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# UNIT 22 NON-AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

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## 22.0 OBJECTIVES

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During the period of our study, India had a high level of craft production. After going through this unit you would :

- know the various types of articles manufactured in India;
- be able to list the main centres of specific crafts;
- have an idea about the minerals found in various parts of the country;
- know about the techniques used in production of a few commodities; and
- have some idea about the organisation of production in certain crafts.

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## 22.1 INTRODUCTION

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India had a high level of craft production during the period of our study. This craft production was linked with the pattern of trade and commerce. We find that the manufacturing activity was brisk in and around the main commercial centres.

The Persian chronicles provide limited information about the crafts and techniques of production. European travellers and documents and correspondence of various European trading companies supply more detailed information. These companies were keen observers of the process of production and the quality of production.

Craft production was basically governed by the demand and consumption in the home market. The increase in demand in overseas markets in the 17th Century was so great that it started influencing the production activity.

In this unit, we will take into account the major crafts, their centres, raw materials used and, wherever possible, the techniques of production. We will also discuss the availability of minerals and their production. We will also analyse the organisation of production in some selected crafts.

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## 22.2 AGRO-BASED PRODUCTION

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It should be noted that the term agro-based industries in the present time is used altogether for a different type of industries. We are using it here simply to indicate the crafts where raw material came from agricultural produce.

The most wide-spread production of commodities during the period of our study was in a sector where the basic raw material was obtained from agricultural produce. As

we noticed in Unit 21, India had a high level of production of cash crops like cotton, sugarcane, indigo, tobacco, etc. It was, therefore, natural that crafts related to these would flourish. Let us first discuss the textile production.

### 22.2.1 Textiles

Under the textiles we will mainly study the manufacture of cotton, silk and wool cloth.

#### Cotton

Cotton textiles were manufactured practically all over the country since with the exception of sub-Himalayan region, cotton could be grown almost everywhere. Abul Fazl gives a list of important centres of production of cotton textiles.

Gujarat emerges as one of the important region of textile manufacture. Here the main centres were Ahmedabad, Broach, Baroda, Cambay, Surat, etc. In Rajasthan we could mention Ajmer, Sironj and many small towns. In U.P., Lucknow and a number of small towns around it. Banaras, Agra, Allahabad, etc. were prominent centres. Other areas in the north like Delhi, Sirhind, Samana, Lahore, Sialkot, Multan and Thatta produced textiles of good quality. In Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Sonargaon and Dacca, Rajmahal, Qasimbazar and a number of towns, Balasore, Patna and a number of small towns around it were famous textile centres.

In Deccan, Burhanpur and Aurangabad produced cotton cloth of a fine variety. On the western coast of Maharashtra Chaul and Bhivandi had a flourishing weaving industry. The Qutab Shahi kingdom was also famous for its textiles. Masulipatnam and Coromandal also produced cotton textiles. In the South, Coimbatore and Malabar were also known for producing good quality cotton.

Many centres specialised in producing only yarn which was taken to weaving centres and even exported. Spinning of yarn thus became a specialised occupation. In and around all the major centres of textile production, many peasants and women took it up as an additional source of earning and supplied yarn to weavers.

Women in large number spun yarn in Mysore, Vizagapatam and Ganjam. Broach, Qasimbazar and Balasore were prominent markets for selling yarn. Gujarat supplied yarn to Bengal in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The fine yarn required for Dacca muslin was spun by young women with the help of *takli* or spindle.

There was a considerable variation in quality. Hameeda Naqvi has listed forty-nine varieties of clothes, produced in five major production centres of the Mughal Empire. The European accounts mention more than one hundred names. It is very difficult to list all the varieties of cotton textiles produced in the country. Every region had their own specialities.

A few important varieties may be explained here. **Bafta** is described in the *Ain-i Akbari* as a type of high quality calico normally white or of a single colour. The word calico was commonly used by Europeans for all kinds of cotton cloth. It also meant white cloth of a thick variety. **Tafta** was a silk cloth some times inter-woven with cotton yarn. **Zartari** was a cloth which was inter-woven with gold or silver thread. Muslin was a very fine quality of thin cloth. Chintz (**Chheent**) was cotton cloth with floral or other patterns printed or painted. **Khasa** was a kind of muslin. It was expensive cloth of a fine quality. (Irfan Habib has provided a detailed glossary of textile terms, see *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, pp. 69-70.)

