

Process of Urbanization



Lesson: Process of Urbanization

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12.1 What do you mean by Urbanization?

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Urbanization is a process of urban growth leading to the rise of a city or a social process whereby cities grow and societies become more urban. In other words, urbanism is perceived as the product of societal change, the manifestation of certain economic and social systems at work (Champakalakshmi, 1996, 2). V. Gordon Childe's article, 'The Urban Revolution', published in *Town Planning Review* lists the ten characteristics of a town or an urban center, such as dense population; diverse composition and functions (agricultural and non-agricultural) of urban population; payment of a tiny surplus of agrarian produce as tithe or tax by peasantry to the ruling elite; monumental public buildings reflecting the concentration of social surplus in the hands of the elite; rulers living on the surplus produced by farmers and, in turn, providing them security, planning and organization; invention of a system of recording as an aid to meeting administrative needs; invention of writing leading to the development of exact and predictive sciences, such as arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, as also the creation of a calendar; sophisticated styles of artistic expression; regular foreign or long-distance trade; and state provision for security and raw materials to specialist craftsmen, enabling them to live a settled life (Childe, 1950, 1-17). These ten deciding features of a city or an urban center became significant parameters for historians to research urban history of India, though not all these traits were present in various phases of urbanization in Indian history. The prominent features of urban settlement in early medieval India are debatable among historians referred to early medieval centres are large size of a settlement in terms of area and population; its closeness to sources of water supply; presence or absence of artifacts reflecting the activities of artisans; evidence of coin mounds reflects mint towns; evidence of luxury goods; presence of shops, streets and fortifications; evidence of inter-regional and foreign trade. All these factors together reflect the presence of urbanization. However, historians studying urbanization in this period have debated on such fundamental issues as the nature or state of urban centers and their role in the socio-economic life, interpreting varied sources to create and buttress different theories/models.

12.2 Sources for the study of urbanization

Either one or several sources — texts, inscriptions, coins, structural remains — have been used to study the urbanization process in different periods of history, including the early medieval, although no source in particular can be depended on in totality for understanding the process. R.S. Sharma primarily based his study of early medieval urbanization on archeological evidence, B. D. Chattopadhyaya on epigraphic material, and John S. Deyell on numismatics — all developing different, and even contrarian in some respects, perspectives on the issue.

Sharma marshaled much literary and epigraphic evidence to forcefully argue for the decline of urban centers in this period. Firstly, land-grant charters of 5th-6th century CE from Bengal lack references to traders, merchants and artisans, and their participation in administration, indicating decline of trade and urbanism. The 6th-century astrologer Varahamihira's *Brihat Samhita* prophesized not only the destruction of towns and cities, including capital cities, but also the decline of crafts and craftsmen. Thirdly, though Sanskrit *kavyas* limited themselves to describing court life and did not reflect the widespread decay of towns, some other texts indicate this phenomenon, such as Valmiki's *Ramayana* that describes the decline of Ayodhya after Ram left for his exile and Kalidasa's play *Raghuvamsham* that details a similar fate of the city after the death of Rama. Fourthly, the 7th-century Jain commentary *Nishitha Churni*, composed in Prakrit, also refers to several towns. Although two other Prakrit texts, *Samaraiccha Kaha* by Haribhadra Suri and *Kuvalayamala* by Udyotana Suri refer to towns and overseas trade, these sources lack historical objectivity. Fifthly, several texts on architecture compiled around 1000 CE or later,

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such as *Mayamata* and *Manasara*, gave less importance to towns in comparison to villages. Sixthly, archeological evidence for de-urbanization in the and post Gupta times is corroborated by foreign accounts. For instance, Hsuan Tsang's (the Chinese pilgrim who visited India between 630 and 644 CE) account *Si-Yu-Ki* mentions that some cities like Kapilavastu, Shravasti, Ramagrama, Vaishali, Kushinagara and Kaushambi were in decline, while others, such as Thaneswar, Kanyakubja and Varanasi, were flourishing, but the overall impression given by his account is that of decline, in particular, of the towns of northern India. In addition to this Chinese traveler's account, those of Arab and Persian visitors to India in 9th century CE and later — for instance, Arab merchant Sulaiman's account of 851 CE and Persian historian and geographer Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadani's *Kitab al-Buldan* — have few references to town. Al-biruni, in his account, also wrote about the decay and disappearance of towns. Taking these sources together, Sharma argues that while references in Indian texts to urban decline in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods are scant, inscriptions and foreign travelers' accounts, indeed, evince urban decline (Sharma, 1987, 108-21). Epigraphically evidences of various cites were marshal by Chattopadhyaya, similarly Ranabir Chakravarti based his research on thirteen epigraphic records of 8th -12th centuries CE inscriptions from different parts of north India. Deyell's analysis was based on several numismatic evidence in surviving coins hoards. In totality, various archeological, epigraphic and numismatic sources aid in unraveling the process of urbanization during early medieval times.

