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MEDIAEVAL INADIA: TOWNS, TRADERS AND CRAFTPERSON

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ABSTRACT

The time period that is collectively referred to as "mediaeval India" covers a sizeable section of the timeline of Indian history. The phrase "Middle Ages India" is the one that is most frequently utilised to refer to this time period. It spans thousands of years, from the time when India was ancient to the present day, and it encompasses both periods. In the chronicles of Indian history, the beginning of the mediaeval period is marked by the fall of the Gupta Empire in the sixth century after Christ and the commencement of the Mughal Empire in 1526. These events reflect, respectively, the beginning and the conclusion of the mediaeval period. A number of important occurrences took occurred in India during the time period that is classified as the Middle Ages in the West. It is easy to separate the totality of India's Middle Ages into a variety of different time periods while looking at its history. Ancient India and Mediaeval India are two extremely diverse eras in Indian history, both having significant distinctions between them. People have a propensity to define "mediaeval India" in a number of various ways, but there is only one true definition. During the time that is now referred to as the "Middle Ages," Europe was home to a wide range of cities, some of which acted as governmental hubs, while others were commercial, industrial, or artisanal manufacturing centres, and yet others were temple towns.

KEY WORDS: Mediaeval India, History, Culture, Trading, Ancient

INTRODUCTION

The Ancient Indian Period, the Indian Mediaeval Period, and the Indian Modern Period are considered to be the three most significant historical periods in the annals of Indian history. The middle ages provide the setting for two of the three, both of which take place in India. As a direct result of this, a significant number of people's perspectives on the world and the way they live their lives have shifted significantly. Because the Pope and the Church had such a powerful position in society at the time, independent ways of thinking were frowned upon and thought inappropriate. When it was first formed, the Indo-Islamic style was the substitute that emerged in the field of art. This style is now recognised by its full name: the Indo-Islamic style. Instrumental music was thought of and started to form as a direct result of the rulers of that era allowing music to grow and develop. This allowed for the

development of instrumental music. The most well-known musicians who were active during that time period are Amir Khusrau, Baz Bahadur, and Rupamathi, who was married to Baz Bahadur. Due to the fact that the people held the religious leaders in the highest respect, they did not question the orders that the religious authorities gave them. The Crusades, which were wars waged between Christians and Muslims for religious and cultural differences, had a profound influence on the development of history in Europe. These wars took place between 1095 and 1291.

India's culture and history spans a substantial amount of time, counting in the hundreds of years. People frequently use the phrase "land of unity in diversity" to describe India when they are attempting to convey their impressions of the nation. This is due to the existence of highly advanced societies in ancient India, such as the Mauryan, Indus valley, and Guptas civilizations, among others. Because of it, we have a lengthy and distinguished history, which is something of which we may be justifiably proud. After the fall of the Gupta Empire in the late 500s, India did not emerge from its mediaeval period until the formation of the Mughal Empire in 1526. During this time, India was entirely immersed in its mediaeval period. India saw a cultural and literary renaissance known as the Golden Age at the time that the Gupta Empire governed most of northern India. This period of time is known as "Golden Age." A rift appeared in the political landscape of India as a direct result of the collapse. Over the course of a thousand years, several Indian dynasties engaged in bloody conflict with one another in an effort to seize control of the country. Islam and Hinduism both gained devotees in India throughout the second part of this millennium, which contributed to the fall of Buddhism in that region. Together, adherents of these two faiths constitute the overwhelming majority of followers of religious practise across the whole Indian subcontinent at the present moment. During the sixteenth century, the Mughal Empire retained authority over a significant area of India; yet, the British were ultimately successful in bringing about their downfall.

The following is a timeline that describes the rise and fall of India's mediaeval kingdoms in chronological order: Around the year 500 A.D., the Huns conquered the territory to the north, which led to the collapse of the Gupta Empire. Around the year 730 A.D., the Gurjara-Pratihara Dynasty took control of a significant portion of northern India. Around the year 800 A.D., the Rashtrakuta Dynasty develops to prominence in the southern region, while the Pala Empire grows to prominence in the northern region around the year 1010 A.D. By the year 1050 A.D., the power of Lakshmikarna of Tripuri had been entrenched over the majority of northern India. In the year 1206 A.D., the Delhi Sultanate came into existence and quickly expanded its dominance over most of India. A Muslim invasion that came from the south was successfully repulsed by the Vijayanagara Empire in the year 1336 A.D. In 1526 A.D., the capital city of Delhi was conquered by the Mughal Empire, which went on to control most of India.

