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Q12

What were the major technological changes introduced during the Sultanate period? How did those technological changes influence the Indian society?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS I · 15 marks · Indian Society and Diversity

Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.

Core demand of the question

- What were the major technological changes introduced during the Sultanate period?
- How did those technological changes influence the Indian society?

Revision summary

The true arch, dome, and lime mortar remade Sultanate building from the Qutb complex onward.

Paper, the tanka, karkhanas, the spinning wheel, and the **Persian wheel** changed records, pay, yarn, and some irrigation.

Cavalry and **iqta** tied the new state to rural surplus.

Urban artisans, Persian clerks, and a mixed food and craft culture grew in qasbas.

The village plough and jati order were pressed, not replaced.

Introduction

The **Delhi Sultanate**, from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth century, brought Persian-Islamic craft, war, and building methods into north Indian cities. Those techniques changed work, towns, and the look of power more than they replaced the village plough overnight.

Body

Military and building technology

- The true arch, dome, vault, and lime mortar, seen from the Qutb complex to the **Alai Darwaza** (early fourteenth century), made large congregational mosques and tombs possible in stone and brick.
- Soldiers used the composite bow, heavy cavalry, and, by the later Sultanate, more gunpowder weapons, which shifted power toward states that could pay horsemen.
- Paper, already known in the Islamic world, spread in chanceries and madrasas, which thickened records, law, and Persian prose.

Production and everyday technique

- The spinning wheel (charkha) and a wider use of the **Persian wheel (saqia)** in parts of the north raised yarn output and well irrigation where they took hold.

- Sericulture, paper, and new urban crafts sat in karkhanas tied to the court, while the silver tanka of Iltutmish gave a stabler coin for long-distance pay.
- Canal repair and new cuts under rulers such as Firuz Shah Tughlaq around the Yamuna-Ghaghar belt showed state interest in irrigation, even if the village still used the older plough.
- Food and garden plants associated with Central Asian and Persian courts entered elite kitchens and some fields, which slowly changed taste in towns.

Influence on society

- New towns, markets, and qasbas grew around forts, mosques, and mints, so a larger urban artisan and service class lived by cash and court demand.
- Persian as the language of command created a clerical elite and a cultural mix in music, dress, and food that later Mughal culture would thicken.
- Building workshops gathered masons, calligraphers, and stone-cutters across religious lines, which made a shared craft world even when temples and mosques differed in form.
- Cavalry and *iqta* finance pressed the countryside for surplus, so peasants met the new state as tax more often than as new machines.
- Sufi hospices and madrasas used paper and urban rent, which spread Islam and literacy in towns without erasing caste in the village.

Limits

- The Sultanate did not industrialise India; the heavy plough, monsoon rice, and jati crafts remained the social base.
- Gunpowder's full military revolution is clearer in the sixteenth century, so the Sultanate is a beginning, not the last word.

Way forward for the answer

- Name arch, paper, wheel, tanka, and canal as techniques, then show town, tax, and culture as social effects, or the second half of the question stays vague.

Flow diagram

Sultanate technique -> Arch dome paper
Sultanate technique -> Charkha Persian wheel tanka
Sultanate technique -> Cavalry canals
Arch dome paper -> Towns karkhanas
Charkha Persian wheel tanka -> Towns karkhanas
Cavalry canals -> Tax on peasant
Towns karkhanas -> Persian urban mix

Conclusion

Sultanate technology was arch and dome, paper, textile wheels, coin, cavalry, and some canals. Society felt it as new towns, a Persian clerical world, and heavier cash demand on the peasant, while village rank changed only slowly.

Facts & figures

Alai Darwaza

Early fourteenth-century gateway at the Qutb complex that shows true arch and dome work.

Iltutmish's tanka

Silver coin that became a standard of Sultanate pay and trade.

Firuz Shah Tughlaq canals

State irrigation works in the western **Ganga plain** associated with his reign.

Persian wheel (saqia)

Animal-powered wheel that lifted well water more steadily where it spread.

Iqta

Revenue assignment to cavalry elites that linked military technique to peasant surplus.

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