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The Process of Urbanization in Ancient India: A Historical Analysis

Abstract

The term 'Urbanization' is most useful on the respect for studying economic history in India as well as ancient India, area of my discussion here. 'Economy' and 'Urbanization' performed an intermingle role for developing a civilization in ancient India. Generally, the historians, Scholars admitted that the 'first urban society' in India as Indus Valley Civilization which had been originated and developed during B.C. 3000 to B.C. 1700 probably. Indus Valley Civilization which was first urban based civilization in India, technically growth and maintained more urban characteristics. Therefore, I trace on the process of 'Second Urbanization', 6th century B.C. onwards which had been started from later Vedic period. After that the process of Urbanization in ancient India had been continuously developed by various ruling dynasties like Maurya, Sunga, Kusana etc. Then I try to clarify the process of Urbanization in India during 'early medieval period'. The process of Urbanization in ancient India was dynamic not only dynamic but also it followed a character of ups and downs.

Thus this paper the author intends to analyze the urban system during various period in ancient India, basically the 'First Urbanization', 'Second Urbanization', also various ruling dynasties up to 'Early Medieval Period' in India.

Keywords: Urbanization, First Urbanization, Second Urbanization, Early Medieval Period in India, Urbanization in India during Early Medieval Period.

Introduction

In modern times the history of Urbanization is a vital issue among the Scholars. In early times two factors were more significant for constructing an urban society, such as exploration of population in a limited space and surplus of production from agriculture. In 1936 Gordon Childe first formulated his idea about 'Urban Revolution' and point out the essential criteria and the basic norms to be observed in the scientific method needed for extracting history from archaeological data. Also Childe emphasized on the use of concept of typology is one of the most important features of archaeological study. Childe focused on technology as the moving force behind the Urban Revolution.

A. Ghosh said that however in early historical periods, there was no large scale drift to the city. The vast population continued to be rural, and rural element was quite strong even within the city. The more purposeful academic attempts to understand the nature of urbanization in India were based mainly on the archaeological excavations supported by number literary evidences. This change was initiated by many Scholars, such A. Ghosh (1973), Vijay Kumar Thakur (1981), and Dilip K. Chakravorty (1988). M. Lal tried to examine the role of iron and the growth of cities in Gangetic Valley. R.S. Sharma in his '**Urban Decay in India**' (1987) tried to argue that the early historic cities of India declined along with the decline of trade economy which reached its water –mark during the Kusana Period.

Several books, Literature studies were either written or organized by many authors, scholar & historians in the different issues regarding Urbanization in Ancient India. Resma Sawant and Gurudas Shete (2016) in their '**A Review of Early Historic Urbanization in India**' elaborately discuss on archaeology related to the process of Urbanization in Early Historic Period at regional level. They point out that Archaeological excavations have revealed early urban settlements in upper Ganges-Yamuna doab region began in the Harappan period; in middle Ganges Basin, urbanism began at the beginning of second millennium BCE approximately. They also mention that some interesting insights on Early



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Historic urbanisms have also come from the state of Orissa, on the eastern coast of India. Rasid Faridi (2017) in his 'First Urbanization in India: Indus Valley Civilization' give an idea about Urban characters of Indus Valley Civilization and various urban centers in this Civilization. R.P. Misra (1998) in his 'Urbanization in India: Challenges and Opportunities' discuss on the successive stages and evolution of Urbanization in India from early times. V.N. Misra (2001) in his article, entitled 'Prehistoric Human Colonization of India' emphasis on Prehistoric Human Colonization in India. He divided Prehistoric Period into Stone, Bronze and Iron ages. Here he explain the evolution of Human settlement in India through economic perspective and also discuss on 'First Urbanization' and 'Second Urbanization in India'. UK Essays (2015), the article 'Focus on Urbanization within India' elaborately discuss on history of Urbanization in India and different issues regarding Urbanization in India. Gregory L Possehl (1990) in his 'Revolution in the urban revolution: The Emergence of Indus Urbanization' discuss on record of recent archaeological work on the Indus Civilization, Village farming tradition and theoretical position on the rise of ancient cities of the Indus.

But no one researcher conducted his or her study on the process of urbanization in Ancient India along with the discussion of first urbanization, second urbanization, urbanization in South India and also urbanization in early medieval India. Therefore, a gap in the area of knowledge is existed. To bridge this gap of knowledge and to analyze the various stages of the process of urbanization in ancient India and its significance on various aspects of society such as economy, culture, social life, religion, education system etc.