TOWNS IN MEDIAEVAL INDIA

"Thanjavur, Vijayanagar, Calicut, Agra, Cochin, Bijapur, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore, Patna, Shahjahanabad (Delhi), Madurai, Hampi, Surat, Somnath, Kanchipuram, Ajmer, and Masulipattanam" were some of the most important towns in India throughout the Middle Ages. These towns were all located in the Indian subcontinent. However, in addition to those cities, there were a considerable number of others that were noteworthy because of the roles that they played as administrative hubs, pilgrimage destinations, or religious centres. A city or other physical area that acted as the nerve centre from which all other administrative tasks were directed is referred to as a central administrative hub. This might be the case in some organisations. Thanjavur, which is located in what is now the state of Tamil Nadu, was the capital of India during the mediaeval era and an important trade location along the Kaveri

River. Today, Tamil Nadu is home to the city of Thanjavur. In addition, the Chola Dynasty made Thanjavur their capital city throughout their time in power. Thanjavur was respected as a sacred city and was home to a number of notable temples. In addition to its function as the centre of governance, Thanjavur was also known for its rich history. Thanjavur is home to the well-known temple complex known as the Rajarajeshwara Temple. It was Rajaraja Chola himself who was in charge of the construction of the temple. Pavilions in the city of Thanjavur served a range of functions, such as royal courts and military barracks, at various times in its history. The labour of a group of people who were known as the Saliya Weavers had a sizeable amount of impact on the textile industry that existed under the Chola dynasty. This organisation may trace its roots back to the cities of Thanjavur and Uraiyur. Weavers from the Saliya tribe manufactured fabric for temple flags, fine cotton clothes for monarchs, and coarse cotton clothing for commoners. The kings wore the elegant attire. Svamimalai was the name of the town that the sculptors, who were also referred to as Sthapatis, called home. Svamimalai is located close to Thanjavur. It is believed that the ancient people known as the Sthapatis were the first people to cast bronze bells, decorations, and idols. During the Chola Dynasty, a method referred to as "lost wax" was used to manufacture bronze figures and bell-shaped metal lamps. This method included melting wax and combining it with clay in order to create the desired effect. During the time when it functioned as a centre of business, Thanjavur served as an important centre for economic activity and transportation, facilitating the exchange of goods like as spices, wheat, clothing, and jewellery. Because of its strategic location, this city functioned as the epicentre of the Chola Dynasty's political, administrative, and commercial activity. The Administration Building got the vast bulk of its water supply from its on-site wells and storage tanks. The central administration was in charge of coordinating the transportation of various works of art to the several communities that were dispersed across the region.

In addition to Thanjavur, there were several more temple cities in India throughout the mediaeval period. Bhillasvamin, Somnath, Kanchipuram, and Madurai are just a few instances among many others. Temples were built all across the region by the many kings and rulers as a sign of their devotion and allegiance to their own deities. They would also provide land, money, and other resources to the temples so that the temples could host regular religious services, festivities, and celebrations. This allowed the temples to fulfil their mission. The strategic importance of the temples to the advancement of the national economy and social order cannot be overstated. The temples received direct support from the emperors, and over the course of time, they accumulated enormous quantities of money from the contributions of an extremely large number of worshippers and visitors. The management of the temple used those funds to engage in commercial and banking activities. As a result of the vast scope of the economic growth, a great number of priests, craftsmen, artists, merchants, and labourers migrated to the temple areas. This was done for a variety of reasons. Consequently, this led to the growth and development of temple cities. The temple towns were representations of development and civilised behaviour over the entirety of the dynasty or kingdom. The residents of the dynasty displayed their wealth, ease of life, and luxury for all to see. Hubs for pilgrimage arose and flourished in India's major centres during the mediaeval period. In mediaeval India, the cities of Vrindavan, Tiruvannamalai, and Ajmer were considered to be the most important pilgrimage destinations. The town of Ajmer is particularly notable for being a model of peaceful cohabitation across a variety of religious traditions. First for the Chauhan Dynasty, and then for the Mughal Dynasty after that, it was the seat of authority in their respective dynasties. The well-known Sufi Saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, who finally made his home in Ajmer, had a significant role in elevating the city to the rank of a pilgrimage destination by attracting adherents from a wide variety of religious traditions to his teachings. Pushkar, a lake located not too far from Ajmer, attracted

a significant number of tourists as well. The capital of the Vijayanagar Empire was located in the ancient city of Hampi. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the city of Hampi, which is situated in the Krishna-Tungabhadra Basin, served as the epicentre of a prosperous cultural and economic economy. It was well known for the many blooming cultural and religious events that took place there, and it was surrounded by beautiful sculptures, buildings, and domes. During the 17th century, Surat was an important stop along the path that western merchants and pilgrims used on their way to Mecca. There were various textile mills and warehouses owned by foreign companies there. The value of it was lessened as a result of the Portuguese obtaining control of its maritime channels. Masulipatnam was the most significant trade post for Dutch merchants who dealt in textiles, spices, and artwork during the mediaeval times. Dutch and English merchants departed Masulipatnam when it was conquered by the Mughals in the 17th century. They went to Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta in pursuit of better business opportunities, which hastened the decline of Masulipatnam's monopoly trading empire.