12.3. Phases of urbanization

1. The first phase of urbanization is represented by the planned cities of the Bronze-age Harappan civilization from the 4th to 2nd millennium BCE. 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 density of population, close integration of economic and social processes, careful planning for urban expansion, flourishing of several crafts, growth of trade and commerce, and scope for artisans and craftsmen. Some scholars have termed the rise of Harappan civilization as an urban revolution that was possibly based on a strong centralized political authority, specialized economic organization and also socio-cultural unity. Planned lay-out of streets, large-scale drainage system and strong citadels were the features indicating a strong government. These traits, in totality, helped in the first urbanization in India. Although this culture was confined to the Indus region and the major part of the subcontinent remained unaffected by this urbanism, as it left no legacy beyond the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE.

2. The second phase of urbanization spanned from around 6th century BCE to the end of 3rd century CE, in the area in and around the middle Gangetic plains. 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 CE (Sharma, 1987, 178). This phase witnessed stages of internal growth and horizontal expansion of cities which was reflected in the distribution of two elements: multifunctional syllabic script and coinage (Chattopadhyaya 1994, 159). The increase in craft production, local and long-distance trade in costly goods and the availability of agricultural produce from the hinterland boosted urbanization in the post-Maurya times. There was also an enormous expansion of trade networks in this phase when India's contact with Central Asia and Roman world reached its saturation (Sharma, 1987, 178). This phase also had an impact on peninsular India due to spread of trade and commercial activities in the Ganga valley. 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.

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After this boom there was a decline in two phases. Several causes are given for the first phase of urban decay that happened between the second half of 3rd century and 4th century CE. Firstly, the decline of many urban centres coincided with the fall of two great kingdoms and the end of Indo-Roman trade. Secondly, the long-distance trade between the Romans, Chinese, Parthians, Kusanas and Satavahanas declined during the late 3rd century and 4th century CE. Archeological excavations of several sites show evidence of what Sharma termed as 'urban decay'. This decline in trade led to a loss of income for the state, merchants, artisans and others. The ensuing social crisis during 3rd and 4th centuries CE, described as the 'Kali Age' in the Puranas, was manifest in the stoppage of the flow of taxes from the countryside and internal revolts in towns. Sharma points out that the second phase of urban decay came after the 6th century CE and coincided with the decline of the Gupta empire. During this period, many important towns of the middle Gangetic plains declined, a fact also corroborated by the account of Hsuan Tsang. Further, the Buddhist texts also give less attention to traders and craftsmen, confirming the phenomenon of de-urbanization. The second phase of urban decay was also linked with the decline of long-distance trade between India and the Byzantine empire on the one hand and South-East Asia on the other.

3. The third phase of urbanization was represented by the rise of towns and cities in the early medieval period, i.e., from the 8th/9th to 12th centuries CE. This period is discussed in detail in the following section.

12.4 Historiography of Urbanization

Urbanization in the early medieval India has been matter of debate among many historians, since Sharma's theory of a two-stage urban decay, the first starting in the 2nd half of the 3rd century or 4th century CE and the second after 6th century CE (Sharma, 1987, 180-81). Sharma argued that the phenomenon of urban decay should be viewed as an integral part of a new pattern of agrarian production and surplus-appropriation, wherein 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. Further, in this system, the servicing and artisanal castes were remunerated by land grants or grains at the harvest time, which left little scope for the operation of exchange economy and the performance of urban functions (ibid., xii).

Among the two pioneering works of Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* (1965) laid down the Indian feudalism model and *Urban Decay in India (c. 300-c.1000)* (1987), a study of 140 archeological sites, showed that early medieval India witnessed economic crisis, social conflict and political disintegration, testifying to the process of urban decay. The process was caused by a combination of interconnected and concurrent processes: issue of a large number of land grants to religious and secular (for services) officials, paucity of metallic currency as a medium exchange, ruralization of economy leading to the rise of villages as self-sufficient economic units where production was carried out for local consumption, and decline of inter-regional and foreign trade. The rise of landed intermediaries entail to the enslavement of the peasantry due to high tax burden, increasing obligations to perform forced labour and created subinfeudation.

Hsuan Tsang's accounts and several inscriptions amply bear out that lands, villages, towns and shops were given away not just to temples and monasteries but also to officials, military and administrative. Such grants entailed the transfer of the state's right to collect taxes from merchants, peasants and artisans to the grantees. This, in effect, meant the delegation of the responsibility for civic administration to the grantees. Further, these beneficiaries of grants could also compel artisans to produce articles not favoured by the latter. Eventually, these grants tended to restrict the economic operations of a town and

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gradually feudalize it (Sharma, 1987, 141). By transferring the control over the merchants and artisans operating in the donated lands from state to the beneficiaries, these grants struck a blow to mercantile activities, as the merchants started getting involved in the management of the donated land. Their involvement in the management of lands granted to temples and monasteries was bound to reduce their trading activities.

