MHI-111
Urbanisation in India-2 (*c.*1300-1950)

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By: *Kshyama Sagar Meher*

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$\mathcal{C}$ontent

URBANISATION IN INDIA-2
(*c.* 1300-1950)

S.No.	*Chapterwise Reference Book*	*Page*

BLOCK-1: INTRODUCTION TO URBAN HISTORY

BLOCK-2: PATTERNS OF URBANISATION *C.* 1300-1600

BLOCK-3: PATTERNS OF URBANISATION IN MUGHAL INDIA

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Sample

QUESTION PAPER - 1

(Solved)

URBANISATION IN INDIA-2
(C. 1300-1950)

MHI-111

Time: 3 Hours]   **[Maximum Marks : 100**

Note: *Answer any **five** of the following questions. All questions carry **equal** marks.*

Q. 1. Examine Mohammad Habib's argument of 'urban revolution' in the 13th-14th centuries.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 5, Q. No. 4.

Q. 2. 'Urban and modern are closely linked'. Comment on this statement.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 11, Q. No. 2.

Q. 3. Discuss the process of urbanisation under the Delhi Sultans.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 20, Q. No. 3.

Q. 4. 'The new capital cities that developed in the 14-15th centuries were benefited by the decline of the Delhi Sultanate.' Comment.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 26, Q. No. 1.

Q. 5.Write short notes on the following:

(a) **Middle Class**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 70, 'Middle Class'.

(b) **Agra**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 76, 'Agra'.

(c) **Ajmer**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 82, 'Ajmer'.

(d) **Bijapur**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 65, 'Bijapur'.

Q. 6. What was the impact of Masulipatnam's geological terrain on water, health and the city dwellings?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-14, Page No. 89, Q. No. 2.

Q. 7. Spell out salient features of coastal towns which served the politico-economic purposes of indigenous principalities.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 95, Q. No. 3.

Q. 8. Examine the growth of the city of Surat in the 17th-18th centuries. What was the pattern of urban social order of Surat?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-16, Page No. 101, Q. No. 2.

Q. 9. In what ways did the Europeans facilitate the economic survival of Dacca in the eighteenth century?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 109, Q. No. 2.

Q. 10.Write short notes on the following:

(a) **Hyderabad**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-18, Page No. 113, 'Hyderabad'.

(b) **Bombay**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-22, Page No. 139, 'Bombay (Mumbai)'.

(c) **Elite City Spaces**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-24, Page No. 150, 'Elite City Spaces'.

(d) **Hill Stations**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-21, Page No. 134, 'Hill Stations'.

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Sample

QUESTION PAPER - 2

(Solved)

URBANISATION IN INDIA-2
(C. 1300-1950)

MHI-111

Time: 3 Hours] [*Maximum Marks : 100*

Note: Answer any **five** of the following questions. All questions carry **equal** marks.

Q. 1. What were the features of medieval towns? Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 20, Q. No. 4.

Q. 2. Discuss the characteristics of capital cities developed during the 14-15th centuries.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 26, Q. No. 2.

Q. 3. Discuss the various theories that have been put forward by scholars who have analysed the modernity.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 11, Q. No. 3.

Q. 4. How are medieval cities of the subcontinent viewed by scholars?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 5, Q. No. 5.

Q. 5. Write short notes on the following:

(a) **Golconda**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 65, 'Golconda'

(b) **Banaras**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 82, 'Banaras'.

(c) **Fatehpur/Fatehpur Sikri**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 76, 'Fatehpur/Fatehpur Sikri'.

(d) **Courtly Culture**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 70, 'Courtly Culture'.

Q. 6. Comment upon the responses of merchants and trading communities towards the process of urbanisation in regional polities.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 96, Q. No. 4.

Q. 7. Discuss the contribution of Indian and European merchants in the rise and growth of the city of Surat.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-16, Page No. 101, Q. No. 3.

