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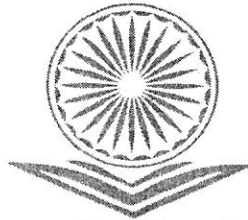
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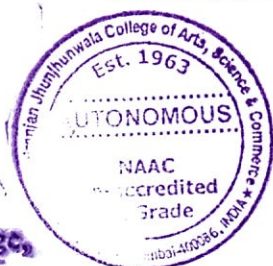
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8. Bharuch - A Reputed Weaving Centre

Dr. Meher Mistry

Assistant Professor, Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College.

Abstract

Bharuch was renowned for its textiles from ancient times. It flourished as a textile weaving centre second only to Bengal till the early nineteenth century. Baftas, Chintzes and many other exquisite textiles were woven here. It also was a centre of yarn manufacture and had a major bleaching and dyeing industry. The advent of machine made cloth gradually reduced this urban textile manufacturing centre to a town exporting raw cotton and agricultural produce.

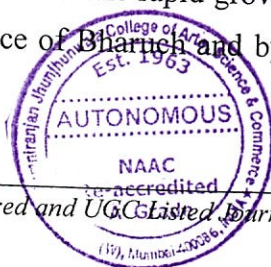
Bharuch was a prosperous port town with extensive maritime trade in the ancient period. In the medieval period, Bharuch's primacy as a port was challenged first by Khambhat and then by Surat which developed under Mughal patronage. Bharuch was the closest important place to Surat and supplied it with a wide variety of textiles. Bharuch was particularly noted for its excellent baftas in the Western and South-east Asian Markets. It was also known for its excellent white and printed cloth. The weaving industry here was relatively urbanized and merchants could place huge orders and ensure delivery on time. With increasing orders from Europeans, the prices of its textiles began to increase.

The English had established their first factory at Surat in 1608 A. D. They soon discovered that piece goods and cotton yarn could be got cheaper and conveniently at Bharuch than at Surat. An Englishman, Thomas Best (1612-1614 A. D.), was one of the first to comment on the excellence of its calicoes. Soon various types of textiles namely white and light blue baftas byrams, candikens, trekenes as well as yarn were purchased by them for England and Bantam (Java). The fact that the length of the baftas at Bharuch was twenty and half covids, while at other places it was only seventeen and half covids also made it profitable to purchase textiles from Bharuch.

The English had to compete with the Dutch and Portuguese in procuring these goods. Bharuch goods were used by the European companies, mainly to supply their trade with the Red Sea regions and South- East Asia. The rapid growth of the calico trade especially with the South- East Asia increased the importance of Bharuch and by 1618 both the English and Dutch had opened factories at Bharuch.

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Mandelslo, a traveller mentioned that the suburbs of Bharuch were almost entirely inhabited by weavers and commented on the excellence of its textiles. Thornton in 1857 A. D., notes "The town of Broach was long famous for its manufacture of cloth consisting of fine dotees and doreeas, chequered cloths, table cloth etc. The weavers were capable of imitating almost any pattern of Scotch Plaid". Bharuch would also be visited by the Malabar merchants every year with a fleet of nine to ten ships to buy goods.

Bharuch was also a centre for the production of yarn supplying to the urban and rural centres of textile manufacture. Textiles and yarn would be transported to Surat and then exported to the overseas market. The English company bought the coarser variety of yarn as the artisans in Europe could not use the fine quality. The weavers were not pleased with the purchase of yarn in huge quantities by the European merchants for export and for their own manufactures. After the great famine of 1630 A. D., which had affected supplies severely, the weavers refused to supply any baftas if they continued to purchase yarn. After the famine of 1630-32 A. D., the quality of Gujarat textiles deteriorated due to migration and death of many skilled weavers. The goods of the east coast particularly the fine Bengal piece goods gradually replaced these goods in the European market.

Thevenot (1666 A. D.), Baldaeus (1672 A. D.) and Tavernier (1657-68 A. D.) in their travel accounts refer to the excellent bleaching of cloth being done at Bharuch. Cloth from various parts of the Moghul Empire was brought here to be bleached and transformed for the markets of Bantam, Mocha and Basra as well as of Europe. The water of the Narmada was considered as possessing 'peculiar properties' for bleaching calicoes. Besides as per Tavernier, the large number of lemons used for bleaching was available in Bharuch and Navsari. Indigo from Bayana, Agra and nearby Jambusar were available at Bharuch and dyeing was another major industry at Bharuch. The quality of bleaching and dyeing was better and rates cheaper than Surat. Baftas of white, black, red and blue colours could be found at Bharuch.