Sharma has linked the decline of cities in India from 600 to 1000 CE to the decline of long-distance trade with the Eastern Roman Empire and Central Asia. The division of the Roman Empire into western and eastern halves by the beginning of the 4th century CE and its subsequent collapse reduced the long-distance trade carried out through the ports of peninsular India. The Indo-Byzantine trade, mostly in silk, also received a setback in the middle of the 6th century CE, as Byzantium learnt the art of rearing silkworms on mulberry leaves. Thus, two emerging phenomena of urban decay were evident. Firstly, the decline of trade and the paucity of metallic currency suggest the rarity of exchange at the commercial level (Sharma, 1965, 129). The scarcity of coins from 600 to 1000 CE, especially of gold coins, was witnessed in almost all parts of the subcontinent, except in Kashmir, Punjab, western Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (Sharma, 1987, 123). There was also absence of seals for commercial use, such as used by the corporate bodies of merchants, traders and artisans; disappearance of fine pottery; reduced use of objects made of shell, glass, ivory, terracotta and iron. Secondly, there was a decline of major urban centres and towns in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. The Indian feudalism model puts forward the thesis that urban centres lost their identity as areas of exchange and craft production and became centres of religious prominence.

Sharma argued for the feudalization of trade and commerce in the economy of Palas and Pratiharas. This, according to him, was manifest in the transfer of rights over markets to land-grantees and in the payment of a portion of their profits by merchants to the temples. The transfer of royal income from trade and commerce to the religious beneficiaries of land grants, whereby the temples got some control over the economic activities of artisans and merchants, was a new development. The emergence of self-sufficient economy was buttressed by lesser use of coins and comparative absence of trade (Sharma, 1965, 102-09). The decline of towns forced the brahmanas to migrate to countryside in search of new means of livelihood; along with them, the artisans, too, probably migrated to the rural areas where they sought shelter and patronage from temples, monasteries and estates of landed magnates. This led to the emergence of new kind of economy marked by urban contraction and agrarian expansion. Rural areas might have received some urban elements, while the urban areas might have been ruralized, this further undermining the distinction between the town and the countryside. With the decline of urban centres, lesser use of money and greater agrarian expansion made *jajmani* system an important element of the social organization (Sharma, 1987, 184). The regrouping and reorganization of social relationships affected by urban decline led to the rise of landed intermediaries, as also occupational immobility of the artisans as they became firmly attached to the soil and their patrons.

De-urbanization was a feature of the classic phase of feudalization, marked by a subject peasantry and a dominant class of landlords under conditions of deteriorating trade and predominant agrarian economy. In this closed economy, the needs of the landed intermediaries were met locally without the effective intervention of traders whose commercial activities were reduced considerably. Due the emergence of these landed intermediaries between the state and peasantry, there emerged no direct connection between them. Thus, the state functionaries and their supporters tended to transform into landed magnates who mainly lived on rent in kind, i.e., labour extracted from the peasantry and artisans (they had earlier depended on taxes collected by state officials and disbursed

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as gifts and salaries in towns). This conversion of tax area into the rent area also increased the shrinkage of urban sector (ibid., 184-85). However, Sharma stated that the coming of the Turkish invaders in the 11th and 12th centuries CE coincided with a mild revival of coins, trade and urbanism in northern India (ibid., 133).

Adopting a stand contrary to Sharma's, B. D. Chattopadhyaya, in his *The Making of Early Medieval India* (1994), argues that though the early medieval period saw the decline of some urban centres, some others simultaneously continued to flourish and some new ones also emerged. In early medieval north India, especially the Indo-Gangetic divide, the upper Ganga basin and the Malwa plateau, some urban centres, such as Prithudaka (modern Pehoa in Karnal district of Haryana), Tattanandapura (Ahar near Bulandshahar and situated on the west bank of Ganga), Siyodina (near Lalitpur in Jhansi district) and Gopagiri (Gwalior), witnessed a continuity of inland trade and elements of urbanization association with it (Chattopadhyaya 1994, 132-45). He has shown with the help of epigraphic records that these urban centres continued commercial activities during the 9th and 10th centuries CE — a period that he has termed as that of 'third urbanization'.

Chattopadhyaya points to the epigraphic evidence for the rise of various market places in the 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 CE to denote centres of exchange (Chattopadhyaya 1994, 94). In particular, there is an epigraphic reference to *hatta* at Tattanandapura and another one to *hattamarga*, the road leading to the market place. The epigraphs from Siyadoni refer to *vithis* or shops owned by merchants as manufacturers of different categories forms the nucleus of a *hatta* (ibid., 134-37). Chattopadhyaya argues that the cities, such as Tattanandapura, Siyadoni and Gopagiri, were not planned townships, as is reflected in the disparate location pattern of the *hattas* which included shops, temples and residential buildings; although this could possibly suggest that before emerging as fully developed urban centres, all these sites nodal points in local commerce. Thus, the conglomeration of such *hattas* could evolve into an urban centre where urban property, along with market goods, would become objects of commercial transactions (ibid., 139, 149). Although the intensity of commercial exchange was unequally distributed, a complex pattern of trade involving a wide range of goods, use of metallic currency and other means of exchange so many exchange centres have been identified.