TRADERS IN MEDIAEVAL INDIA

The expansion of business and trade throughout the Middle Ages may be directly attributed to the advancements that were made in agricultural practises during that time period. During this historical period, weaving and other forms of handicraft also achieved significant advances in terms of their overall growth. During the mediaeval years, India was a popular destination for merchants from all over the world. These merchants came from places such as China, Arabia, Portugal, the Netherlands, England, and France. These entrepreneurs hailing from India amassed a fortune by marketing products created in India to consumers in other countries. The rest of the world had an unquenchable need for Indian products such as spices, textiles, leather, stones, sandalwood, metals, pearls, and ivory. A significant number of people travelled to India with the purpose of engaging in commerce related to these goods once they were there. There is a wide range of perspectives among historians concerning the state of the economy, in particular with regard to the scope of trade and commerce that existed throughout this time period. Some people think that we are presently living in a period of decline and stagnation, and as proof, they point to the elimination of towns and the expansion of localism and regionalism. Others say that we have been living in a period of decline and stagnation for quite some time. Because gold coins did not enter circulation until the eleventh century, this is something that can be deduced from that fact alone. It was traditionally believed that the fall of the Roman Empire would have a substantial impact on India's ability to participate in international trade; however, more recent research indicates that this was not the case. The fall of the Roman Empire resulted in the establishment of two major empires: the Byzantine Empire, which had its capital in Constantinople and ruled over the majority of what is now known as Eastern Europe and Western Asia; and the Sassanid Empire, which had its capital in what is now known as Iran. Both of these empires lasted for hundreds of years after the fall of the Roman Empire. It was a huge quantity of business that took place while these two countries, together with India, were trading with one another.

The decline in Northern Indian trade and commerce during the seventh and eleventh centuries was a contributing factor in the disappearance of urban centres and the decline of religious life in the region. Because of a decline in trade and commerce brought on by the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West and the Iranian Empire in the Middle East, North India had a severe lack of gold and silver currency from the seventh to the tenth centuries. This was owing to the fact that the Roman Empire had fallen in the West and the Iranian Empire had collapsed in the Middle East. The rise of an expansive Arab empire in West Asia and Africa brought about a slow but continuous alteration in the situation in northern India. This was due to the fact that the Arab empire expanded its territory. Northern India, notably

Gujarat and Malwa, reaped the benefits of a steady revival of trade and commerce beginning in the 10th century and continuing onward. This was made possible by the advent of maritime Arabs who dealt in Indian textiles, spices, and incenses in return for gold. Gujarat and Malwa particularly benefitted from this development. It was common practise for anyone desiring to travel to Southeast Asia to depart from the port of Tamralipti, which is located in Bengal. The Palas and Senas of Bengal, in addition to the Pallavas and Cholas of the Southern region, were big supporters of commercial activity in the east. The Chola Empire's first ruler, Rajendra I, sent a naval expedition to Sumatra so that they could attack the Sailendra monarchs and compel them to cease interfering with trade with China. Additionally, he sent a representative to Beijing in the capacity of ambassador. Economic growth occurred in Bengal and southern India as a result of this change because, despite a decline in trade with the west, commerce with Southeast Asia increased steadily until the 12th century. Vastupal and Tejpal, who served as ministers for the Chalukya of Gujarat, were also two of the most successful businesspeople in human history.