Some clothes were named after the place of production, such as Dariabadi and Khairabadi, Samianas (Samana), Lakhowries (Lakhowar near Patna), etc. Some regions specialised in a particular variety, **Bafta** from Gujarat and muslin from Sonargaon and thereafter from Dacca in Bengal are examples of this specialization. In the seventeenth century, significant changes were noticed due to the intensified activities of the European trading companies whose numbers now increased with the arrival of the English, Dutch and French East India Companies, etc.

However, the most common cotton cloth much in demand was superior quality white calico cloth called by different names such as **Ambarteas** (in Bihar, Bengal etc.), **Bafta** in Gujarat, etc. Other famous varieties were fine muslin of Bengal called **Khasa**, Chintz, a printed cloth and fabric made with mixing silk yarn. Ahmedabad acquired fame for its printed cloth known as chintz (**Chheent**).

The manufacture of cotton textiles involved a number of steps. The first was ginning, that is, separating seeds from cotton. Later, the carder (**dhuniya**) cleaned cotton with the bowstring. Next, yarn was spun on the spinning wheel. The yarn was used on looms by the weavers. The most common loom was horizontal, the pit-loom with foot treadles.

The cloth thus woven was as yet in a raw state. The next step was to get it bleached or dyed before being used. These functions were performed by a separate group of people. Though these processes were performed everywhere, some centres became prominent. Broach in Gujarat was supposed to be the best bleaching place because of the special quality of its water. The English East India Company sent **baftas** purchased in Agra, Lahore, etc. to Broach and Nausari (Gujarat) for bleaching before exporting them. Ahmedabad, Surat, Patna, Sonargaon, Dacca, Masulipatam, etc., were other towns where textiles were bleached in large quantities.

Bleaching involved soaking of cloth (as in fine fabrics) or boiling it in a special solution. After this it was washed and dried. Indigo was used for bleaching (whitening).

Dyeing and printing also became specialized profession. **Rangrez** (dyers) had specialised in it and were considered a separate caste. Vegetable dyes were generally used. Red dye was produced by **chay** or lac and blue by using indigo.

### **Silk**

Silk was another important item for the manufacture of textiles. Abul Fazl mentions Kashmir where abundant silk textile was produced. Patna and Ahmedabad were known for silk fabrics. Banaras was equally famous. In the seventeenth century, Bengal produced the largest amount of raw silk which was exported abroad as well as to other parts of India. In Bengal silk fabrics were manufactured at Qasimbazar and Murshidabad. Around the middle of the 17th century, the total annual production was estimated around 2.5 million pounds. Around .75 million pounds were carried away in raw form by the Dutch alone. In 1681, the London silk weavers petitioned to the British Parliament to ban its import by the English East India Company. The import of Bengal silk fabrics was stopped in 1701. Nevertheless, Bengal remained the premier centre in India for producing silk textiles and raw silk.

### **Wool**

Wool was another important material used for manufacturing textiles. The most famous was the Kashmiri shawl, exported all over the world. The fine wool used in these shawls was imported from Tibet. Akbar promoted its manufacture at Lahore but it could not match the quality of Kashmiri shawls. Finer varieties of woollen textiles were generally brought in by the Europeans for the upper classes. Blankets were made from wool almost all over North India.

Other textile items included cotton **durries**, carpets (of silk and wool), tents and quilts, etc. Carpet weaving was yet another branch of textile production. Bihar (Daudnagar, Obra, etc.), Delhi, Agra, Lahore and Mirzapur were famous centres in the north. Warangal in the south was also famous for carpet weaving. The carpet weaving was also done in Masulipatam along the Caromandal coast. The output of carpet weaving was not very large and Persian carpets continued to be in use. Akbar took special interest in developing the manufacture of silk carpets in the royal **Karkhana** after the Persian variety.

The tents used mostly by royal establishment and nobles were also manufactured. Abul Fazl mentions eleven types of tents. Their size varied a great deal.

