CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the study of urban geography towns occupy a place of great significance because of their role in the political, social and economic life of people. In a country like India, having long history, towns have undergone vast changes with the passage of time. As a result of which, towns and cities – as we find them today – bear marks of past civilisation.

This study of towns of North India during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries covers a period of one hundred years from 1556 to 1658 A.D. This period is recognised for its political peace and social tranquility and cultural grace, which led to sustained urbanization. Urban centres sprang up during this period of Mughal supremacy especially in Northern India comprising of important subahs of Bengal, Bihar, Allahabad, Awadh, Agra, Malwa, Dandes, Gujarat, Ajmer, Delhi, Lahore and Multan (Fig.I).

Muslim Rulers of Medieval Period were used to an urban sort of life. Extensive studies in the fields of political science, sociology, history and culture have
been done on the Great Mughals but very little work has been done to unfold the patterns of urbanisation of northern India during their regime. Urbanisation of northern India during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries though very rich and fascinating a subject did not attract the attention it actually deserves.

Several historical and geographical factors made urbanisation a natural rather than an accidental phenomenon. In this study an effort has been made to reconstruct the conditions and circumstances that led to an unprecedented urbanisation as a direct consequence of which the period witnessed the emergence and growth of towns and cities in the entire northern India under the Mughal Rule.

I have endeavoured to investigate into the various agricultural, commercial, industrial phenomena under the specific political and social conditions which contributed very directly to the process of urbanisation.

The whole study has been divided into seven chapters. In Chapter I the subject has been introduced and sources have been surveyed. In Chapter II geographical basis, in Chapter III economic basis of
urbanisation have been reviewed. In Chapter IV urbanisation has been viewed as an outcome of administrative, fiscal and revenue reforms of Akbar. Chapter V deals with functional classification of towns and cities. In Chapter VI some important medieval Indian towns have been examined from their morphological and various functional aspects. Chapter VII covers my conclusions of the study.

**SOURCES**

This work is based on original sources, which include various accounts of several contemporary foreign travellers and contemporary Indian writers. These sources did not contain a very systematic account of urbanisation but a substantial amount of information could be gathered by collecting and correlating information contained therein.

The foreign travellers' accounts have mainly been consulted which are available in English; and while utilising them particular care has been taken to leave out nothing which had any real importance or relevance. While accounts of travellers, that only repeated information already available in more representative accounts, have generally been ignored - some of the non-contemporary works, belonging to the period but compiled a few decades later, have also been made use of. These accounts often present a picture almost the same as given by contemporary
authors. The information so collected has been rigorously verified by comparing with the contemporary records.

The Persian sources have mainly been utilised through their translations, contemporary foreign travellers' accounts are perhaps the most important sources of the study of urbanisation in the 17th century.

A very large number of European travellers visited India during the 16th and 17th centuries. Their accounts differ in quality as well as in fullness of their description because of differing backgrounds of their authors. However, their accounts prove a perfect storehouse of information regarding matters of historical importance. Some of the travellers have left us short journals, others have left us more ambitious works and full accounts of the places they visited and supplemented the same with accounts of contemporary events. The impressions left by foreign travellers are very valuable and supply convincing evidence of various political, social and economic conditions of India. Their observations regarding India are not based on conjectures but on their first hand personal experiences.

The records of successive travellers furnish enormous material for a critical and scientific study of
the subject. The foreign records include accounts of contemporary foreign travellers and the correspondence of the employees of the English, French and Dutch companies. In order to be comprehensive, factory records, court-minutes and accounts left by missionaries have also been consulted. Amongst early 16th century travellers, the accounts of missionaries like the Jesuits and other English traders and envoys like Ralph Fitch and Thomas Roe are the most important. These cover the period up to the first half of the 17th century, while some later travellers viz. Tavernier, Bernier, Manucci and Thevenot were more enterprising than others as they had spent pretty long years in India and had acquired first hand knowledge regarding various towns and cities.