Q. 8. Discuss the synthesis of trade and culture in eighteenth century Patna.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 109, Q. No. 3.

Q. 9. Trace the prominence of Portuguese in the port town of Masulipatnam in the sixteenth century.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-14, Page No. 89, Q. No. 3.

Q. 10. Write short notes on the following:

(a) **Railways and Railway Towns**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-21, Page No. 134, 'Railways and Railway Towns'.

(b) **Madras**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-22, Page No. 139, 'Madras (Chennai)'.

(c) **Lived Cities**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-24, Page No. 151, 'Lived Cites'.

(d) **Poona**

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-18, Page No. 113, 'Poona'. ∎∎

URBANISATION IN INDIA-2 (*c.* 1300-1950)

Approaches to the Study of Medieval Urbanisation | ① 1

INTRODUCTION

Cities reflect economic growth and social change, varying across historical periods and regional contexts. Though terms like 'city' and 'town' are often used interchangeably, historians recognize their evolving meanings shaped by socio-economic processes. Urban centres are dynamic, constantly reflecting larger societal changes and serving as microcosms of broader systems. This perspective sees cities as concentrated forms of social relations, intensifying societal properties. Consequently, cities of the medieval period differ significantly from ancient and modern cities, each shaped by distinct socio-economic systems. The perception of cities as mirrors of societal processes highlights their transformation over time.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

IDEA OF MEDIEVAL CITIES IN EUROPE

Historians and sociologists view cities as indicators of economic growth and explore urban processes that shaped society. Max Weber highlighted medieval Western cities as centres of production, contrasting them with consumption-oriented ancient cities. These medieval cities enabled capitalism's rise by prioritising producers and traders while challenging feudal power. Burghers, through associations, usurped authority and fostered autonomy, trade and rational economic action, which Weber argued developed the "work ethic."

Henry Pirenne emphasised medieval cities and long-distance trade as transformative forces, while Maurice Dobb viewed their rise as internal to feudalism, weakening it by fostering petty production and exchange. Cities became havens for the oppressed rural populace. Henri Pirenne classified medieval towns as political (Liege type) and economic (Flemish type), while Fernand Braudel identified open, closed and subject towns, each shaping power dynamics and freedom.

Modern urban spaces differ through planned cities, complex labour divisions and industrial capitalism's structures. Recent studies, influenced by Foucault and Lefebvre, analyse cities as cultural constructs and spatial entities imbued with power dynamics. Historical geographers emphasise the intentional shaping of urban spaces to reflect control and human agency. Urbanisation studies focus on population, social organisation, environment and technology, revealing cities' evolving structures and societal transformations.

PERCEPTIONS ON MEDIEVAL INDIAN CITIES

The academic debate on medieval Indian cities began with Mohammed Habib, who argued that Muhammad Ghori's conquest triggered an "urban revolution" in North India. He attributed this to political conquest, which integrated depressed-caste workers into towns for military and manufacturing roles, providing them upward mobility through Islam. In contrast, Irfan Habib challenged this view, attributing urban expansion to technological innovations, monetary flow, and land revenue systems rather than societal "liberation," emphasising the role of unfree labour in production.

B.D. Chattopadhyaya traced medieval towns' origins to trade, highlighting urbanisation in regions like Gujarat and Rajasthan during the ninth to eleventh centuries. Meanwhile, R. Champakalakshmi focused on Chola and Vijayanagara towns in South India, emphasising their diversity – mercantile, royal, ceremonial and fortified towns stimulated by external trade and temple economies.

Scholars like Shireen Moosvi explored urban taxation under the Mughals, identifying Gujarat as the most urbanised region. Stephen Blake viewed Shahjahanabad as a "sovereign city," embodying the

emperor's cosmic authority. Contributions by historians such as Satish Chandra, Indu Banga, and K.S. Mathew further enriched urban studies, examining economic, political, and cultural dynamics of medieval towns across regions, ports, and ruling systems.