Embroidery on all types of textiles with cotton, silk or silver and gold thread was also an allied craft. Large number of craftsmen were involved in it.

### **22.2.2 Indigo**

The demand for it in the country and for export was very high. As we read in Unit 21, the cultivation of indigo was widespread.

Except for the hilly regions, indigo was available in all parts of the country. The best variety was secured from Bayana, near Agra. The next best variety was from Sarkhej

near Ahmedabad. Being a basic dye (blue), it was in great demand in India as well as abroad.

In Gujarat, other centres where indigo dye could be had were Jambussar, Broach, Baroda, etc. In North India, Agra and Lahore were two other cities where indigo dye could be purchased in vast quantities. On the Coromandal coast, Masulipatam was another important mart for this dye.

The process of extracting was simple. The stalks of plants were put in water. After the dye was dissolved, the water was taken to another vat where the dye was allowed to settle at the bottom. It was strained and dried in the form of cakes. The process was done mostly in the villages by peasants.

### 22.2.3 Sugar, Oil, etc.

Since sugarcane was cultivated widely, sugar was also manufactured all over the country. Generally, we get references to three types of sugarcane products; the **gur** or jaggery; the powder sugar and the finer quality grains called candy. The jaggery was made in all sugarcane producing areas and was mainly consumed locally. The other two qualities were manufactured mainly in Bengal, Orissa, Ahmedabad, Lahore, Multan and parts of Northern India. Writing about Deccan in the 17th Century, Thevenot remarks that every peasant who grew sugarcane had his own furnace. Abul Fazl records the price of powder sugar around 128 **dams** for one **man**, while that of the candy 220 **dams**.

The method of extracting sugarcane juice involved the cane-press which was operated manually or with animal power. The jaggery or finer quality was obtained by boiling it over in pans or open furnace. It was during the process of boiling that different qualities were obtained. Bengal sugar was considered the best and was in great demand for export to Europe and Persia.

Extraction of oil was also mostly a village-based industry. The oilseeds were put to a simple oil-press operated manually or by animal power. The specialised caste involved in extracting the oil was called **tellis**. The residual product was used for animal feed.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) List some important places of cotton textile production.

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- 2) Write a small note on silk production in India.

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- 3) Which were the main indigo varieties produced in India?

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## 22.3 MINERALS, MINING AND METALS

Deep mining was not carried out in the 16th and 17th centuries in India, but surface mining for a large number of minerals and metal was practiced. We will deal with both in this section.

### 22.3.1 Mineral Production

The salt was the essential commodity in which India seems to have been self-sufficient. The sources of salt were the Sambhar lake in Rajputana, the Punjab rock-salt mines and sea-water. Sea salt was made mainly in Sind, the Rann of Cutch, other coasts of Gujarat, Malabar, Mysore and Bengal, etc. Since salt was not available in all parts of the country, it was one of the major articles of trade at regional and inter-regional level.

Saltpetre was one of the most important mineral products. It was in great demand by the Europeans. It was primarily used as an ingredient for gun powder. Initially, saltpetre was extracted at Ahmedabad, Baroda, etc. But since the supply could not meet the demand, it started to be made even in the Delhi-Agra region. However, by the second half of the seventeenth century, Patna in Bihar became an important centre for procuring saltpetre. Saltpetre, collected from the nearby places of Patna was then sent by boats down the Ganges to Hugli and sent to Europe.

The method of obtaining saltpetre from salt earth was a simple one. Shallow reservoirs were made on the ground and salt earth was mixed in water. The salt dissolved in water and earth settled down. This salt water was then boiled in large pans, the water evaporated and saltpetre was obtained. Indian artisans used earthen pans for boiling. The Europeans used iron or copper pans for boiling. Tavernier (17th century) found that Dutch were using boilers imported from Holland. According to one source, the total production in a year (1688) was around more than two lakhs ~~mans~~ of raw saltpetre from Bihar alone.

Other minerals such as alum and mica were produced on small scale.

### 22.3.2 Metals

India did not have gold and silver mines in the proper sense. The famous gold mines of Kolar were not explored. However, small quantities of gold were obtained from river beds, but the cost of procurement was more than its value. Fitch (1584) has described the method of washing the river sand and finding gold dust in Bihar. Similarly, gold was found in river beds in some other regions.