(a) **EARLY TRAVELLERS**

The accounts of missionaries are also of considerable importance and as such require a particular notice. The Portuguese entered India, quite a few years before the Mughals, and occupied some ports of India with a view to spreading Christianity in the neighbouring regions and later in the domain of the Mughals. They sent out missionaries to attain their objectives. A large number of missions visited the Mughal's courts especially under Akbar and Jahangir. The accounts of Jesuit
missions provide us with abundant information in connection with the general history of India. This source is of very great importance and consists entirely of letters and reports dispatched by the missionaries themselves from various missionary centres and the capital towns of the Mughal Empire. They were written when the missions enjoyed the favour of Akbar and Jahangir. Fathers, who resided at the Mughal courts, were men of learning and culture, and in most cases were accomplished writers too. Though quite a large number of Jesuits visited the Mughal courts, the accounts of Father Monserrate, De-Jarric and Father Guerreiro are worth noticing. These are available to us in the following books:


Father Monserrate (1580-1582 A.D.)

Father Monserrate was admitted to the society of Jesus in 1578, he was selected by Father Aguaviva to go to Agra in the first mission to the court of Akbar. Shortly after his arrival, he was appointed tutor to Murad, the second son of Akbar.

Monserrate kept a diary in which he recorded all the important events and his experience every evening. During his stay for two and a half years in India, Monserrate noted "I embraced every new experience of fact which the day's journey or events had brought before my notice, for example, the rivers, cities and countries which we saw".

Du-Jarric (1580)

Du-Jarric compiled his material into a series of continuous narrative of Jesuits missionary, commencing from the year 1580, when the first mission came to the Great Mughals till the death of Akbar in 1605. These records bring us in touch with the administrative machinery of Akbar's kingdom. Du-Jarric accounts of the mission to Akbar merits a high place amongst authorities for the history of India.
Ralph Fitch (1583-1591 A.D.)

The Voyage of Ralph Fitch to East India (Ralph Fitch, a merchant of London who visited India from 1583 to 1591) is of great interest and importance. Ralph Fitch's education, native shrewdness, his power of clear and concise, description make his accounts very valuable. He reached Fatehpur-Sikri from Golconda, and after a brief stay at Fatehpur-Sikri in 1585, he started to explore the eastern parts of India and went from Agra to Tanda and Banaras, Patna, Hugli and Chittagong. Fitch was a very shrewd observer and his accounts are based on his personal experience and observations.

John Milden Hall (1599-1606 A.D.)

Milden Hall, another English men, visited India to acquire privileges of trade for himself and for his fellow countrymen. He visited Lahore, Agra, Ajmer and has described his experiences in India.

William Hawkins (1608-1611 A.D.)

William Hawkins reached Agra in 1609. His accounts, on the whole, are reliable and give us first hand information about the places visited by him. He had close contacts with the kings, the officials and the
nobles of the court. His accounts regarding description of the chief cities of the Mughal Empire are very interesting and are of great importance.

**William Finch (1608-1611 A.D.)**

William Finch was a fellow merchant of William Howkins. He landed with him at Surat on August 3, 1608. He toured widely and passed through different regions. Finch has fully related his experience at Surat. He visited Agra, Delhi, Ambala and Sultanpur. He has carefully recorded the details of his journey describing the extents of the country. It is one of the most valuable contributions to our knowledge about the Mughal Empire of the early 17th century.

**Thomas Coryat (1612-1617 A.D.)**

Thomas Coryat was the first Englishmen who travelled through India with no intention of trade but was inspired to see this strange country and to write a book based on his experience. In India, he visited Multan, Lahore, Delhi, Agra, Ajmer, Mandu, Hardwar and Kangra. He remained in Agra for about fourteen months. Coryat had the rare natural gift of observation. He has narrated fully and accurately what he saw, including
many small details which other travellers have just passed over as unworthy of notice. It is unfortunate that only a few letters written by him from India have survived till date.

Nicholas Withington (1612–1616 A.D.)

Nicholas Withington visited Surat, Ahmadabad, Cambay, Thatta and Agra, and found interesting things which he related in the Journals. He has thrown much light on commerce and trade, trade-routes and administration. He has offered a vivid description of some cities also. He wrote whatever was essential as he had to deal with the masses. His work is quite reliable.

Francisco Pelsaert (1620–1627 A.D.)

Francisco Pelsaert was a Dutchman, and an employee of Dutch East India Company. In 1620 he was posted in India and reached Agra via Surat, where he remained for about seven years. His work is primarily a commercial document but it also gives a detailed account of the social and administrative environment under which commerce had to be conducted. He gives a vivid description of Agra city and the development of commerce and trade of different provinces – particularly of Bengal, Agra, Lahore, and Burhanpur. His description of various
places appears to be based on his personal observations. He visited different towns and examined them minutely.

