

HISTORY

Chapter 10: Colonialism and the City



COLONIALISM AND THE CITY

Rise of New Cities

In India, the cities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras emerged as Presidency cities during the late eighteenth century. The period also saw the decline in many old urban centers. They declined because of the following reasons:

- Many old port towns declined as the volume and the flow of trade moved to new port cities. For example, after the rise of Bombay, the city of Surat declined.
- Old centers of regional powers declined when their rulers were defeated by the British. New centers of administration then developed.

Thus, there was a process of **de-urbanisation**. De-urbanisation takes place when the population of cities decline mainly because of political and economic factors. By the early twentieth century, only 11% of Indians were living in the cities. Many cities such as Machilipatnam, Surat and Seringapatam were de-urbanised during the nineteenth century.

The History of the City of Delhi

- Delhi had been a capital city for more than a thousand years. It remained as the capital of many empires which were located in the region.
- The most magnificent capital city was the city of Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi) which was built by Shah Jahan. The Red Fort contained the palace complex.
- Shahjahanabad was surrounded by walls with 14 gates. Chandni Chowk and Faiz Bazaar were broad streets where royal procession used to pass. The city had mohallas and several bazaars.
- Jama Masjid built within the city was the largest and the highest building in the city. It was also the first mosque in India which had minarets and full domes.
- Delhi at the time of Shah Jahan was an important centre of Sufism. It had dargahs (tombs of Sufi saints), khanqahs (Sufi lodges) and idgahs (praying places of Muslims usually meant for id prayers).
- There were cul-de-sacs (streets with dead ends) and several water channels in the city.
- However, the city of Shahjahanabad also presented contrasts between the rich and poor sections of society. Along with mansions and havelis, there were many houses built of mud and bricks.
- In the city, religious processions and celebrations also created conflicts among sections of Indian society.
- Delhi College was established in 1792. This paved the way for the development of sciences, arts, and humanities mostly in the Urdu language. Thus, the period from 1830 to

1857 is called the period of the Delhi renaissance.



The walled city of Delhi before the revolt of 1857

Demolition of Old Delhi

- The city of Delhi in some respects was different from the Presidency cities of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay. In these cities, there were separate residential areas for native and European populations. While the Indians lived in the 'black areas', the British lived in the 'white areas. In Delhi, the British lived along with the rich section of Indian society and participated in local festivals.
- After the revolt of 1857, the British plundered and ravaged the city. Houses were burnt and the helpless were killed.
- As Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor, had provided the leadership to the rebels, he was exiled to Rangoon. Many of his palaces were razed to the ground and gardens were closed.
- The British wanted the city to forget its Mughal past, and thus, buildings around Jama Masjid were demolished and razed to the ground.
- Many mosques were destroyed. No worship was allowed in Jama Masjid for the next five years.
- During the 1870s, the western walls of Shahjahanabad were broken in order to lay down railway lines for the expansion of the city.
- The British began to live in the Civil Lines area away from the walled city where the natives lived. The Delhi College was shut in 1877.

Building of New Delhi

- After the revolt, many occasions were celebrated in Delhi on a grand scale. In 1877, a Durbar was held at Delhi to proclaim Queen Victoria as the Empress of India. The durbar was held at Delhi to celebrate the British power in the city which was previously ruled by the Mughal emperors. In this way, the British tried to establish and assert their power and authority in the city.
- In 1911, the capital of India was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi.
- The British constructed New Delhi on Raisina Hills, located to the south of Old Delhi.
- The city of New Delhi was planned by two architects— Edward Lutyens and Herbert Baker.
- The government buildings consisted of Kingsway (Rajpath), Viceroy Palace (Rashtrapati Bhavan) and secretariat buildings.
- Features of these buildings were borrowed from different periods of Indian history. For example, red sandstone and carved screens were borrowed from the Mughal architecture, while the central dome of the Viceroy Palace was taken from the Buddhist stupa at Sanchi. Overall, these buildings had a look of classical Greek architecture.
- New Delhi was built in about twenty years.



The Delhi Durbar of 1911

Differences between the architecture of Old Delhi and New Delhi

Old Delhi	New Delhi
There were crowded mohallas with narrow streets and bylanes.	There were well-planned spacious localities with broad straight streets.
The city had havelis and small congested houses made of mud and bricks.	The city had mansions surrounded by large gardens.
The city did not have a good sewage disposal system and drainage facilities.	The city had a good sewage disposal system and drainage facilities with adequate supply of water.

Delhi at the Time of Partition

- During the Partition of British India, millions of people were displaced from their homes. Delhi witnessed an increase in its population. The transfer of people from and into the city changed its economic structure and culture.
- After Indian independence, many Muslims' fearing for the loss of their lives fled to Pakistan.
- Their homes were taken up by Sikh and Hindu refugees who came from the newly created state of Pakistan.
- Many people who were not able to find homes lived in refugee camps. Nearly five lakh people were added to the population of Delhi. Most of the migrants were from Punjab who hoped to build new homes.
- During this time, colonies such as Tilak Nagar and Lajpat Nagar sprang up.
- Partition also changed the economic structure of the city. Muslims who migrated to Pakistan were artisans, small traders, and labourers. The new population which moved into the city were landlords, teachers, lawyers, traders, and small shopkeepers.
- Forced by the circumstances, these people took up work as hawkers, vendors, carpenters, and ironsmiths.
- This also marked a change in the culture of the city. The Urdu-based culture was overshadowed by changes in food, dress, and language.



The population of Delhi swelled after the partition of British India.

Old City

- While New Delhi was built in a well-planned way, the city of Old Delhi or Shahjahanabad experienced several changes. The canals of Old Delhi and the drainage system were neglected by the British.
- The city soon began to face a shortage of water supply. The new system of open surface drains was introduced which had its own negative impacts. Overflowing of open drains and stench from the roadsides proved hazardous.
- While money was spent on the drainage systems in the New Delhi area, The Delhi Municipal Committee was not willing to spend money on improving the drainage system of the old city.
- The period also saw a decline in palatial mansions or havelis. As these havelis were large structures with the quarters of servants built inside, many Mughal nobles were not able to maintain them.
- The British mansion or the bungalow in which the British officers lived was a large single-storeyed structure spread on one or two acres of open ground. These bungalows included separate living rooms, dining rooms and bedrooms. The servants' quarters were located away from these houses.

The Beginning of Planning of the City

- According to the census of 1931, while Old Delhi had as many as 90 persons/square foot, New Delhi had only about 3 persons/square foot.
- Despite the lack of space, Old Delhi was still expanding. In 1888, the Lahore Gate

Improvement Scheme was planned by Robert Clarke for the people inhabiting Old Delhi.

- This scheme aimed at building a market square around which the building of shops was planned.
- This scheme however was never completed and hence could not decongest the old city.
- The Delhi Improvement Trust was set up in 1936 for rich sections of society for improving the living conditions in the old city.
- Under this scheme, houses were constructed around parks with families enjoying their own private living space.

MIND MAP : LEARNING MADE SIMPLE CHAPTER-6