Most of the silver requirements were met through imports. Gold and silver were used for minting of coins. A large amount was used for making ornaments and for hoarding purposes as precious metal.

Rajasthan was the main centre for copper production where copper mines existed (at Khetri). The bulk of the copper was used for minting copper coins. Small and big household objects were also manufactured.

Iron was the most commonly found metal. Iron mines were widely distributed in the north, east, west, central and southern parts of the country. Abul Fazl records Bengal, Allahabad, Agra, Bihar, Gujarat, Delhi and Kashmir as iron producing regions. Chhotanagpur in Bihar and adjoining regions of Orissa also produced large quantities. The iron found in the south was converted into steel.

Iron was used for making ploughs, axes, nails, screws, swords, daggers. The steel made in the south, especially in Golconda, was used for the manufacture of Damascus swords, admired all over the world.

Some other metals, though in small amount, were also produced. Lead was found in north and western India.

#### Diamond Mining

Diamond mining was carried out in some parts of India, but the diamond miners of Golconda were most famous. Other places included Biragarh in Berar, Panna in Madhya Pradesh, Khokhra or Chhotanagpur in Bihar.

## 22.4 WOOD-BASED CRAFTS

Wood provided the basis for a large number of crafts. The means of surface transport made of wood included palanquins and bullock-drawn carts. Both were made in a wide variety of styles and the ones used by rich were carved and decorated. Large number of boats and sea-going ships were always needed since India has a long coast line and north India is criss-crossed by a large number of navigable rivers.

The boats were built in various sizes: from small one for pleasure trips to large ones for transporting hundreds of kilograms of goods over long distance.

The ports on the Arabian sea as well as the Bay of Bengal, such as Thattah Surat, Bassein, Goa, Cragnore, Cochin, Masulipatam and the neighbouring, Narasapur, Hariharpur, Satgaon and Chittagong were important ship-building centres. When the Europeans intensified their activities, they got their ships repaired at these places. They found Indian ships better suited for eastern waters and, hence, they purchased ships built in India. Thus ship-building industry received a considerable boost because of the rising European demand throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Other uses of wood were to make doors, windows, and a large number of household furniture such as boxes, bedstead etc. The rich had their furniture made from high quality wood.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write ten lines on Saltpetre production in India.

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- 2) Describe the main regions of:

- i) Diamond mining

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- ii) Ship-building

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## 22.5 MISCELLANEOUS CRAFTS

Each and every region had its highly specialised crafts. Here it would not be possible to go into the details of all these crafts. We will describe some important crafts only.

Stone-cutting was an important craft as stones were widely used in the construction of houses, palaces, forts, temples, etc. Indian stone-masons were known for their skill.

Other items of non-agricultural production were leather goods such as shoes, saddles, bookcovers, etc., manufactured all over the country.

### Paper

Paper was manufactured during the period under review in a number of centres, such as Ahmedabad, Daulatabad, Lahore, Sialkot, Biharsharif near Patna, etc. Ahmedabad paper was of several varieties and was exported to Arabia, Turkey and Persia. The paper from Kashmir was also famous.

In a number of places in north India, paper was made which was used for local needs. The manufacture in South India was limited. Most of the paper was hand made and of a coarse variety.

### Pottery

The contemporary records refer to the use of earthenwares by people for cooking, storing water and grains, etc. Besides, most of the houses had earthen tiled (*khapraill*) roof. The demand for earthenware must have been great. Every large village in India had its potter and pottery for every day use was made all over the country.

Apart from the above coarse pottery, fine crockery was also made. Manucci (1663) mentions the manufacture of earthen crockery which was finer than glass and lighter than paper. Marshal (1670) also noticed fine crockery.

Glass manufacturing was also undertaken in several parts of the country.

Other miscellaneous items produced by Indian craftsmen included soap, objects of ivory and shell, articles of horn, etc.

Several crafts were forest-based. Among them, lac was used for the manufacture of bangles, varnishing doors and windows and toys and for preparing a red dye. It was extracted from forests in Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Orissa, Malwa, Gujarat, Malabar, etc. Bengal lac was considered to be the best. In Surat, bangles and toys were made of lac. It was also used for sealings.