THE IDEA OF MEDIEVAL URBANISM

Urbanism in the medieval period was highly influenced by polity, society and trade.

Commercially and Politically Charged Urbanism

During medieval and early modern India, two types of urbanism emerged: commercially charged urbanism in trade hubs like Patna, Ahmedabad, and Ujjain, driven by economic forces, and politically charged urbanism in centres like Delhi and Agra, shaped by power dynamics. The two often intersected as commerce and politics were intertwined. The revival of trade and the influence of Islamic culture intensified urbanisation, particularly through increased textile demand driven by Islamic customs. Islamic enclaves became hubs for weavers and artisans, furthering town growth. The iqtadari system also accelerated urbanisation by channeling agrarian surplus into emerging urban centres.

Urbanism and Sufi and Bhakti Spaces

During the 15th and 16th centuries, Sufism and Bhakti movements became pivotal for artisans seeking social acceptance in urban towns. These movements offered spiritual, social and psychological support, fostering urban cohesion. Saints like Kabir and Dadu integrated artisan metaphors, legitimising work culture and uplifting artisan self-pride. Sufi saints also promoted urbanisation by attracting devotees to remote areas, transforming them into towns, as seen in Sylhet. Bhakti and Sufi ideologies mobilised artisans, reduced rural elite control and shaped urban spaces. Cities like Benares, Ahmedabad and Panipat emerged as artisan hubs, blending religious values with evolving urban culture and economy.

Poliscracy

From the sixteenth century, Mughals and Portuguese established towns to mobilise resources, integrate regions and consolidate power. The Mughals' poliscracy relied on towns for governance, resource extraction and political consolidation. Akbar pioneered this model, founding and transforming key cities like Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Lahore, aligning capitals with conquests to secure resources and quell rebellion. Urban centres thrived as power bases and hubs for economic activity, supported by intermediaries under the mansabdari system. Luxury goods production, such as textiles, surged, bolstered by Akbar's technological innovations. Ports like Surat and Bengal facilitated trade, connecting hinterlands with global markets. Frequent capital shifts spurred urbanization, creating secondary towns and enhancing rural-urban integration. The growing consumption by nobles fueled economic dynamism, while urban markets expanded through technological advancements and trade routes like the Grand Trunk Road. The poliscratic approach intertwined governance, economy and urbanisation in sustaining Mughal power.

Portuguese Cities: Polisgarchic

The Portuguese used cities as economic tools to extract wealth from India's hinterlands, contrasting with the Mughal approach of wealth circulation within the country. They established a chain of towns along the west coast, such as Goa and Cochin, which became core centers for extraction and governance. Wealth generated from these towns, including customs duties, was transferred to Europe. Goa, as the power center, imposed strict cultural homogeneity, while distant towns like Diu exhibited cultural inclusivity. Private Portuguese traders developed independent mercantile towns along India's eastern coast, but these were eventually integrated into the 'polisgarchic' system through religious institutions. Despite resistance, this urban strategy reflected Portuguese imperial priorities of maximising profit and controlling local resources, distinct from Mughal policies.

'CITY STATES'

Calicut and Cochin in medieval India functioned as city-states, akin to Venice and Florence in Italy or Hanseatic cities in Europe. Emerging from intensified maritime trade, these port-cities became power hubs, with rulers like the Samoothiri (Zamorin) of Calicut and the chief of Perumpadappu Swarupam in Cochin leveraging trade wealth to control hinterlands. While European city-states were merchant-dominated, power in Indian city-states resided with political rulers who shared authority with mercantile allies. In Calicut, foreign Muslim merchants and local Mapilla Muslims oversaw trade, while Cochin relied on Jewish, Konkani and Portuguese traders as advisors and collaborators. Frequent shifts in power dynamics among these groups enriched the complexity of these city-states. Calicut's rise as a trade hub followed its ruler's relocation from an agrarian base, while Cochin's growth mirrored intensified trade post-Portuguese entry, showcasing unique interactions between maritime trade and state-building in India.

