- **With the shift of English headquarter to Bombay in 1687, the chief seat of English trade was shifted to Bombay.**
- Moreover, **the port of Surat was also silting** and Bombay with its natural harbour presented the better alternative location for the trade and commerce.
- **Moreover, Bombay under the British, offered political stability.**