Various contemporary authorities refer to pearl fisheries being practiced in the sea waters along the southern coast.

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## 22.6 ORGANISATION OF PRODUCTION

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All forms of production from independent artisan level to the *karkhanas* existed in India during the period of our study. The organisation of production varied in different crafts and industries in accordance with the needs and requirements of that craft.

**Village Artisans:** As we noticed in Units 17, 18 and 19 the artisans in rural areas, who produced articles of daily use, formed a regular part of the village establishment called *jajmani* system. The most crucial services were those of the blacksmiths, carpenters, potters and shoemakers. Generally, they were paid in kind for providing the basic tools, agricultural implements and their maintenance needs. The system was much more organised in Deccan and Maharashtra where village artisans and servants were called *balutedars*. There was one more group of workers in Deccan called *alutedars* which were also included in some regions.

With the money economy penetrating into the rural areas and also the increasing demand, the situation in this subsistence-oriented system started changing. According to Tapan Ray Chaudhuri, "By the seventeenth century, if not much earlier, exchange had made significant inroads into the subsistence-oriented system of manufacture by collectively maintained artisans. Payments in cash and kind for additional work, or entirely on a piece-work basis, co-existed with the more widespread practice of allocating fixed shares of the rural produce and/or land to the artisan families".

Tapan Ray Chaudhuri adds that probably by the mid-eighteenth century the entire production for the long and medium distance trade was dependent on artisans who were fully weaned from the *jajmani* system.

With the increase in demand, it seems the rural artisan catered to urban markets also. The village artisan seems to be quite mobile and would move from one village to

## Production for the Market

Production for the market was mainly done at the independent artisan-level production. Almost every craft had specialised artisans manufacturing articles for sale. Pelsaert, a Dutch traveller (1623) mentions that around 100 specialized categories of artisans work in different crafts. The high level of specialization is most evident in the textile manufacture. Almost every operation was performed by a different group of workmen like carding, spinning of yarn, winding silk thread, weaving of cloth, bleaching, dyeing, printing and painting of cloth, etc. Peasants in villages played a significant role by taking up various manufacturing activities. In almost all the agro-based crafts like indigo, sugar and others like spinning of silk and cotton yarn, manufacture of salt and saltpetre, they were at the core of manufacturing activity.

The localization of manufacture was a significant feature. As referred to in the earlier sections, different regions specialised in the production of certain crafts. The European traders tell us that they had to go from place to place to procure the desired commodities. Masulipatam and Benaras each are said to have around 7000 weavers. Similarly, Qasimbazar had around 2500 silk weavers.

At the individual artisan-level production, the artisan himself procured the raw material and tools, performed the manufacture and also retailed the products. The working place was invariably the house of the craftsman or artisan. The artisans had little capital to work with. Therefore, the individual output was small and merchants had to make great efforts to procure it. The quality also differed.

### Dadni

These problems gave rise to a revised form of production called **dadni** or a sort of putting-out system. In **dadni** the money was advanced to artisans by the merchants and the artisans promised to deliver the goods at a given time. Here the merchant was in a position to dictate his specifications. The practice in textiles sector became so widespread that it was difficult to obtain cloth without making advance payment to the artisans. In the seventeenth century, the weaving industry in Deccan was found to be dominated by merchants. In South India, according to Alaev., "The subjection of crafts to merchant capital was widespread. Practically all the artisan settlements along the Coromandal coast were under the control of one trader or another. In the 17th century, the biggest of them (merchant) was Kasi Viranna, who had in his hands all the coasts from Madras to Armagaon except Pulicat. Weaver settlements of this region were known as 'the Viranna villages'." (*The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I, p. 320.)

The system of **dadni** empowered the buyer to dictate the quality and quantity of the goods produced. The artisan got the much needed money to buy raw material with the guarantee of the sale of the goods made, but he lost his control over sale.

### Manufactories

In 1620-21, the English factory at Patna established probably the first such unit for winding silk yarn and employed around 100 workmen. The Dutch at Qasimbazar employed 700-800 weavers in their silk factory. But such instances are just sporadic (see A.J. Qaisar, 'The Role of Brokers in Medieval India').