Objectives of Study

1. To explain the process of Urbanization in Indus Valley Civilization (B.C. 3000-B.C 1500 probably) which was known as first Urbanization in Ancient India.
2. To study the process of second urbanization which had been started from later Vedic Period and it may be matured B.C. 6th century onwards.
3. To discuss the continuity of the urban process in Early India by various ruling dynasties after the end of second Urbanization.
4. To enumerate the process of Urbanization under various regional dynasties in Early Medieval India.
5. To analyze the probable factors which had been influenced the process of Urbanization in Ancient India.

First Urbanization

Indus Valley Civilization was known as first urbanization in India which had been started from B.C. 3000 probably. The two important Cities of this Civilization were Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Each city was located on the bank of river such as Mohenjo-Daro on the bank of river Indus and Harappa on bank of river Ravi. These two cities represented the climax of urban development in the first phase. The rise of towns in the Indus zone was based on

agricultural surplus, the making of bronze tools, various other crafts and widespread trade and commerce. The main features of the

Harappan cities were the rise in the destiny of population, close integration of economic and social process, careful planning for urban expansion, flourishing of several crafts, growth of trade and commerce, scope for artisans and craftsmen. Some Scholars described the rise of Harappan Civilization as an urban revolution that was possibly based on centralized political authority, economic organization and also socio-cultural unity.

Second Urbanization

After the end of great Harappan culture, no urban development took place in any part of India, but around 6th century B.C. the 'Second phase of Urbanization' began in India. R.S. Sharma asserted that "the towns in this phase were distinguished by crafts and commerce and reached their height of prosperity in the period between 2nd century BCE and 3rd century. The increase in craft production, local and long distance trade is costly goods and availability of agricultural produce from the hinterland boosted urbanization in the post Maurya times.

Excavations and explorations give some idea about settlements in later Vedic times. The term '*nagara*' is used in later Vedic texts we can trace only the beginning of towns towards the end of the later Vedic period. *Hastinapura* and *Kausambi* can be regarded as primitive towns belonging to the end of the Vedic period. Iron played a vital role in the life of Aryan peoples. 6th century B.C. onwards a number of settlements were established in different parts of India that could help for 'rapid urbanization' in India.

We can divided the second phase of urbanization in north India into three part such as post Vedic period, Mauryan period, and post Mauryan period. Many Scholars admitted that in Southern India, "Urbanization originated and acquired to a great status during Sangam Age." During post Vedic period the centres of the Aryan homeland had shifted to upper *Yamuna* and *Ganga* basins. In the meantime they established small territories which led to the emergence of Kingdoms and capital cities. The earliest cities of this period were *Hastinapur*, *Shravasthi*, *Kapilavastu*, *Ujjain*, *Mahismati*, *Champa*, *Rajgir*, *Ayodhya*, *Varanasi*, and *Kausambi*. During this period the 'smaller Janapadas' gave way to the 'Mahajanapadas' which had been rose to the 'Maghadhan Empire.' The Janapadas were Magadha, *Kosala*, *Vatsa*, *Avanti*, *Vajjis*, *Kasi*, *Malla*, *Panchalla*, *Chedi*, *Kamboja*, *Gandhara*, and *Kuru*. The growth of these Janapadas and Empires encouraged Urbanization.

During the Mauryan period there were evidences of different types of towns, such important categories of towns were *Rajadhaniyanagar*, *Sthanianyanagara*, *Kharavarta*, *Kheta*, *Putabhedana*, *Nigama*, *Patana* and *Dronamukha*. The first four types were administrative towns and last four types referred to commercial Cities. According to Kautilya's *Arthasastras*, a capital city should have three royal highways in the east-west direction and three in north-

south direction, dividing the city into number of sectors.

Most towns flourished in the 'Kusana' period in the first and second centuries A.D. Excavations show that several sites in 'Bihar' such as Chirand, Sonapur, and Buxar witnessed prosperous Kusana phases. In Uttarpradesh *Sohgaru*, *Bhita*, *Kausambi* and several sites in the district of Meerut and Muzaffarnagar were also glorious in Kusana times. Town prospered in the Kusana period because they carried on thriving trade with the 'Roman Empire'.

Urbanization in Southern India

The *Dravidian* culture attained a very high level of urbanization due to large number of classical works in Tamil language i.e. known as 'Sangam Literature'. The important Tamil cities of early period were *Maduri*, *Vengi*, *Urayur*, *Puhar* and *Korkai*. These kingdoms were situated on the south of the 'Krishna River'.