In a similar vein, Ranabir Chakravarti, in his *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society* (2002), also strongly argues against the perception of declining trade in India during 600-1000 CE and demonstrates the linkages of trade at the locality level during this period. His study is based on 13 epigraphic records of 8th -12th centuries CE inscriptions from different parts of north India, particularly Gujarat and Rajasthan, as well as *Lekhapaddhati* texts of 13th-14th centuries CE from Gujarat. He stresses on the importance of *mandapika* in the trade circuit of early medieval India. The *mandapika*, according to him, was a centre for exchange and collection of levies, commercial tolls and duties. The *Lekhapaddhaties* contain recommendations related to the imposition of commercial cesses on the *mandapikas*. He shows that some *mandapikas* appear to have been situated at major urban centres like Siyadoni, Balhari and Anhilwada where they were described as *pattanamandapikas*. At other sites, besides these three, the *mandapikas* served as local-level exchange centres, closely associated with their adjacent rural hinterland. According to him, in the commercial structure and hierarchy of exchange centres, the *mandapikas* might have been assigned a position intermediate between small, rural periodic markets (*hatta*) and developed urban centres involved in inter- and intra-regional trade. He showed through the inscriptions that Siyadoni (near Gwalior) was a full-fledged commercial centre which had several streets (*rathyas*), market centres (*hattas*), professional quarters (*vithis*) and

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settlements of various groups of distillers, braziers and oilmen. This place emerged as an exchange and manufacturing centre under the imperial Pratiharas. Bihari (near Jabalpur) had a *pattanamandika*, indicating its expansive urban space. Large number of commodities were brought for transactions and levied at the *mandapika* of the city. Many references to *vithis* or shops points out that this *mandapika* was a centre of retail and wholesale trade as well. He opines that it was agricultural expansion that created agrarian surplus which, in turn, helped in city formation. This led to a greater concentration of population in some villages, thereby transformed them into smaller towns.

Chattopadhyaya further criticizes Sharma's thesis on the decline of foreign trade leading to an urban decline. According to him, decline in foreign trade may not necessarily imply a decline in internal trade or petty commodity production, and the same applies to the urban centres. Further, he elaborates this point by way of two arguments. Firstly, as the foreign trade did not play a crucial role in the birth of early urban centres, a reduced volume of such trade may hardly be held responsible for their decay in the post-Kushana or post-Gupta times. Secondly, decay of urban settlements coincided with and, in several cases, even preceded the period when land grants grew rapidly. Thus, decline in trade and urban centres may not have logically followed from the types of assignments that were made in early and medieval India. (Chattopadhyaya 1994, 147-48). Chattopadhyaya also challenges the notion that stable political structure promoted the rise of trade and urban centres, arguing that there was no guarantee that the rise of a kingdom or an empire would necessarily bring in trade and urbanism. For example, the Eastern Chalukyas of Andhra faced several political disturbances, but still a number of traditional urban centres survived in their domains; their survival was not due to the stability of the kingdom but due to their location along some important trade routes and the location of a traditional seat of manufacture at the centre. (ibid., 153-54).

According to Chattopadhyaya, in the early medieval period the existence of fully developed urban centers in some parts of the India could be traced from the 9th century CE. He cited several south Indian researches pertaining to 11th and 12th centuries CE, highlighting the existence of some factors leading to urban growth: (i) emergence of religious centres; (ii) the holding of fairs; (iii) commercial activities centered around ports; (iv) the bestowal of urban status on rural settlements; and (v) initiatives taken by kings and ministers in the establishment of urban centres (ibid., 168). Overall, the epigraphic study shows several factors for urban growth, such as (i) imposition of levies as a source of urban income, indicating the nature of activities predominant at the urban centres; (ii) the nucleus of urban space in which urban economic activities take place; (iii) the nature of the interaction with settlements outside; and (iv) the nature of urban hierarchy (ibid., 170). Further, he cited much epigraphic evidence for many cities of the early medieval period acting as centres for exchange of goods. The centre of these activities was the *mandapika*, a term used for a pavilion though its contextual meaning is derived from the word *mandi* in Hindi and *mandai* in Marathi (ibid., 171-72). There was an emergence of markets and merchants, as reflected in the holding of weekly *hattas* and rural fairs that became nodal exchange centres, as also a revival of long-distance trade. This phase of urbanization happened due to agrarian expansion and increased craft production which went beyond the confines of temples or monasteries. There also emerged several grades of traders, such as *purashreshthi* and *rajasreshthi*, while merchants, such as *vanik*, *sarthavaha* (caravan leader who was the head of the corporation of merchants) and *sreshthi* (chief merchant of the *nigama*), continued to operate.