Another specialised area where large number of workmen were assembled to work at one place were ship-building and building construction. Almost all the ship-building centres in Deccan and South India had large number of artisans working on each ship under one single supervision. Building activity also like ship-building required large number of artisans working under one single supervision. (See A.J. Qaisar, 'Ship-building in the Mughal Empire during the Seventeenth Century' and *Building Construction in Mughal India: The Evidence from Painting*.)

There were two other production sectors where large number of workmen (though not very skilled artisans) were employed. One, the diamond mines of Golconda and Deccan had around 30,000 to 60,000 people working at periodical season of mining. Here, the plots of land were taken on rent from the ruler by the prospectors. Each of them used to employ 200 to 300 miners to work on their plots. The miners were paid wages per day. Similarly, in Bihar around 8000 men used to come to diamond mines in the season of mining (December-January). These people were generally peasants and workers who came to work here after sowing their fields.



The second case of assemblage of large workers was in the production of saltpetre. In this case also large number of people worked under one master in small groups. In Bihar they were called **nooneas**. With the increasing demand, the Dutch and English established their own units for refining saltpetre. The workmen in their refineries were to work with the equipment provided by these European companies.

### **Karkhanas**

A unique feature of production in the period of our study was the **karkhanas**. These **karkhanas** were in operation even in 14th-15th centuries. These **karkhanas** were part of the royal establishment and also of the nobles. These produced things for the consumption of the royal household and the court. Many high nobles also had their own **karkhanas**. Generally expensive and luxury items were produced here. Skilled artisans were employed to work under one roof to manufacture things needed. They were supervised by state officials. The need for such **karkhanas** arose because the artisans on their own were not in a position to invest huge amounts required for royal needs. Because of valuable raw material, the state also did not want to give these to artisans to work at their own places. We will not go here into details of the functioning of these **karkhanas** as their production was not for the market but for personal consumption of the king and nobles.

We notice that the process of production was undergoing a change during the period of our study. As summed up by Tapan Ray Chaudhari, "The organisation of manufacture in Mughal India did not remain unchanged. A lot was happening, but on a limited scale, and the sum total of new developments did not amount to a break with the past. Continuity was still the dominant characteristic. Yet the changes in organisation were more basic than those in technique".

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) Briefly describe the **jajmani** system.

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- 2) Write five lines on each of the following.

- i) **Dadni**

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- ii) **Manufactories**

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- iii) **Karkhanas**

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## 22.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we discussed the non-agricultural production of India which was sufficiently developed for being recognised separately. Here the largest and perhaps the most widespread production was that of textile goods. There was a great demand for cotton textiles which seemed to have given a great boost to the industry. The other agro-based industries were those pertaining to indigo and sugar.

The salt production was sufficient for meeting the needs of the domestic sector. Saltpetre was another important industry where the production was carried out on a large scale. As a result there existed enough surplus for export. Substantial quantities of iron and copper were also produced though production of silver on an equal scale was missing. The ship-building industry also developed considerably during this period.

Significantly the bulk of production in non-agricultural sector was undertaken through the agency of the individual artisan. In some sectors like, saltpetre and diamond mining, large number of artisans and workmen worked jointly under common supervision. A few experiments for establishing manufactories for silk winding were undertaken by the East India Company. But they met with little success. The system of advancing money to artisans for production purposes was well developed. Royal **karkhanas** produced luxury items catering to the needs of the royalty and the nobility.

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## 22.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Gujarat, Bengal and parts of U.P. were famous textile centres. See Sub-section 22.2.1.
- 2) Bengal produced large quantities of silk yarn which was woven in many other parts of the country. See Sub-section 22.2.1.
- 3) Two famous varieties were Bayana and Sarkhej indigo. See Sub-section 22.2.2.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) In 17th century large quantities were produced in Bihar, Bengal and Gujarat. See Sub-section 22.3.1.
- 2) See Sub-sections 22.3.1 and 22.3.2.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) In **jajmani** system the artisans were paid by the community for the service provided by them. See Section 22.5.
- 2) See Section 22.6.