

Revision Notes

Chapter 8: Confrontation of Cultures

SNIPPETS FROM THE CHAPTER:

It reflects the encounters between European and the people of the America between fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. The fifteenth century was the age of geographical discoveries mainly influenced by new scientific inventions, travellers' accounts, political and religious motives, etc.

Reasons:

- In 1492, a Spanish sailor Christopher Columbus discovered America. Later on, Italian explorer **Amerigo Vespucci** came to South America in 1499 and called it a New World.
- Economic motives spurred the European voyages and discoveries.
- The invention of compass in 1380 helped the sailors to sail independently in different directions.
- Astrolabe was invented which helped the sailors to look beyond the normal vision and helped them to avoid the marine danger.
- The Americas are home to many native tribes; the world's largest river - the Amazon flows here. There were communities of the natives such as the *Arawakian Lucayos* and the *Caribs*.

1. Native American Culture

(a) Small Subsistence Economies

(i) **Arawaks** (Bahamas)

(b) Developed Culture

(i) **Aztecs** (Mexico)

(ii) **Mayas** (Central America)

(iii) **Incas** (West Coast & South America)

THE ARAWAKS (BAHAMAS)

The Arawakian Lucayos lived on a cluster of hundreds of small islands in the Caribbean Sea, today known as the **Bahamas**, and the Greater Antilles.

Economic activities of Arawaks (Bahamas)

- (a) They produced food collectively to feed everyone in the community.
- (b) They had self-sufficient economy.
- (c) They were skilled boat-builders, they sailed the open sea in dugout canoes (canoes made from hollow tree trunks).
- (d) They lived by hunting, fishing and agriculture
- (e) They grew food products like- corn, sweet potatoes, tubers and cassava.

Religious & social life of Arawaks (Bahamas)

- (a) Polygamy was common in their society.
- (b) They were animist (they believe that even objects regarded by modern science as 'inanimate' may have life or a soul).
- (c) Shamans played an important role as healers and intermediaries between this world and that of the supernatural
- (d) They were superstitious.

Cultural & Features of Arawaks (Bahamas)

- (a) They preferred negotiations to conflict.
- (b) They were very generous host.
- (c) The art of weaving was highly developed – the hammock was one of their specialties.

**** People called the Tupinamba lived on the east coast of South America, and in villages in the forests (the name 'Brazil' is derived from the brazilwood tree).**

Political Features of Arawaks (Bahamas)

- (a) They were governed by oligarchy as they were organised under clan elders.
- (b) They had no army.
- (c) There existed no religious institution.

THE AZTECS (of Mexico)

In the twelfth century, the Aztecs had migrated from the north into the central valley of Mexico (named after their god *Mexitli*).

Social life of Aztecs

- (a) They had hierarchical society.
- (b) Nobility was dominant as the nobles chose from among them a supreme leader who ruled until his death.
- (c) The king was regarded as the representative of the sun on earth.
- (d) Warriors, priests and nobles were the most respected groups, but traders also enjoyed many privileges and often served the government as ambassadors and spies.
- (e) They engaged in war.
- (f) Aztec women were given special status in the society.

Economic Activities of Aztecs

- (a) The Aztecs undertook reclamations. They made *chinampas*, artificial islands, in Lake Mexico.
- (b) They made canals between fertile lands.
- (c) They cultivated food products like - Corns, beans, pumpkin, potatoes, etc.
- (d) They had agrarian economy. Land was owned not by individuals but by clans.

Cultural Activities of Aztecs

- (a) They gave special attention the schooling of their children.
- (b) Children of the nobility attended the *calmecac* and were trained to become military and religious leaders.
- (c) Others went to the *tepothcalli* in their neighbourhood, which was the center of learning.

Political Activity of Aztecs

- (a) In 1325 the capital city **Tenochtitlan** was built.
- (b) The king was their sole leader.
- (c) They made conquests and reclaimed territories as land was limited.
- (d) They conquered people.

