NCERT Notes: India Under The Mughals [Medieval Indian History Notes For UPSC]

The Mughal reign was a crucial phase in Indian History. This article throws light on the Mughal era in India like Economic & Social Life, Agriculture, Trade Growth, etc.

Economic and Social Life

- The socio-economic conditions of India are mentioned by many European Travellers and trader who came to India and their accounts contain a mine of information.
- Generally, most of the accounts describe the wealth and prosperity of India and also the lavish life of the nobles.
- There are accounts of foreigners as well that give information about the poverty and sufferings of ordinary people such as peasants and artisans.

Mughal Nobility

- The Mughals were nobles and most of them were foreigners like Turks and Afghans and formed a privileged class.
- The Mughal nobles were paid high salaries but their expenses were also the same.
- Each noble had a large number of servants, horses, elephants etc.
- Wealthy people dressed in silk and cotton clothes and the poor people dressed minimally.
- One of the foreigners Nikitin mentions that the people in the Deccan were bare-footed indicating the high cost of leather.
- The common people food was pulses, millets and rice.
- In coastal region fish was common.
- Milk and milk products were surpluses, salt and sugar were expensive, while ghee and oil were cheaper.

Agriculture

- One of the estimates claims that at the beginning of the 17th century India’s population was about 125 million.
- A large variety of crops such as barley, gram, pulses, rice, and wheat were cultivated.
- Commercial crops such as indigo, oil-seeds, cotton and sugarcane were also cultivated.
- During the seventeenth century two new crops, viz., tobacco and maize were added.
- On a note, no new agricultural technique was introduced during this period.
- India was able to export food items like rice and sugar to the neighbouring countries.

Growth of Trade
The Indian trading classes spread across the country and were in large numbers.

- Seth and Bohra - Long-distance traders
- Banik - Local traders
- Banjaras - Another class of traders specialized in carrying bulk goods, they also moved long distances with their goods on the back of oxen.
- Bulk goods were also taken through rivers on boats.
- The Gujarati merchants included the Hindus, Jains and Muslims.
- In Rajasthan, Oswals, Maheshwari's, and Agarwals came to be called the Marwaris.
- The most important trading communities in south India
  - The Chettis on the Coromandel coast
  - the Muslim merchants of Malabar
- Bengal - Exported sugar, rice as well as delicate muslin and silk.
- Gujarat - Was an entry point of foreign goods from where fine textiles and silk were taken to north India.
- The major imports into India were certain metals such as
  - tin and copper
  - warhorses and
  - luxury items such as ivory
- The import of gold and silver balanced of trade.
- In the seventeenth century, the growth of foreign trade resulted in the increased import of gold and silver.

**Cultural Development under the Mughals**

- The Mughal period witnessed a significant and widespread development in cultural activity.
- It was evident in the sphere of art and architecture, painting, music and literature.
- The Mughals brought Turko-Iranian culture into India and the Indian traditions were blended Turko-Iranian culture.

**Art and Architecture**

- The Mughals were fond of laying gardens with running water. Some of the Mughal Gardens are:
  - Nishat Bagh in Kashmir
  - the Shalimar Bagh at Lahore
  - the Pinjore garden in Punjab
- During the reign of Sher Shah, the mausoleum at Sasaram in Bihar and the Purana Qila near Delhi were built.
- Large scale construction of buildings started with the dawn of Akbar
- He built many forts and the most famous one was the Agra Fort. It was built in red sandstone.
- His other forts are at Lahore and Allahabad.
Shah Jahan built the famous Red Fort at Delhi with its Rang Mahal, Diwan-i-Am and Diwan-i-Khaswas.

Akbar also built a palace cum fort complex at Fatehpur Sikri (City of Victory).

Many buildings in Gujarati and Bengali styles are also found in this complex.

Gujarati style buildings were probably built for his Rajput wives.

The most magnificent building in it is the Jama Masjid and the gateway to it called Buland Darwaza or the Lofty Gate.

The height of the gateway is 176 feet. It was built to commemorate Akbar's victory over Gujarat.

Other important buildings at Fatehpur Sikri are Jodha Bai’s palace and Panch Mahal with five storeys.

During Akbar's reign, the Humayun's tomb was built at Delhi and it had a massive dome of marble.

It may be considered the precursor of the Taj Mahal.

Akbar's tomb at Sikandara near Agra was completed by Jahangir.

Nur Jahan built the tomb of Itimaddaulah at Agra.

It was constructed wholly of white marble with floral designs made of semi-precious stones on the walls. (Pietra dura)

This method became more popular during the reign of Shah Jahan.

Taj Mahal

○ The Pietra Dura method was used on a large scale in the Taj Mahal.
○ Taj Mahal is considered as the jewel of the builder's art.
○ It contains all the architectural forms developed by the Mughals.
○ The chief glory of the Taj is the massive dome and the four slender minarets
○ The decorations are kept to the minimum.

The Moti Masjid at Agra was built entirely in white marble. The Jama Masjid at Delhi was built in red stone.

Paintings and Music

The foundation for the Mughal painting was laid by Humayun while staying in Persia.

He brought with him two painters – Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdal Samad to India.

Akbar commissioned the illustrations of several literary and religious texts.

He invited a large number of painters from different parts of the country to his court.

Both Hindus and Muslims joined in this work.

Baswan, Miskina and Daswant attained great positions as Akabar’s court as artists.

Illustrations of Persian versions of Mahabharata and Ramayana were produced in miniature form.

Art Studio established by Akbar. Historical works such as Akbar Nama also remained the main themes of Mughal paintings.

Mughal paintings reached its climax during the reign of Jahangir.

He employed a number of painters like Abul Hasan, Bishan Das, Madhu, Anant, Manohar, Govardhan and Ustad Mansur.
Akbar patronized Tansen of Gwalior.
Tansen composed many ragas.
Jahangir and Shah Jahan were also fond of music.

**Language and Literature**

- The Persian language became widespread in the Mughal Empire by the time of Akbar’s reign.
- Many historical works were written during this period.
- They include Ain-i-Akbari and Akabar Nama authored by Abul Fazl.
- The leading poet of that period was his brother Abul Faizi.
- The translation of Mahabharata into the Persian language was done under his supervision.
- Utbi and Naziri were the two other leading Persian poets.
- Jahangir’s autobiography, Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri was famous for its style.
- He also patronized many scholars like Ghiyas Beg, Naqib Khan and Niamatullah.
- Shah Jahan also patronized many writers and historians like Abdul Hamid Lahori, author of Padshah.
- Nama and Inayat Khan who wrote Shah Jahan Nama.
- His son Dara Shikoh translated the Bhagavat Gita and Upanishads into the Persian language.
- Regional languages such as Bengali, Oriya, Rajasthani and Gujarati had also developed during this period.
- Many devotional works including the Ramayana and Mahabharata were translated into regional languages.
- The most influential Hindi poet was Tulsidas, who wrote the Hindi version of the Ramayana, the Ramcharitmanas.