

# Role of Geography in Shaping the Structure of Trade in Mughal India

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**Abstract:** *Trading as an activity was at its zenith during the Mughal period in India. The role of Geography was exceptionally crucial in the foundation of a trading town. How propitious geographical factors helped in the growth and development of a trading town in that period is the foremost focus of this paper. Assortments of factors were responsible for the growth of trade during that period, among them geographical factors also played a key role. If a town was having a centripetal location, was near to a water body or had fertile soil or had a rich hinterland then it was considered apt for becoming a trading centre. Technology was not that advance as it is today so it becomes interesting to know how trading towns were affected by geographical factors.*

**Keywords:** Inland trade, Administrative, Topography, Entrepot, Water body

## 1. Introduction

Trading as an activity has always been a part of our economic structure though the scale at which it was conducted varied. One of the most significant contributions of trade is that it allows an area to experience a consumption pattern which not necessarily coincides with the production pattern of that area. During the Mughal period in India trading as an activity was at its peak. Several factors were responsible for such a scenario. Mughal Era observed a continuous interchange of people, capital and wherewithal, which paved the way for a well-built interaction between various provinces of that time. The aspiration to preside over a strong political empire by the Mughals gave birth to a series of urban centres in diverse parts of the empire for efficient control. Towns performed different types of functions by becoming either administrative or commercial or religious centres.

For nearly one hundred and seventy years (1556-1719) the Mughal Empire remained a dynamic, centralized, and complex organization. The main trade route acted as blood vessel which ran through whole of the Mughal Empire and strengthened the interaction between various trading centres. The role of geography of was very crucial in shaping the structure of trade during that period. Towns which developed as trading towns were taking benefit out of their geographical setting? The geographical factors like topography, presence of a river or nearness to a water body and Presence of rich fertile soil and having a rich agricultural hinterland were like a gift of nature for growth of trade.

It was easier for a town to grow if it had a central location. The presence of river or rivers ensured easy flow of commercial traffic. Goods and people both could be conveniently transported from one place to another with the aid of the river. The rich productivity of the area made sure that the area enjoyed continuous exchange of goods. Not only there was inland trade but also international trade. The international trade was possible because of the geographical

setting which provided access to the sea. Port cities were developed and there was a continuous exchange of goods of various kinds from all over the world. Though there were different types of towns which emerged in the Medieval Mughal India, performed various functions like becoming administrative towns or religious centre or trading centres or port towns, the geography of a particular town played a very important role in defining the significance which it had gained by becoming one of these towns. As far as the urban centres are concerned in the Medieval Mughal India, different types of urban centres came up. But the four distinct types of towns which can be identified are as follows.

First, there were those cities whose leading function was administrative and where other roles manufacturing or sacral were of minor importance too and were partly dependent on the primary role, of such kind were Agra and Delhi. Secondly, there were those cities enjoying a primarily commercial and manufacturing character, to which might have been attached administrative functions which on the other hand, remained subsidiary to their economic functions. Ahmadabad fell under this category.

Ahmadabad became a successful trading town because of its location. It is not the only reason for its growth as a trading centre but is most definitely an important one. It was near to both the important port cities of Mughal period i.e. Cambay and Surat. Ahmadabad was like a collection centre for goods almost all the goods which had to be exported from the interior parts of the Mughal India had to reach Ahmadabad to be further transported to the port cities. From there they were exported to other parts of the world where they were demanded. The goods which were imported from others part of the world mainly luxury items first travelled to Ahmadabad from the port cities and from there, they were sent to the other parts of the Empire.

Thirdly, there was the case of pilgrimage centres where trade and craft activities were drawn to where there was already an assemblage of both undeviating settled and ephemeral



paramount industries of Delhi, Cotton industries but more so Chintz were well coloured, next in quality to those of Masulipatnam only these were also produced in large quantities and several qualities with a wide range of prices to suit the pocket of high and low. This very fact shows that Delhi had material available for both the classes i.e. for the privileged as well as for the common man.

### 1.3 Cambay

It appears that a large variety of goods were exported annually from Cambay and the vessels on their onset composed and brought various special goods and commodities from different places



Figure 2: Division of Delhi in Mughal Era 1595

These goods were of all varieties these were white stamped and painted silk stuffs, quilts, carpets, Indigo, Paper, Leather goods, Dressed hide, Opium and other drugs, Iron, Large quantities of Sugar, Dried Ginger, Raw Cotton, Asafoetida, precious stone

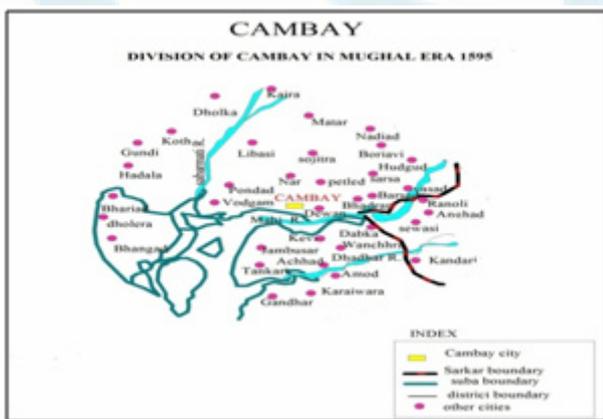


Figure 3: Division of Cambay in Mughal Era 1595

### 1.4 Surat

It was already a port of some magnitude for pilgrim traffic since Tapti River presented a harbour, while within small discharge silting was not too immense a peril. Its benefit as a port was enhanced by the unearthing of a hole or a natural

under sea though opposite the village of Swally, presenting outstanding anchorage for huge ships.

## 2. Postscript

Clearly during the Mughal period in India the role of geography in the foundation of a trading town was immense. Today it's easier to build the transport and communication lines because of the developed technology. Even if geography poses some obstacles in the foundation of a town or any other developmental work it is taken care off because of the presence of advanced technology. It is not that during the Mughal Era that the will power of mankind was less but paucity of technology was there. Occasionally more than one factor could coalesce to account for the rise and growth of a trading town. But by and large it may be said that Geographical factors like topography, presence of a river or nearness to a water body and Presence of rich fertile soil and having a rich agricultural hinterland were imperative for the growth of the trading towns.

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