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Colonialism and the City The Story of an Imperial Capital

Lesson at a Glance

- In most parts of the western world modern cities grew with **industrialisation**. In Britain industrial towns like Leeds and Manchester grew rapidly in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- In India Calcutta, Bombay and Madras emerged in importance as **Presidency cities** in the late 18th century.
- These Presidency cities became the centre of British power in the different regions of India.
- At the same time cities like Machlipatnam, Surat and Seringapatam declined.
- The historic imperial city of Delhi became a dusty provincial town in the 19th century before it was rebuilt as the capital of British India.
- Delhi has been a capital for more than a 1,000 years, although with some gaps. As many as 14 capital cities were founded in a small area of about 60 square miles on the left-bank of the river Jamuna of these, the most important are the capital cities built between the 12th and 17th centuries.
- Shah Jahan built the most splendid capital of all. Shahjahanabad was begun in 1639 and consisted of a fort-palace complex and the city adjoining it. The Red Fort contained the palace complex.
- Delhi during Shah Jahan's time was also a centre of Sufi culture. It had several *dargahs*, *khanqahs* and *idgahs*.
- Even this was no ideal city and its delights were enjoyed only by some. There were sharp differences between the rich and the poor.
- In the first half of the 19th century the British lived along with the wealthier Indians in the Walled City. They learned to enjoy Urdu/Persian culture and poetry and participated in local festivals.
- But things did not remain the same after 1857. During the Revolt Delhi remained under rebel control for four months. When the British regained it they embarked on a campaign of revenge and

plunder. They began to demolish everything that was associated with the Mughals. In fact, the British were very much annoyed with the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar to see his active participation in the Revolt.

- They either demolished mosques or put to other uses. For example, the Zinat-al-Masjid was converted into a bakery. No worship was allowed in the Jama Masjid for five years. One-third of the city was demolished and its canals were filled up.
- In the 1870s, the western walls of Shahjahanabad were broken to establish the railway and to allow the city to expand beyond walls.
- The British now began living in the sprawling Civil Lines area that came up in the north, away from the Indians in the Walled city.
- Delhi college was turned into a school, and shut down in 1877.
- Delhi emerged into the **modern city** only after 1911 when it became the capital of the British India.
- New Delhi was constructed as a 10-square-mile city on Raisina Hill, south of the existing city.
- Two architects, Edward Lutyens and Herbert Baker, were called on to design New Delhi and its buildings. It was kept in mind that the new buildings must assert British importance.
- New Delhi took nearly 20 years to build. The idea was to build a city that was a stark contrast to Shahjahanabad. There were to be no crowded mohallas, no mazes of narrow bylanes. In New Delhi, there were to be broad, straight streets lined with sprawling mansions set in the middle of large compounds. The architects wanted New Delhi to represent a **sense of law and order** in contrast to the chaos of old Delhi.
- In 1947, India got independence but at the same time it was partitioned into India and Pakistan. This led to a large migration from Punjab that changed the social background of Delhi. An urban culture largely based on Urdu was overshadowed by new tastes and sensibilities, in food, dress and the arts.
- Inside the old city, the excellent system of water supply and drainage was neglected in the 19th century. The system of wells or baolis also broke down and channels to remove household waste were damaged.
- The population of Delhi was continuously growing at this time. The broken-down canals could not serve the needs of this ever-growing population.
- At the end of the 19th century a new system of open surface drains was introduced. But this system too was soon overburdened.

The Delhi Municipal Committee was not willing to spend money on a good drainage system.

- At the same time, millions of rupees were being spent on drainage systems in the New Delhi area.
- The *havelis* or grand mansions in which the Mughal aristocracy lived in the 17th and 18th centuries also declined gradually. In fact the Mughal *amirs* were unable to maintain these large establishments under conditions of British rule. *Havelis* therefore began to be subdivided and sold.
- The colonial bungalow was quite different from the *haveli*. It was a large single-storeyed structure with a pitched roof and usually set in one or two acres of open ground.
- The census of 1931 revealed that the Walled City area was crowded with as many as 90 persons per acre while New Delhi had only about 3 persons per acre.
- The poor conditions in the **Walled City** did not stop it from expanding. In 1888 an extension scheme called the **Lahore Gate Improvement Scheme** was planned by Robert Clarke for the Walled City residents. Streets strictly followed the **grid system** and were of identical width, size and character. Land was divided into regular areas for the construction of neighbourhoods. But even this scheme could not decongest the old city.
- The Delhi Improvement Trust was set up in 1936, and it built areas like Daryaganj South for wealthy Indians. Houses were grouped around parks. Within the houses, space was divided according to new rules of privacy.

■ TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED ■

Let's Recall

9. 1. State whether true or false:
- (a) In the Western world, modern cities grew with industrialisation.
 - (b) Surat and Machlipatnam developed in the nineteenth century.
 - (c) In the twentieth century, the majority of Indians lived in cities.
 - (d) After 1857 no worship was allowed in the Jama Masjid for five years.

(e) More money was spent on cleaning Old Delhi than New Delhi.

- Ans.** (a) True (b) False
(c) False (d) True
(e) False

Q. 2. Fill in the blanks:

- (a) The first structure to successfully use the dome was called the
(b) The two architects who designed New Delhi and Shahjahanabad were and
(c) The British saw overcrowded spaces as
(d) In 1888 an extension scheme called the was devised.

- Ans.** (a) Central dome (b) Edward Lutyens, Herbert Baker
(c) Unhygienic (d) Lahore Gate Improvement Scheme.

Q. 3. Identify three differences in the city design of New Delhi and Shahjahanabad.

Ans. Three differences were:

- (i) Shahjahanabad was crowded with mohallas, and several dozen bazaars. But New Delhi was not crowded nor were there mazes of narrow bylanes.
(ii) Shahjahanabad was not established in a planned manner while New Delhi was beautifully planned.
(iii) There was chaos everywhere in Shahjahanabad. But New Delhi represented a sense of law and order.

Q. 4. Who lived in the 'white' areas in cities such as Madras?

Ans. The British lived in the 'white' areas in cities such as Madras.

Let's Discuss

Q. 5. What is meant by de-urbanisation?

Ans. De-urbanisation is a process by which more and more people began to live in villages or rural areas. In the late 18th century, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras emerged as Presidency cities. They became the centres of British power in different regions of India. At the

same time, several smaller cities declined. Old trading centres and ports could not survive when the flow of trade shifted to new centres. Similarly, earlier centres of regional power collapsed with the defeat of local rurals by the British and new centres of administration grew. This process is described as de-urbanisation.

Q. 6. Why did the British choose to hold a grand Durbar in Delhi although it was not a capital?

Ans. During the Revolt of 1857, the British had realised that the Mughal emperor was still important to the people and they saw him as their leader. It was therefore important to celebrate British power with pomp and show in Delhi—the city the Mughal emperors had ruled earlier. The British thought that by doing this they would acknowledge people about their power and authority.

Q. 7. How did the Old City of Delhi change under British rule?

Ans. The British changed the Old City of Delhi entirely. They wanted Delhi to forget its Mughal past. Hence, the area around the Fort was completely cleared of gardens, partitions and mosques. They either destroyed the mosques or put them to other uses. For example, the Zinat-al-Masjid was converted into a bakery. No worship was allowed in the Jama Masjid for five years. One-third of the city was demolished and its canals were filled up.

In the 1870s, the western walls of Shahjahanabad were broken to establish the railway and to allow the city to expand beyond the walls. The British began living in the sprawling Civil Lines area that came up in the north, away from the Indians in the Walled City. The Delhi College was turned into a school and shut down in 1877.

Q. 8. How did the partition affect life in Delhi?

Ans. India got partitioned in 1947 and this led to a massive transfer of populations on both sides of the new border. As a result, the population of Delhi increased all of a sudden. The job of the people changed and the culture of the city became different.

Most of these migrants were from Punjab. They stayed in camps, schools etc. While some got the opportunity to occupy residences that had been vacated by the Muslims. Yet others were housed in refugee colonies. New colonies like Lajpat Nagar and Tilak Nagar grew at this time. Shops and stalls were set up to cater the needs of the migrants, schools and colleges were opened.

The migrants coming to Delhi were rural landlords, lawyers, teachers, traders and small shopkeepers. Partition changed their lives and occupations. They had to take up new jobs like hawkers, vendors, carpenters, and ironsmiths.

Let's Do

Q. 9. Find out the history of the town you live in or of any town nearby. Check when and how it grew, and how it has changed over the years. You could look at the history of the bazaars, the buildings, cultural institutions, and settlements.

Ans. Attempt yourself.

Q. 10. Make a list of at least ten occupations in the city, town or village to which you belong, and find out how long they have existed. What does this tell you about the changes within this area?

Ans. I live in a village, I find here the following occupations in which villagers are engaged:

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|-----------------|-----------------------|
| (i) Farming | (ii) Fishing |
| (iii) Teaching | (iv) Carpentry |
| (v) Grocery | (vi) Vending |
| (vii) Weaving | (viii) Cattle rearing |
| (ix) Blacksmith | (x) Barber |

These occupations have existed from a long time in the village. We have seen many changes in the methods of these occupations. With spread of education and awareness, many new technologies have been adopted. For example, in the beginning farmers used ploughs in their fields but now they are using tractors.