(e) In the early sixteenth century, the Aztec empire was showing signs of strain due to discontent among recently conquered peoples.

THE MAYAS (of Central America)

The Mayan culture of Mexico developed remarkably between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, but in the sixteenth century they had less political power than the Aztecs. The important Mayan civilisation were Mexico, Honduras, El-Salvador and Guatemala.

Social life of Mayas

- (a) Their religious ceremonies were based on agriculture.
- (b) Their social relation was based on agrarian system.

Economic Activities of Mayas

- (a) They were engaged in corn cultivation.
- (b) Efficient agricultural production generated surplus, which helped the ruling classes, priests and chiefs to invest in architecture and in the development of astronomy and mathematics
- (c) This surplus helped ruling classes priests and chiefs to invest in architecture and in the development of astronomy and mathematics.

Cultural Activities of Mayas

- (a) Made significant development of architecture.
- (b) They progressed of astronomy and mathematics.
- (c) They devised a pictographic form of writing.
- (d) They made Maya Calendar

Political Activity of Mayas

- (a) They had less political power.
- (b) Their ruling class was strong.

The **Incas** were also known as the **Quechuas**. The capital city – **Cuzco** was established by the first Inca emperor, **Manco Capac** in the twelfth century. They spoke Quechan language. The Aztecs and the Incas shared some common feature, e.g, hierarchical societies with no private

ownership of resources, and were very different from European culture.

VOYAGES AND EXPLORATION (by Europeans)

- The voyages of discovery were pioneered by explorers from Spain and Portugal.
- The magnetic compass was used by Europeans for the voyages.
- The printed version of Ptolemy's Geography was available in 1477.
- The Vikings of Norway had reached North America in the eleventh century.
- Portugal gained independence from Spain in 1139.
- **Christopher Columbus** had reached South America. He also reached the Guanahani Island in the Bahamas in 1492. The two continents were named after **Amerigo Vespucci**, a geographer from Florence.
- **Francisco Pizarro** captured the Inca emperor from the ruler, Atahualpa in 1532.
- Brazil was occupied by the Portuguese under command of **Pedro Alvares Cabral**. They exploited Brazilwood. In 1601, King Philip II of Spain publicly banned forced labour.

Conquest, Colonies and the Slave-Trade

- The uncertain voyages had a lasting consequences for Europe, the Americas and Africa. From the fifteenth century, European maritime projects produced knowledge of continuous sea passages from ocean to ocean. Before this, most of these passages had been unknown to Europeans. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, all these feats were accomplished.
- For Europe, the 'discovery' of the Americas had consequences for others besides the initial voyagers. Europe became familiar with new crops from America, notably potatoes and chillies. These were then taken by Europeans to other countries like India.
- For the native people of the Americas, the immediate consequences were the physical decimation of local populations, the destruction of their way of life and their enslavement in mines, plantations and mills.
- The sudden destruction of the two major civilisations – those of the Aztecs and the Incas – in America highlights the contrasts between the two cultures in combat. Both with the Aztecs and the Incas, the nature of warfare played a crucial role in terrorizing local inhabitants psychologically and physically.

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- The enslavement of the population was a sharp reminder of the brutality of the encounter. Slavery was not a new idea, but the South American experience was new in that it accompanied the emerging capitalist system of production. Working conditions were horrific, but the Spanish regarded the exploitation as essential to their economic gain.

Conclusion

In the early nineteenth century, European settlers in the South American colonies were to rebel against Spain and Portugal and become independent countries, just as in 1776 the thirteen North American colonies rebelled against Britain and formed the United States of America.

Latin America: South America today is also called '**Latin America**'. This is because Spanish and Portuguese, two of the main languages of the continent, are part of the Latin family of languages. The inhabitants are mostly native European (called Creole), European, and African by origin. Most of them are Catholics. Their culture has many elements of native traditions mixed with European ones.

Timeline: Refer to page no. 177

Keywords: Maya, Bahama, Arawak, Aztec, Inca, Columbus, Pizarro