Chattopadhyaya also differentiated the third phase of urbanization from that of the early historic urbanization. He remarked that the early historical urban centres were all characterized (i) as centres of political power; (ii) by large agricultural hinterlands; (iii) by

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their location along well-developed trade routes; and (iv) as having an epicenter (upper Ganges and middle Ganges basin), whereas the early medieval urban centres did not have any such epicenter, even though it may be empirically established that, different regional contexts, they represent different chronological stages (ibid., 178-79). Further, the range of interactions of early medieval urban centres seems to suggest that they were far more rooted in their regional contexts than their early historical predecessors. He said:

[T]he emergence of centres which could be considered distinct from rural settlement units was phenomenal in the early medieval period ... Since the majority of the urban centres of this period were primarily nodal points in local exchange networks, the numerical strength of settlements and the growth in the number of locality elites would tend to result in the proliferation of urban centres of relatively modest dimensions. They would thus reflect the character of the economy and polity of the period: unlike the early historical centres, which were directly linked with centres of authority with supraregional loci, the majority of early medieval centres would correspond to different tiers of regional power (ibid., 180-81).

A prominent work on this topic, John S. Deyell's *Living Without Silver* (1990) challenged two arguments of early historiography, namely the paucity of coinage and impoverishment of medieval states in the early medieval era. His work has profound implications for the economic history of the period, particularly with respect to models of feudalization, political decentralization and decline of trade and commerce. In his analysis of the numismatic evidence presented by the surviving coins hoards, he rejects the common perception that money during the early medieval period was scarce, primitive and debased. Instead, he suggests that there was considerably high degree of reliance on money, its closer coordination, and its wider circulation in larger quantities (Deyell, 1990, 1-2). He remarks that 'living without silver' (or indeed gold) in sufficient quantities was the dilemma of early medieval Indian economies.

Deyell observes that money was not scarce in early medieval India and that the states of those times were not facing any financial crisis. It was not the absence of precious metal but a clear excess of demand over supply. He is of the opinion that debasement of coinage did not reflect any financial crisis but was an alternative means to fulfill the increasing demand for coins in a condition of shortage of precious metals. There were several reasons for the shortage of silver in the north, and the rulers diluted the silver content in their coins to cope with the dearth of silver. He also stressed that besides of the regular currency of gold, silver or copper, cowries were also the means of exchange during the period of shortage of silver in Central Asia.

The first part of Deyell's book discusses the maturation of four separate spheres of money during the 9th and 10th centuries CE. First place, the Gangetic plains under the Gurjara-Pratihara empire saw the circulation of billon *dramma* coinage. Secondly, the Indus valley under the Arab governors and Amirs witnessed the issuing of both copper and silver currencies, but they never took roots in the region, though the circulation of foreign coinage was also prevalent. Thirdly, in Gandhara and the north-west under the Shahi dynasty, a bimetallic silver-copper currency system was operative. Though the copper coinage remained local in nature, the influence of the silver bull-and-horse coinage was felt beyond the kingdom's borders. Fourthly, Kashmir under local rulers saw the evolution of a copper coinage system, largely supplementary to other forms of exchange (Deyell, 1990, 21-66). Deyell detects in each of these cases, distinctive regional currencies that evolved mainly in response to local needs, but was imposed, in the first place, by the political authority. But even if not imposed by the political authority, the coinages had special characteristics which encouraged their extraterritorial circulation (ibid., 21-66). The striking feature of the early medieval coinage system in northern India was the anonymity of the issuing political

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authority and once this prototype coinage became successful, successive monarchs appeared unwilling to alter or change its characteristic physical details (ibid., 21-66). Thus, this resulted in uniformity, and this lack of identification of coinages with particular rulers is the factor that contributed to the idea of dearth of coinage in circulation in the early medieval period.

The second part of Deyell's book analyzes currency use in the 11th and the 12th centuries CE in different areas of India. Firstly, in Kabul, Gandhara and Punjab, the Shahi coinage with high silver content was replaced, in the west, by gold and silver coins of the Caliphal norms and in the east, by a billon coinage of lesser silver content. Secondly, in northern Rajasthan and Delhi, the broad billon coinage of the Pratihara feudatories was replaced by primarily local billon and copper coinage and secondly, regional billon and gold coinages. Thirdly, in the central Ganga valley and central India, there was a rise of electrum or trimetallic base gold currency which was issued by number of political authorities on same pattern and weight standard. Lastly, western India had separate identity in matters of the circulating medium insofar as the distinctive *gadhaiya* currency of the earlier period continued, but derivative coinages also came up in the Konkan and Malwa region (ibid., 67-191). Further, the anonymity of the coinage of the early medieval period mostly came to an end during the rule of the Rajputs, especially with the issue of Lakshmi-type gold coins and bull-and-horseman billon coins, though the *gadhaiya* billon continued to be issued in anonymity. During this period, the apparent constraints on the precious metal supply did not result in the disappearance of currency or undermonetization. Rather, the available metal supply was made to serve the need for currency through the issue of mixed-metal coinages. Further, when unduly small pure gold or silver coins became physically inconvenient to use and prone to loss, copper was used as carrier medium or matrix to enable coins of convenient size to be issued (ibid., 190). Thus, during this time of shortage of precious metals, the above mentioned three types of currency were used vigorously as mediums of exchange.