The English Factors had to check for frauds in the cloth that was purchased. Sometimes due to lack of proper packing damage was caused. If the bales were not tied closely the pieces due to 'the chafeing and fretting of one piece against another' would be damaged. During imbaleing a wrapper of dutty cloth or wax-cloth was inserted in between for protection against any accidental contact with oil or water on the ships during transportation.

By 1622 A. D., the English were seen investing in various types of cloths at Bharuch. Besides Baftas, they purchased varieties like poplee, chokree, cappera, husaini, bucker, gingham, dhotis, tricandis and sailas to be sent to England and Java. By 1650 A. D. the demand from England fell and the textile goods catered chiefly to the Red Sea and South-East Asia.

Many communities such as Muslims, Khatris and Parsis seem to have engaged in weaving in Gujarat. Mention is found of Parsis as excellent weavers in Bharuch in the 17th century. George Roques (1676-86 A. D.) during his visit to Bharuch found that their baftas were much sought after. He noted that they made both fine and coarse varieties of bafta and also alleged a mixed fabric of silk and cotton.

Parsi entry into brokerage was also linked with their weaving activities. The very first mention of a Parsi broker to the Europeans is of Hirji Asa of Bharuch. Hirji played an important role in procuring supplies of baftas from Bharuch and Ankleshwar. In the eighteenth century too, we have a few stray references of Parsis as prominent brokers and merchants of cloth in Bharuch. The textile manufacturers were not a completely unorganized lot as is seen from the *mochaut* system being practiced till the time of the Nawab. The *mochaut* undertook the task of collecting one pice and a half on every piece of good that was manufactured and from this the Nawab's family was supplied with dainties. This money was also utilized to give presents of charity to Fakirs, Brahmins and Parsi priests.

In 1773 A. D. the British ousted the Nawab and took control over Bharuch. A lot of piece goods were being manufactured at Bharuch towards the end of the eighteenth century. Bharuch was ceded to Mahadji Sindhia in 1783 A. D. but in 1803, the Sindhia's forces were defeated and the British regained possession of Bharuch. The textile industry continued to flourish both under the British and the Maratha rule till the end of the eighteenth century although there was a general decline in the demand for textiles from Europe and West Asia. Forbes who was in India till 1784 notes that there was considerable demand for cloth and later for raw cotton for China. He notes that the cotton trade at Bharuch was considerable and the manufactures of this valuable plant, from the finest muslin to the coarsest sail cloth employed thousands of men, women and children in and around Bharuch. The cotton cleaners and spinners generally resided in the suburbs or *pooras* of Bharuch. Forbes felt that although Bharuch was famed for its fine bafta and muslins, in the latter product it could not rival those of Bengal and Madras. He also believed that the painted chintzes of Gujarat were not better than those of the Coromandel Coast. I. Hove, who visited Bharuch in 1787-88 A. D., noted the various types of textiles being manufactured there. He wrote, "Their manufacture is cloth of various kinds as Bafta, Daria, Czarhany. Bafta is the finest of all coming near the Muslin of Bengal, Czarhany and Daria; the striped Muslins which the ladies wear in England. Daria comes near the Madras long cloth and it is exported to different parts of India to great advantage."

Uptil 1820 A. D., coloured cotton, chintzes, turbans etc. were being woven at Bharuch. In 1822 A. D., Sir William Erskine reported that the demand for coarse cloth formerly produced

Bharuch for the African market had ceased for some years. The trade with Arabia too had declined due to the Mokah Blockade. In 1820 A. D., Bharuch was able to export textiles worth four lakh twenty-five thousand but by 1849 A. D., it could only export cloth worth around ten thousand rupees. The main reason behind this decline was the stiff competition offered by Manchester Cloth. The entry of cheap machine made cloth from England severely harmed the handmade textile industry of Bharuch. The manufactures of Bharuch were reduced from a wide range of textiles to a few fancy ones. By 1874, no handmade piece-goods were exported from Bharuch. Colonial control progressively reduced Bharuch to a centre exporting more of raw cotton and other agricultural produce. Later towards the end of the nineteenth century, steam run textile factories that came up in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Bharuch itself ensured further decline of handloom weaving at Bharuch.

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