'*Satbahana*' period was also important for extending urban culture in Southern India. *Tagar*, *Paithan*, *Amravati*, *Nagarjunakonda*, *Broach*, *Sopara*, *Arikamedu*, *Kaveripattam* were prosperous towns in the '*Satbahana*' period in western and southern India. Pliny mentioned that the Andhara country in the eastern Decan included 30 walled towns, beside numerous villages. Several towns of the second and third century in this area are known from this inscription and excavations. At this time, South India, too, witnessed the impact of maritime trade with the Roman World. In peninsular India, this phase represents the first phase of urbanization.

Urbanization in Early Medieval India

Urbanization in the early medieval India has been matter of debate among the Scholars. R.S. Sharma contributed a theory regarding urbanization in early medieval India i.e. the 'Urban Decay in India'. Sharma mentioned the two stage urban decay, the first starting in 2nd half of the 3rd century to 4th century A.D. and second after 6th century A.D. Sharma argued that urban decay should be an integral part of a new pattern of agrarian production and surplus appropriation, where in state officials and revenue collectors gave way to Landed Chiefs, Vassals, Brahmanas, Temples, and Monasteries who directly extracted surplus services and goods from the Peasants and Artisans. Sharma's *Indian Feudalism* (1965) laid down the 'Indian Feudalism Model' and *Urban Decay in India: C.300 – C.1000* (1987), a study of 140 archaeological sites, showed that early medieval India witnessed economic crisis, social conflict and political disintegration, testifying to the process of urban decay.

On the other hand eminent Scholar *B.D. Chattopadhyay*, in his 'The Making of Early Medieval India' (1994) point out that though the early medieval period saw the decline of some urban centre, some other simultaneously continued to flourish and some new ones also emerged. In early medieval North India, some urban centre, such as *Prithudaka* (modern Pehoa in Karnal district of Harayana), *Tattanandapura* (Ahar near Bulandshahar and situated on the west bank of Ganga), *Siyodina* and

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Gopagiri, witnessed a continuity of inland trade and elements of urbanization with it (Chattopadhyay, 1994). Chattopadhyay points to the epigraphic evidence for the rise various market places in early medieval period. Two terms, *hatta* (market) and *mandapika* (centre where commercial cess was imposed and collected), are used in the inscriptions from Rajasthan dated to the second half of 9th century to donate centre of exchange (Chattopadhyay, 1994). *Ranavir Chakravarti*, in his 'Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society' (2002) strongly challenged the perception of declining trade in India during 600-1000 CE and demonstrates the linkages of trade at the locality level during this period.

According to B.D. Chattopadhyay, urban centres were fully developed in some parts of India during early medieval period, South India was more important regarding this statement, so many factors were responsible for growing urban centre during early medieval period, such factors are:

1. Emergence of Religious Centre,
2. The holding of fairs,
3. Commercial activities centered around ports,
4. The bestowal of urban status on rural settlements,
5. Initiatives taken by Kings and ministers in the establishment of urban centers,
6. The nature the interaction with settlements outside,
7. Nature of urban hierarchy.

Summary and Conclusion

We can say on basis of above discussion that the process of Urbanization in ancient India had not been constructed in few times, it was the result of a long time evolution which had been started in Indus Valley Civilization probably. Thereafter we have got the evidences of second phase of Urbanization which had been followed on long times and also discussed about the process of Urbanization in Southern India as well as early medieval India. Various Scholars specified their views on the process of urbanization in ancient India and established their views behind it. They mentioned about many factors which responsible for origin and developing the process of Urbanization in ancient India.

This study, 'The Process of Urbanization' in Ancient India' reflects on a percept i.e. the socio-economic factors were very much responsible behind the Urbanization in Ancient India. Trade was another important component for extending urban character in Ancient India. Trade was impossible without good agricultural production or surplus during that period. River and River sites were also important factors which were desirable for good agriculture and trade and industry and crafts were also important regarding process of Urbanization in India.

Religious centre and Educational institutions were also significant for developing Urbanization in Ancient India. Buddhist Vihara, Buddhist Study Centre, Jain Temples, Educational Institutions in Ancient India like Nalanda, Vikramshila, Taxila and many south Indian Temples and Religious Centre were much responsible to establish a City or Town in

Ancient India.

Thus the process of urbanization in ancient India was very much significant for evaluating the economic and cultural condition and also socio-political interaction in ancient India. The Urbanization in ancient India also indicates the superiority of cognitive thinking and creativeness of Indian Peoples during Ancient period.

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