In conclusion, Deyell observes that north India, in the period 800-1200 CE, had a number of distinct coinages which constituted well-defined currency systems based on political and unconstrained political boundaries. He shows the use of cowries shell, copper, silver and gold coins, as also evidence for debasement of coins where the low mass of individual units of the two precious metals made them inconvenient to handle in pure form; hence the use of a copper carrier or matrix to bring the coins up to a reasonable weight and size (ibid., 237). Firstly, he challenges the supposition of the dearth of coinage prior to 1000 CE, by comparing the rate of recapture of hoards of the Gurjara-Pratihara coinages with both earlier and later coinages (ibid., 243). Secondly, he proves that there was no diminution in the use of money in exchange transactions before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, and that high volume of exchange transactions depended on money during this period (ibid., 244). Thirdly, the hypotheses of a decline of trade is, according to him, in conflict with the pattern of coin movements along the coastal axes centering on Gujarat, or the overland axis centering on Afghanistan and terminating in Delhi, although he admits that the balance of payments position is not indicated by the movement of single currency, as Gujarati money moved outwards in coastal trade gathering goods from local to international markets, and this was probably counterbalanced by the import of foreign specie and bullion into Gujarat in payment. Thus, the reminting of this constant infusion of new silver enabled Gujarat to maintain a healthy currency despite commensurate outflows (ibid., 244).

R. Champakalakshmi, in *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India, 300 BC to AD 1300* (1996), argues that there was urban development in the early medieval period which is perceived as a process, from agrarian expansion to urban growth, centered on the

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brahmadeya and the temple institutions. The temple cities of this period continued to dominate the urban landscape of south India. Urbanism is seen by her not merely in terms of economy and demography but also as a function of Chola imperialism and Bhakti ideology.

In order to understand the process of urbanization in south India, one needs to understand the remarkable degree of agrarian expansion during the Pallava-Pandya rule, which continued till the Chola period. New integrating forces like *brahmadeya* and the temple led to the extension of agricultural activities, and a more intensive organization of production supported the large populations in the *brahmadeyas* and temple centres. These clusters of settlements emerged as the foci of urban growth at the end of 9th century CE.

The Pallava-Pandya period represents the stage of early urbanism when the royal centres or seats of the ruling families show a similar growth around temples such as Kanchipuram and Madurai. In the process, a large number of *brahmadeyas* in the hinterland with temples as their nuclei emerged. The *brahmadeya* and the temple evolved as institutional forces at the hands of *brahmana-kshatriya* alliance, wherein the brahmanical ideology was expressed and sponsored by the ruling families who claimed kshatriya status and divine descent. The *brahmadeyas* and temples were seen as forerunners of advanced farming methods like the technology of irrigation and the seasonal regulation of the cultivation process. These methods helped in improving cultivation. The chief beneficiaries of the redistribution of agrarian surplus were the powerful local elite, temples and Brahmins. The production and distribution processes were in the hands of *sabha* and *ur*, which were the results of an alliance between the Brahmanas and dominant peasantry and the crystallization of the peasant society (Champakalakshmi, 1996, 40).

There was a gradual expansion in the exchange nexus among the agricultural settlements and continuation of long-distance trade in coastal areas, with the emergence of a trading community as a distinct class by the 8th-9th century CE. The urban forms generated by the end of the Pallava-Pandya period due to the preceding process of agrarian development, found expression in two categories: first, the royal centre or capital; and second, the market or commercial centre. The two royal centres that emerged, Kanchipuram and Madurai, combined with commercial or market centres called *nagaram* and helped in the expansion of trade networks.

The theory of urban decay is not applicable to south India, as cities there played multiple roles as political centres, centres of manufacturing and trade and sacred or ceremonial centres. During the 8th century CE, in south India, *nagarams* emerged, which were mainly connected with the production and exchange commodities, at local, inter-regional or international level. In regard to Chola state, there was urban growth and direct royal involvement in promoting trade and exchange networks by using the *nagaram* as one of the agents of state synthesis. Trade and commercial activities were promoted by royal policy of conquests, development of ports and the encouragement of production centres and guild activities. During the Chola period, in response to constant demand and encouragement, specialization of crafts followed and production centres catered to an expanding market (internal and external) through organized commerce emerged (ibid., 206).