EXERCISES

Q. 1. What are the approaches to study the medieval towns?

Ans. The study of medieval towns requires a nuanced understanding of their historical, socio-economic and cultural contexts. Different scholarly perspectives highlight the dynamics of urbanisation and its transformative impact on societies. Medieval towns can be analysed through the following lenses:

(a) **Cities as Mirrors of Socio-Economic Processes:** Cities are reflections of broader societal changes, evolving with economic systems. Medieval towns significantly differed from ancient or modern cities, shaped by feudal and emergent capitalist economies. This perspective frames cities as concentrated forms of social relations, intensifying societal properties and serving as microcosms for broader systems.

(b) **The European Perspective on Medieval Cities:** Max Weber viewed medieval Western cities as centers of production that challenged feudal authority, fostering capitalism and a rational economic ethos. Henry Pirenne linked urbanization to long-distance trade, contrasting with Maurice Dobb's focus on internal feudal dynamics. Scholars like Braudel classified cities into open, closed, and subject types, reflecting diverse power dynamics. These frameworks emphasize the interplay of autonomy, trade and societal change.

(c) **Medieval Indian Urbanisation:** Mohammed Habib described an "urban revolution" triggered by political conquest, integrating marginalized communities into towns. Irfan Habib argued for technological innovations and agrarian surplus as catalysts for urban growth, emphasizing unfree labor. B.D. Chattopadhyaya highlighted trade-driven urbanization in regions like Gujarat, while Champakalakshmi emphasized diverse urban forms in South India, shaped by trade and temple economies.

(d) **Commercial and Political Urbanism:** Medieval Indian towns reflected a blend of commerce and politics. Trade hubs like Ahmedabad and Patna emerged as centers of commercially charged urbanism, while cities like Delhi embodied politically driven urbanism. The *iqtadari* system, agrarian surplus, and growing textile demand under Islamic influence intensified urbanization.

(e) **Religious and Cultural Influences:** Sufi and Bhakti movements played pivotal roles in shaping urban identities. Sufi saints fostered towns through spiritual influence, while Bhakti leaders legitimized artisan culture, promoting urban cohesion. Cities like Benares and Ahmedabad became cultural and economic hubs, blending religious values with evolving urban economies.

(f) **Mughal Urbanism: Poliscracy:** Mughals relied on urban centers for governance, resource mobilization, and political consolidation. Akbar's city-building initiatives like Agra and Fatehpur Sikri exemplified this approach. Urban centers thrived as economic bases, fueled by luxury goods production and technological advancements, with ports like Surat connecting hinterlands to global trade networks.

(g) **Portuguese Urban Strategies: Polisgarchic:** The Portuguese used cities for wealth extraction, establishing towns like Goa and Cochin along India's west coast. Their urban strategies focused on economic dominance and cultural homogeneity, distinct from the Mughal approach of wealth circulation.

(h) **City-States in India:** Port cities like Calicut and Cochin functioned as city-states akin to Venice or Florence, leveraging maritime trade for political and economic power. While European city-states were merchant-driven, Indian counterparts involved rulers collaborating with mercantile elites, reflecting unique socio-political dynamics.

Studying medieval towns requires interdisciplinary approaches, combining perspectives on trade, polity, culture and religion. These cities, as hubs of transformation, reveal intricate interactions between economic forces, power dynamics and societal change.

Q. 2. How did scholars perceive medieval European cities?

Ans. Medieval European cities have been perceived by scholars as critical hubs of economic, social and political transformation. Historians and sociologists have examined their nuanced urban processes, highlighting their distinct roles in economic growth and societal evolution.

