



## Conceptualization of Urban Life – The Lessons from Ancient India

Dr. VEENA.H.N. Associate Professor & HOD , Department of Sanskrit,  
Government Arts College (Autonomous) , HASSAN, Karnataka state

### Abstract

Ancient Indians had a great urban life with scrupulous preparation, conscientious scheduling & conventionally estimated vision. The values of civic life were forth coming from the very landscaping of cities. Ancient Indian history is replete with references to cities & urban centers. Since the Indus valley civilization Indian urbanization had tremendous examples of city planning. But modern Indian urbanization has left little space for energetic living & urban centers are too congested & filthy. Urbanites suffer from lack of healthy air & healthy living space. This paper records the ancient Indian model of urbanization & compares it with unplanned urban centers of today & affords lessons from ancient Indian replica towards building happy citizenry & healthy cities.

**Key Words:** urban life, healthy living , urban policy

### Introduction

India has a cradle of civilization & the records of history have explicitly depicted that Indians had the experience of an ideal urban living. The ancient Indian notions about urbanization was very thoughtful & premeditated. There was a conscious effort to make provision for ample room spacing, superior design, structural adequacy, systematic projections & excellent devising of layouts. ( Mansur Rehman & N.T.K Naik – Urbanization In India – 2012).Modern India , on a towering gesture of urbanization has to review its policy towards urbanization & adopt some of the key features of Ancient concepts & make provision

for healthy & happy urban living.( Allchin Raymond- The Archeology Of Early Historic South Asia 1995 )

The archeological references from Indus valley have been authentically displayed the existence of cities .Harappa , Mohenjo-Daro , Chanhu daro, Lothal , Kalibhanghan, Roopar etc were planned cities. During Vedic times Hasthinapura , Pataliputra , Champa, Ayodhya ,Magadha were great cities. During Maurya period cities were well planned as Kautiyan Arthashastra says cities were surrounded with fort walls. Rajagriha , Ujjayini , Varanasi , Gaya ,Saranatha , Prayaga ,Dwaraka , Mathura , Kanyakubja , Nalanda , Vikramashila , Takshashila , Vaishali



, Kushinagar , etc were cities with teeming population & trading communities. (Mansur Rehman & N.T.K Naik – Urbanization In India – 2012).

### Literary References

There have been several references to cities, civic life ,Tamil works Silappadhikaaram ,Mani mekhali, Kautilya's Arthashastra , Vatsyayana's Kamasutra , Great Indian epics of Mahabharatha & Ramayana etc mention cities & urban centers. Sthapatya Veda mention urban institutions , Atharva Veda mentions street layouts , Smrit literature mentions Vasstu shastra & architectural planning of cities , manasaara shilpa shastra categorizes city planning as grama vidhaana ( Village planning ) , nagara vidhana ( City Planning ) , & details about the categories. Arthashastra mentions environmental management of urban centers , foreign visitors management in urban centers etc. (Allchin Raymond- The Archeology Of Early Historic South Asia 1995). Mayamatha , an ancient Indian treatise mentions types of shapes of city planning. It details about chandura –square shape, agarthathara rectangle shape, vritta – circle shape, kritta vritta –elliptical shape, gola gosthi full circle. Shilpa shastra mentions jana bhavana raja bhavana , deva bhavana & other miscellaneous type with ample room for public such as public rest stations , eating houses , well laid out gardens , libraries, public tents,

reservoirs , wells , animal feeds etc. Purusha sukta mentions symbolic divisions of city as purusha with four symbols such as Brahman – intellectual of purusha , kshtriya – administrative symbol of purusha , vaishya business symbol of purusha , shudra working symbol of purusha ( Amitabh Kundu –Trends Of Urbanization In India 2012).

Ancient Indian texts mention the concept of a city thus. nagara vidhana was followed to plan a layout of a city. A city had grid pattern of exit entrance system , Raja veethi or main streets , pradhana veethi or primary streets, ratha veethi or secondary / tertiary streets . Streets with green trees, pedestrian tracks, foot path junctions at main axis. Vedic texts gave emphasis to community living as they designed houses with public accessibility, public space, public building. (Amitabh Kundu –Trends Of Urbanization In India 2012).

### Models of City Planning

1. **Indus valley urban planning** -In the Indus valley urban houses were built with a greater consideration of the city as a whole. The structuring was laid out in various by laws with specification of how to arrange the houses in growing city where too plant trees hierarchical setup higher caste people had tall multilevel houses lower caste houses were smaller structures houses of the same caste were grouped together. (N.M. Khilani –



Socio Political Dimensions of urban life in Modern India 19930.

2. There were cities in the ancient period with brick walls, bulky granaries, drainage ditches, planned streets, bath source for ritual cleansing & separate community halls. (Chakrobarthy D K -Indus Civilization Sites In India -New Discoveries2004)
  3. Each house was designed to address the joint responsibilities. Women safety, child care & aged persons were looked into as a joint share by all stake holders. As the amenities of drinking water, well water, drain water & rain water were considered divine resources there was a meticulous spending. (N.M. Khilani – Socio -Political Dimensions of urban life in Modern India 1993).
  4. Each family was bound by certain urban norms & each family contributed to the urban amenities in the form of tolls & taxes. (N.M. Khilani – Socio Political Dimensions Of urban life in Modern India 1993)
  5. Community well was used by all residents which had equal share for all families. Public garden area, schooling, recreational facilities, sporting events were common. (John Haywood – The Penguin Historical Atlas Of Ancient Civilizations2012). The social gatherings & festivities were organized jointly. Ritual ceremonies were part of
- community living & not individual. (Amitabh Kundu –Trends Of Urbanization In India 2012).
  6. Mutual respect for each other was provided in these gatherings. Whether in joy or in panic each gesture was shared. Thus there were satisfied habitants with healthy residential locales. (Shivarmakrishnan K .C. Basic Principles Of Urbanizations & People 2012) .
  7. Community locales had its own benefits & societal profits. The Urban locality had good familiarizing, social cohesion, mutual regard & reciprocated feeling. The upbringing of the children was not at all a troublesome responsibility. (N.M. Khilani – Socio -Political Dimensions Of urban life in Modern India 1993).
  8. The looking after of aged & senior dependents was not a difficulty. Disposal of waste was not a crisis. Water management was not a predicament. Everything was a shared responsibility community stake holders jointly resolved if any setback was in the offing. (Amitabh Kundu –Trends Of Urbanization In India 2012).
  9. These benefits were an outcome of community proprietorship of land holding pattern. Land was not a private property. It was owned by whole community. (John Haywood – The Penguin Historical Atlas Of Ancient Civilizations 2012) .



10. Hence whole community was a stakeholder in joys & in sorrows. Nobody could escape from taxes nobody could claim a remission or discount in tolls. Nobody could claim ownership individually. All decision was taken on behalf of the community in the interest of the community by all members of the community. this projected sustenance to women , all round nourishment to children , constancy for aged people , full fathom support to male members , consistent protection to environment & safe shield to healthy living.

( Shivarmakrishnan K .C.- Basic Principles Of Urbanizations & People 2012)

### Conclusion

Thus ancient Indian notions about urbanization was very thoughtful & premeditated. There was a conscious effort to make provision for ample room spacing, superior design, structural adequacy, systematic projections & excellent devising of layouts. Modern India, on a towering gesture of urbanization has to review its policy towards urbanization & adopt some of the key features of Ancient concepts

& make provision for healthy & happy urban living.

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