A *nadu* could have one or more *nagarams*, and these *nagarams* had a corporate body consisting of merchants and whose members were called *nagarattar*. These factors were significant for the urban growth. She showed that *nagaram* organization assumed the character of a local body maintaining local markets, supervising the flow of goods, and providing a regular link between *nadus* and itinerant traders, thus breaking the isolation of the *nadu* and its ties of kinship. (ibid., 45). The proliferation of *nagarams* kept pace with the

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expansion of the Chola power. During the middle Chola period, a change took place within the *nagaram* organization in the form of further diversification in trading activities because of specialization in marketing and trade. Thus emerged specialists like the Saliya *nagaram* and Sattum Parishatta *nagaram* for trading in textiles; Sankarappadi *nagaram* as suppliers of oil and ghee; Paraga *nagaram* group representing seafaring merchants; and Vaniya *nagaram* as a large organization of oil- mongers. (ibid., 46)

There has been a long tradition of movement of traders, individually and collectively, over long distances within the Tamil country and between the Tamil country and Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra regions. This phenomena accelerated during the Chola period due to the demand for several products like spices, aromatics, incense, horse, gents and textiles. (ibid., 47). There was an expansion of trade from the 10th century CE, including that between the South Asian and Southeast Asian kingdoms and China. Thus, in totality, with the *nagaram* network, the emergence of merchant organizations to look after the long-distance trade proved detrimental for urbanization process which started in the 10th century CE and blossomed from 11th to 13th centuries CE.

Bhakti ideology in south India proved instrumental in order to achieve institutional permanence and socio-political dominance. The authority through which the concept of bhakti or devotion was expressed was the temple. The religious ideology provided an instrument for the creation of an effective space for urban forms and for determining the nature of the city and helped in the process of change. In this period, the office of king came to be venerated and hence equated to divine power, and the Brahmana priests acted as agents of legitimizing temporal sovereignty through divine sanction and by fabricating genealogies of divine descent. (ibid., 58-69). The creation of *brahmadeyas* (land gifted to the Brahmans by kings) and temples was a way in which some form of divine authority was given to *kshatriyas* to expand their authority. The bhakti ideology helped in the process of enhancing the power of both the divine and sovereigns through the symbolism of the cosmos/temple/territory (ibid., 58-69).

In south India, there was a close connection between cities, kings and temples, and with rise of the Chola state, the temple emerged as a significant religious institution in the urban domain. In the late Pallava and early Chola periods, there was a major shift in royal patronage from gifts to Brahmans towards gifts to temples. Although earlier kings of south India had also built and patronized temples, the Cholas constructed a large number of new temples with elaborate architecture and also rebuilt some old temples in stone (Singh, 2008, 597-600). Close connections developed between the political and religious domains exemplified by direct royal patronage to the construction of two distinctive Dravida-style temples in Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram, as an act of royal policy in creating royal centre. Thus, under the Cholas, some of the bhakti centres became leading political, sacred or pilgrimage centres and further evolved into huge urban complexes, centered around a single large temple or with multiple temples together forming a part of such complexes (Champakalakshmi, 1996, 205-207).

Many cities were transformed into major royal and temple cities during the reign of the Chola king Rajaraja I (985-1014 CE). Through these temples he invoked the temple's superordinate integrative role in order to create a ceremonial city as a symbol of a centralizing power (ibid., 62-63). There were several royal centres which emerged during this time, the first being the city of Thanjavur, located on the southern bank of Vadarau on the south-western extremity of the Kaveri delta; the second, Gangaikondacolapuram which was situated at the northern edge of the Kaveri delta; and the third, Tanjai settlement which also developed into major royal and religious centre.