Joennes De-Laet

De-Laet has used the material of Pelsaert and other foreign travellers. His work is a complete Gazetteer of Jahangir's India, and gives us a detailed and reliable account of various towns, their splendour, administration, trade-routes, articles of trade and production.

Peter Mundy (1626-1634 A.D.)

Peter Mundy was one of the most remarkable travellers of England. He was selected for the service of the East India Company in 1627. The account of Peter Mundy is full of interest, noting and commenting on every thing that attracted his attention. He gives a detailed account of the routes, towns and caravansaries through which he passed during his journey. His description of Agra, Fatehpur-Sikri, Burhanpur, Patna, Banaras, Ajmer and Surat etc. is very valuable. He also gives a vivid and picturesque description of the markets, offices, public buildings and houses.
Fray Sebastien Manrique (1628-1643 A.D.)

He was attached to Bengal from 1629 to 1637. Manrique gives a fanciful account of Agra and other towns in its vicinity. His account is both interesting and useful.

(b) LATER TRAVELLERS

John Boptiste Tavernier (1631-1668 A.D.)

Tavernier is known as one of the most renowned travellers of the 17th century and a pioneer in the field of trade with India.

The account of Tavernier is the most authoritative work regarding the commercial history of different towns and provinces, their mineral resources and forces at work in the economic life of the country. His observations and judgements, which were confined to matters of commerce, industries and trade are most reliable. Tavernier visited all the important towns of the country like Agra, Delhi, Burhanpur, Lahore, Surat and Cambay. His work consists of his observations on the towns and cities, the contemporary conditions of trade, high ways, administration of the towns, security of travel and his occasional comments on the social and
economic life of his period. His records immensely help us in identifying the small towns and other urban centres which are not otherwise traceable.

**Francois Bernier (1656-1668 A.D.)**

Bernier was a physician, and a man of superior education with a keen eye for things which interested him. He was attracted by the desire of seeing the world. During his stay in India he visited a large number of places like Surat, Ahmadabad, Lahore, Agra, Delhi etc. Bernier's "travels in the Mughal Empire" is a celebrated work and a first class authority for the study of social life in the second half of the 17th century.

**Niccolao Manucci Yenetein (1653-1708 A.D.)**

Manucci was an Italian traveller. He visited a large number of towns and travelled through Burhanpur, Agra, Delhi. While he was entrusted with an expedition eastwards, he travelled through Patna and Hugli. Regarding towns he gives us abundant and varied details. His account is extremely vivacious. Manucci's detailed description of the various towns, about their general appearance, commerce, industry and administration is based on his personal visits, observations and experiences.
Jeen- De Thevenot (1667 A.D.)

Thevenot was a French gentleman, his natural curiosity attracted him to India. Thevenot remained only for a year in India, but he visited a large number of places, and in such a short stay he studied the life and conditions of the people in this country. Thevenot has recorded from his personal experience, the roads he traversed and towns and ports he visited. He noted their administration also.

(c) ACCOUNTS OF INDIAN WRITERS

The information on the present subject from the Indian writers is mainly derived from general histories, statistical, administrative and institutional accounts. This information is generally available from the conventional Indo-Persian histories and from administrative manuals and records. ((1) Dutch Records at the Hague, First Series, collected by C. Danvers, Vol.I, VIII, I.O.L. 6.1.; (2) Orme, R., The Historical Fragments of the Mughal Empire, London 1983).

In addition to these autobiographies, biographies, topographical accounts, archaeological survey reports, gazetteer and some other material has also been fully
utilized. Contemporary historical records such as Babar Nama, Humayun Nama, Tabaqat-i-Jahangiri, Akbar Nama, Tabaqat-i-Akbari, Muntakhibat-Tawarikh and Massir-i-Alamgiri are major sources of information. Imperial Gazetteer, Vol.V.IX.XI. is also a valuable document for this purpose.

Most of the Indian historians recorded political events centring around king's nobles and high officials of state. Persian chronicles are mainly concerned, excepting a few, with wars, conquests, revolutions etc. Accounts regarding the observations of the court, the jewels, swords, drums, standards, elephants etc. bestowed upon the dignitaries of the Empire are recorded therein.

Among other sources may be mentioned the invaluable Ain-i-Akbari, Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh etc. The most useful source for this study is the Ain-i-Akbari, which is a mine of a vast variety of information and contains the most systematic account of towns, their character, growth, trade, industries, and administration. Ain-i-Akbari is one of the greatest works and stands unique amongst the Muhammadan histories of India.