Max Weber viewed medieval Western cities as production centres, contrasting with ancient Greek and Roman cities focused on consumption. These cities, combining production and exchange processes, laid the foundation for Western capitalism. The autonomy and rational economic actions of urban spaces fostered a "work ethic" and empowered producers and traders, enabling them to challenge feudal authorities. Through associations of burghers, power shifted, with urban dwellers asserting influence over artisans and peasants.

Henri Pirenne emphasized cities' roles in social change, particularly through long-distance trade. He categorized towns into political (e.g., Liege) and economic (e.g., Flemish) units, demonstrating their varied impacts on feudalism's decline. Maurice Dobb argued that the rise of medieval towns was integral to feudalism, stressing internal struggles and their appeal to exploited rural populations.

Fernand Braudel classified towns into open, closed, and subject types, illustrating their evolution and autonomy. Closed towns, especially, symbolized freedom for migrants escaping feudal oppression. The transition from medieval to modern cities highlighted differences in labour processes, governance, and urban planning, with industrial capitalism driving structured city designs.

Recent scholarship explores medieval cities as cultural constructions. Influenced by thinkers like Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, spatial studies reveal urban spaces as intentional expressions of power and domination. These spaces were contested resources, shaped by societal forces and individuals seeking control.

Sociologists focus on urbanization variables, including population, social organization, environment, and technology. Stanley K. Schultz highlights factors like population density, migration, and communication networks as essential to understanding urban development.

Medieval European cities were dynamic entities shaping and reflecting profound economic, political and cultural shifts. They served as catalysts for capitalism, freedom and urban identity, marking their historical significance.

Q. 3. Comment on Henry Pierenne's idea of the primacy of medieval towns?

Ans. Henry Pirenne said the rise of medieval towns, especially from the eleventh century onward, marked a transformative shift in Western Europe, contributing to the decline of feudalism and the emergence of a more complex, commercialised society.

Pirenne argued that the revival of long-distance trade in medieval Europe was pivotal to the formation of a new economic and social order. Medieval towns, strategically located along trade routes, became the focal points of this revival. They not only facilitated economic exchange but also acted as centres of political and social power, with wealthier merchant and financial elites taking control. For Pirenne, these towns represented the transition from an agrarian-based economy to one that was increasingly centreed on commerce and trade. They functioned as magnets for the rural population, who migrated from the countryside seeking the relative freedoms and opportunities that urban life offered.

Pirenne's view on the primacy of towns is tied to his argument that the medieval cities were critical to the development of a new socio-political system that eventually undermined the feudal structure. He suggested that the towns were the sites where commercial activity led to the formation of a new social class – the bourgeoisie – who were not tied to the land or traditional feudal structures. These townspeople, especially merchants and artisans, created a new economic dynamic that was based on exchange and production rather than the agricultural production that had dominated feudal society. In this sense, towns represented both economic and political autonomy, gradually undermining the traditional power of feudal lords.

Pirenne's focus on the role of towns in the decline of feudalism was informed by his broader perspective on history. He viewed the medieval towns and long-distance trade not merely as incidental but as the very forces that helped break down the social, economic and political constraints of the feudal system. The towns acted as nuclei of change, where economic transactions gave rise to new forms of political organisation and social mobility, allowing the towns to function as launching pads for broader societal transformations.

Furthermore, Pirenne emphasized the relationship between towns and trade in facilitating the development of capitalism. The wealth generated by trade allowed the urban centres to become increasingly powerful, leading to a shift in the balance of power away from the rural aristocracy and towards urban elites. This shift was a crucial precursor to the development of capitalist economies in Western Europe, as towns became key locations for the circulation of goods, capital and ideas.

However, Pirenne's view has not gone unchallenged. Critics, such as Maurice Dobb, revised Pirenne's thesis by arguing that medieval towns did not necessarily constitute an external force to feudalism but were instead part of the system's internal dynamics. Dobb suggested that the rise of towns and markets was a response to feudalism's limitations, as it could no longer contain the processes of petty production and exchange that it itself had generated.