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In the Chola period, another example urban development was evident in the twin cities of Kudamukku and Palaiyarai, located in the Chola heartland near the Kaveri delta. Kudamukku evolved as a sacred centre, while Palaiyarai grew around the palace of the imperial Cholas. The Kudamukku-Palaiyarai region was an important resource base since the post-Sangam period, and this led to a series of battles between neighboring regions to establish their dominance over it. In this urban complex, trade and commercial activities played a major role, and the presence of religious institutions supported the urban process. Champakalakshmi has outlined the successive stages in the evolution of the Kudamukku-Palaiyarai urban complex from 7th to 13th centuries CE, by showing the expansion of the city in two broad periods. The first period spanned from 7th to 9th centuries CE, and the second was the imperial Chola period from 9th to 13th centuries CE. The evolution of the Kudamukku complex between 7th and 9th centuries CE showed the marked rise of temple settlements of both Shaiva and Vaishnava cults, as these centres were visited by the followers of such bhakti cults as the Shaiva nayanars and the Vaishnava alvars. There were huge endowments made to the temples by the members of royal families, high officials, local merchants and traders, in form of land grants, monetary gifts and other articles. This helped in the growth of its temple establishments, particularly the Nageshvara temple, which continued to be the centre of all major activities in Kudamukku. There were several causes for the urbanization of Kudamukku. Firstly, its geographical location was such that it was located in the fertile delta region of the Kaveri where numerous peasant settlements rose and became the main source of income for the Cholas. This further helped in enhancing the links that Kudamukku established between the interior and coastal regions. It became an important point of convergence of all major routes which passed through the core region of the Chola kingdom. The Kaveri and its distributaries facilitated the safe transport of goods and people over shorter distances. The second dominant factor for the urban development of this region was the choice of Kudamukku by the Samgam Cholas as their stronghold for guarding their treasure and of Palaiyarai as the residential capital by the imperial Cholas (ibid., 351-355). A large number of articles, such as cloth (silk and cotton), gems and other luxury items, coconuts, fruits, flowers, betel, incense, oil and ghee, were traded in these centres. Further, Kudamukku was a major centre of betel and areca cultivation. Temples were the biggest consumers of such goods, representing the religious counterparts of the royal establishment in Palaiyarai. Textiles, metal ware, vessel-making and bronze casting were major crafts of these urban centres.

Champakalakshmi has pointed out four major criteria as determinant factors for urban development, leading to four major categories of urban centres in south India: (i) areas of urban activities may be looked upon as clusters of *brahmadeyas* and *devadanas* forming the centre of the core regions of the early kingdom; (ii) intentional attempts to establish new political and administrative centres, such as Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram, due to their strategic location helped them to develop into urban centres (for instance, Kanchipuram and Madurai served as political and administrative centres, as also had religious significance which helped it to keep their urban character alive); (iii) the sacred associations from very early times providing special sanctity to religious centres helped in their development as urban centres; and (iv) trade and commercial activities in ports and market towns also helped in their development as urban centres (ibid., 356-57). This categorization of urban centres shows that trade was mostly the secondary factor, while religious activity was the dominant but not necessarily the sole factor. The sacred function of a temple or a *brahmadeya* would accompany their major economic activities, in a situation where dense peasant settlements and intensive agriculture permitted the mobilization of large surplus. In totality, the political factors also hastened the processes of urban development (ibid., 356-57)

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Kanchipuram and Madurai were important political centres during the early medieval period. Kanchipuram was a significant royal and commercial centre, whose trading networks expanded under the Cholas. Champalakshmi opines that Kanchipuram underwent significant changes when it was drawn into reurbanization process of the early medieval period, which began with the agrarian integration of the Tondainadu. The agricultural hinterland, which sustained the city's population, was initially confined to Eyil Kottam in which Kanchipuram was located. Its expansion beyond Eyil Kottam began with the Pallava land grants of the seventh to the ninth centuries, but more significantly from the ninth century, when a higher level of agrarian integration began under the Cholas ... From the tenth to thirteenth centuries, under Cholas, the city's growth was continuous, the expansion of its hinterland corresponding to the city expansion in the form of new temples, or rebuilding and elaboration of existing ones, to all of which grants land (ibid., 391).

Summary

The forgoing discussion points out varied contours of urbanization in the early medieval India (c. 600-1200 CE). Beginning with the definition and varied facets of urbanization, the chapter discusses the three phases of urbanization in Indian history. It further gives an overview of the different sources used by historians to study the process of urbanization during these phases and derive dissimilar theories. R. S. Sharma's theory of Indian feudalism and urban decay remained the benchmark for understanding the interrelated processes of feudalism, coinage-paucity and de-urbanization, till it was effectively challenged by B. D. Chattopadhyaya's study which, mostly relying on epigraphic evidence, has sought to demonstrate the process of urbanization in certain regions of north India. John S. Deyell's study offers another line of critique of Sharma's thesis on the scarcity and debasement of coinage in early medieval India. Finally, in regard to south India, R. Champalakshmi explains the process of agrarian expansion leading to urban growth, centred on the *brahmadeyas* and temples. She explains urbanism not only in terms of economy and demography but also as a function of Chola imperialism and Bhakti ideology. Due to dearth of historical sources one needs to carry out further research to evaluate the process of urbanization in early medieval Indian history.

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Exercises

Essay questions

- 1) What are the different sources used by varied historians to understand process of urbanization in early medieval India?
- 2) Discuss the three phases of urbanization, with special reference to third phase.
- 3) What are the different approaches used to study process of urbanization by varied historical approaches of Indian feudalism and integrative model?

Glossary

brahmadeya: land gifted to Brahmanas, generally by kings
shatta: market

mandapika: local centre of exchange, its between small periodic markets and larger trade centres

nagarams: markets or commercial centres in early medieval South India

nagarattar: the corporate organization of the nagaram

sabha: the assembly of a Brahmana village in early south India

Further Reading

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