

16 . Description of Indian civilization and agriculture by travelers from China, Europe and USA

Indus valley civilization: Allchins, relying on Lambrick, who, according to them, had personal knowledge of Sind, describe as follows how crops were grown in the riverain tract of the Indus. "The principal food grains, that is wheat and barley, would have been grown as spring (*rabi*) crops: that is to say, sown at the end of the inundation upon land which had been submerged by spill from the river or one of its natural flood channels, and reaped in March or April.

The Greek writers highly praised the fertility of Indian soil and favourable climate condition describing the principal agricultural products of the land.

The Greek writers also affirm that India has a double rainfall and the Indians generally gather two harvests. - Megasthenes witnesses - the sowing of wheat in early, winter rains and of rice, 'bosporum', sesamum and millets in the summer solstice (Diodorus, II, 36). **Megasthenes** adds further to the winter crops, viz., "wheat, barley, pulse and other esculent fruits unknown to us".

The Chinese pilgrim **Hsieun Tsang** who arrived at the monastic University of Nalanda in 630 A.D. mentioned the gardening as: "The temple arose into the mists and the shrine halls stood high above the clouds . . . streams of blue water wound through the parks; green lotus flowers sparkled among the blossoms of sandal trees and a mango grove spread outside the enclosure."

Protection of cultivators: Sher Shah had genuine concern for the peasantry and safety of their crops. One of the regulations made by Sher shah was this: That his victorious standards

should cause no injury to the cultivations of the people; and when he marched he personally examined into the state of the cultivation, and stationed horsemen round it to prevent people from trespassing on any one's field. As regards the peasantry and their condition, there is reliable evidence in the observations of the European travellers who travelled in India in the seventeenth century.

Evidence of the structure of the Mughal gardens and plants grown in them is in the Persian classics illustrated during the reign of Akbar. Among them is *Diwan-i-Anwari*, a collection of poems by the Persian poet Anwari, who flourished in the latter part of twelfth century. It contains some excellent paintings on gardens and gardening. **Abu-I-Fazl** mentions three kinds of sugarcane, viz. *paunda*, black and ordinary. **Abu-I-Fazl** provides a list of twenty-one fragrant flowering plants along with the colour of their flowers and the season of flowering in the **Ain-i-Akbari**.

Terry, an English traveler, writes, 'The country was abounding with musk-melons. One could also find water-melons, pomegranates, lemons, oranges, dates, figs, grapes, coconut, plantains, mangoes, pineapples, pears, apples, etc.' Terry also mentions the use of coffee by some people. He writes, 'Many religious people drank a "wholesome liquor" which they called coffee. Black seeds were boiled in water, which also become black. It altered the taste of water very little. It quickened the spirit and cleansed the blood.'

Francois Bernier: Of the European travelers who come to India during the Mughal rule, the most intelligent and learned was Francois Bernier a Frenchman. Bernier gives a vivid description of Bengal its landscape people and its plant and animals products. With extensive

fields of rice, sugar, corn, three or four sorts of vegetables, mustured, seasems for oils and small mulberry trees two or three feet (61 to 91 cm) in height, for the food of silk worms.

Meadows Taylor states “The Bahmanis constructed irrigation works in the eastern provinces, which incidentally did good to the peasantry while primarily securing the crown revenue.

Vincent Smith points out that those items to their credit weigh lightly against the wholesale devastation wrought by their credit weight lightly against the wholesale devastation wrought by their wars, massacres, and burnings. Their rule was harsh and showed little regard for the welfare of Hindu peasants, who were seldom allowed to retain the fruits of their labour much more than would suffice to keep body and soul together.

Herodotus (484-425 BC) the father of history reported in his writings that the wild Indian (cotton) trees possessed in their fruits fleeces, superseding those of sheep in beauty and excellence from which the natives used to weave cloth. Herodotus further wrote that “trees which grow wild in India and the fruit of which bear wool exceeding in beauty and fineness that of sheep wool Indians make their clothes with this tree wool”. Some traveller writers fabricated stories of a lamb sitting inside the fruit. **Marco Pola**, a Venetian, who traveled widely throughout the Asia in AD 1290 said that the coast of Coromandel (Madras, India) produced the finest and most beautiful cotton in the world. Indian cloth, particularly the Dacca muslin was renowned all over the world and has been described as ‘webs of woven wind’ by oriental poets. It was so fine that it could hardly be felt in the hands. It is said that when such muslins were laid on the grass to bleach and the dew had fallen, it was no longer visible. A whole garment made from it could be drawn through a wedding ring of medium size. There is also the often repeated tale of Moghul princes who put on seven layers of muslin and still the contours of her body were so visible that she had to be admonished by her father, Muhamed Bin Thuklak.