CRAFTPERSONS IN MEDIAEVAL INDIA

Skilled artisans from all across the subcontinent made significant contributions to the development of Indian handicrafts in the decades that followed the fall of the Gupta dynasty, which marked the beginning of the mediaeval period in India. This event also indicated the beginning of the Islamic period in India. These endeavours contributed to laying the groundwork for the subsequent modernisation of Indian handicrafts. When it comes up in discussions about the history of Indian handicrafts, this time period is the one that is referred to as the "Mediaeval Indian Craft" time period. As a result of the contributions to Indian culture that subsequent dynasties gave to Indian culture in the shape of new handicrafts, India prospered in terms of the amount and diversity of handicrafts that it generated. This was a direct result of India's cultural revolution. After that, throughout the course of time, these newly produced handicrafts were developed further and improved. Candidates for the UPSC who are interested in knowing more about the artisans and master craftsmen who worked during the mediaeval period will benefit from reading this article. The article focuses on their work throughout that time period. The influence of previous empires may be seen in the works of art and craft that are created in each of India's states. During the era that is now referred to as the Mediaeval period of Indian Craft, a number of important kingdoms rose to power, and each of these kingdoms made a distinctive contribution to the development of Indian craft. It is widely acknowledged that the Chola dynasty, which originated in southern India, was one of the most influential in the history of Indian art and architecture. Both in terms of its beauty and its technological applications, the use of bronze throughout the Chola period represented a continuance of the Andhra culture's legacy. The Cholas were especially fond of the lost-wax process, which is generally used in the manufacture of Indian bronzes. This method involves melting down wax and casting the resulting bronze. There is not a shred of doubt in my mind that this was without a doubt one of the most remarkable instances of Indian Craft from the Middle Ages. The Cholas and the Vijayanagar Empire each contributed new levels of expertise to a number of different creative fields, including as bronze work, silk weaving, jewellery design, and temple sculpture. Because it represented both the beginning of the universe and its ultimate end, the enormous statue of Shiva-Nataraja doing his cosmic dance was an important example of Mediaeval Indian craft. This was due to the fact that it symbolised both the creation and the end of the cosmos. The Chalukya Empire was home to some of the most breathtaking works of art that have ever been sculpted out of hard rock in the annals of humankind's exploration of the earth. This culture was preserved by dynasties like as the Rashtrakuta and the Pallava, and it was handed down from generation to generation. The arrival of Islam in India coincided with the

beginning of the era known as orientalism. Before the arrival of the Mughals in the 16th century, a number of Muslim conquerors, the most notable of which was Mahmud of Ghazni, the Tughlaqs, the Sharqis, and the Lodhis, made brief appearances on the historical stage of India. Their impact may be seen in the art created during that time period. Mughal painters combined the aesthetics of Turko-Mongolic, Persian, European, and Indian cultures around the beginning of the 16th century. The combination of a variety of aesthetics served only to enrich the workmanship of mediaeval India. The period of Akbar's reign is regarded as the "Golden Age" of Indian handicraft that flourished during the Middle Ages. The practise fostered the development of one's unique identity while also being accepted as a valid form of artistic expression. During this historical period, European realism arose as a result of a confluence of the decorativeness of Persian art with the vivacity of Rajasthani art. During this historical period, the Mughals were responsible for the extensive distribution of marble sculptures. It is well known that mural painting was included into the design of the Sultanate of Delhi's royal palaces, royal apartments, and mosques. Plants, flowers, and leaves are the subjects that come up most frequently. There are mentions of works of art that were produced during the reign of Iltutmish (1210–1236). Wall murals, miniature paintings (of painted manuscripts), and textile paintings have been discovered that date back to the time of Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316). The influence of both Persian and Arabic art may be seen strongly in Indian artwork. The art of miniature painting had a surge in popularity in the 14th and 15th centuries after the Common Era in Gujarat and Rajasthan. This popularity subsequently expanded across the rest of Western, Northern, and Eastern India as the history of the planet. By ensuring that it was passed down through the generations, dynasties such as the Rashtrakuta and the Pallava were among those that contributed to the tradition's continued existence.

CONCLUSION

A number of cities in mediaeval India rose to prominence before falling into disrepair. The majority of cities were categorised as an administrative hub, a temple town, or a pilgrimage town according to their geographic position, population, cultural makeup, and economic standing. The majority of mediaeval India's main urban centres were situated in what is now southern India; the physical differences between the urban centres of modern-day north, east, and west India ultimately contributed to their downfall. The majority of mediaeval India's major urban centres were located in what is now southern India. On the other hand, if we examine the city layouts from the mediaeval period, we can find that India was actually rather technologically proficient and advanced for its time. India's degree of commercial engagement with the west, Southeast Asia, and China gradually rose over the course of time as a result of all of these numerous variables. South India, Bengal, and Gujarat were the states that were the first to pioneer this type of commerce, and it was one of the key contributions to the overall economic expansion of those regions. In addition to the money that is made through agriculture, rural villages in India also make a significant amount of money off of the handicrafts that are produced by the artisans and crafters in those areas. Talented artisans were the driving force behind the extraordinary success that was achieved in a wide range of creative pursuits during the rule of the Delhi Sultanate. These artistic endeavours included, amongst others, ceramics, weaving, woodcarving, metalwork, and jewellery production. During the time of the Mughal Empire, two of the most well-known methods for designing and crafting jewels were known as Bidriware and Meenakari. The initial appearance of Western influences in Indian artwork may be traced back to the beginning of the modern or contemporary age, which coincided with the colonial period. This was also the time when Europeans first began to colonise India.

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