Urbanization in Ancient India– Growth of City Culture -A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

This paper intends to corroborate the growth of cities &phases of expansion of urbanization in ancient India .India had a vast legacy of urbanization since the finding of Indus valley cities. But Indian urban expansion was interlinked with expansion of trade & commerce. The elaborate transit option opened through Silk route, was instrumental in the new townships emerging. The townships which emerged were planned cities forging with amenities to cater to all needs of the urbanites. The city planning has undermined the very visionary planning system. Contemporary India can include some of these aspects & redesign built-up suburbs methodically.

Key Words: ancient India, urban expansion, systematic building

Introduction

Ancient cities in India does had its share of similarities and dissimilarities with the present Indian city scenario, and the more one dives into its depth, the more enamored one becomes. The distinctive and individualistic mode of urban customs, cultures, celebrations, festivals, religious observances, caste system, sports activities, education, and position of women, architecture, & other potential facets of urban life was intrinsic in Indian ancient history. It can also be comprehended that most of the contemporary Indian cultural refinement that any citizen witnesses today, has been heavily borrowed and inspired from these ancient Indian cities which were not only planned but well-conceived . This archetypal artistic amalgamation of planned city life could be traced historically from the Indus valley civilization.

Features of ancient Indian cities

1. **Incorporating brick** -the ancient cities within India had possessed archetypal lineaments, which made them uniquely stand out in matters incorporating brick as the all-encompassing form of construction.

2. **Raised platform** -Constructed on raised platform, most of the major building were made from brick. Constructed on raised

platform, most of the major buildings were made from brick.

3. **The cities possessed well** – The cities possessed well planned streets, art of pottery, drainage ditches, ducky granaries and large bath sources for ritual cleansing.

4. **Storied with courtyards** - There also existed some small, two – room structures to enormous houses with tow – storied with courtyards. The history of ancient cities commencing from pre-historic era to the colonial era of modern India has witnessed tremendous changes . The ancient civilization of India is also known in history as Indus valley Civilization, the history of which was traced back to the Bronze Age, beginning from 10,000 BC, which had disseminated and prospered in the north western part of Indian subcontinent where the city life had reached a zenith with broader roads , planned residential compartments , religious buildings, trade centers , ports & coastal links.

Urban Spread in Ancient India

Indus Valley region spread of civilization now encompassing India & Pakistan was very much a urban civilization. It covered the regions of Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan present day Pakistan, especially the part of Sindh and Punjab and the now legendary cities of Dholavira, Kalibangan, Rupar , Rakhigarhi, Lothal , which are located in present day India and the cities of Harappa, Ganeriwala and Mohenjodaro in present day Pakistan .

Ancient Indian cities have been characterized by

1. thick fortified walls
2. parallel residential dwellings
3. bifurcated entries
4. citadels
5. watch towers
6. separate houses for caste hierarchies
7. multi laned houses
8. aqua ducts
9. water facilities
10. civic amenities
11. strong perpendicular pillars
12. strong roofing
13. by lane linking
14. boarder roads
15. arithmetically designed path ways
16. linear link to trade centers
17. hygienic living
18. healthy environment
19. civic sense
20. empanelment of palatial structures
21. multi-storied buildings
22. huge rectangular special constructions
23. huge gateways

The cities of ancient India have been mentioned in the Epics namely Mahabharatha and Ramayana as well as the Puranas .The cities are

superlatively depicted in Mahabharatha which mirrors those houses were as tall as Kailash Mountains. Ramayana refers to the Lankan towns designed with golden gateways and ornamented arches. (Mythili das- The urban ancient India 2012)

Reasons for Urban Expansion in Ancient India

The urban expansion in ancient India was a cumulative effect of expansion in commercial activities. But there are several other reasons for this.

1. Increasing population
2. expansion of trade & commerce
3. expansion of items of trade in internal markets
4. shipment of surplus products
5. migration of people eastwards & northwards
6. expansion in agricultural production
7. warring factional demands for territorial expansion
8. geographical proximities through internal mobility

Some Important Cities

1.   **Aror:** is located 8 km east of Rohr in present day sindh , it had served as the ancient capital of sindh and was once located on the banks of Indus River .The city was once the prime nucleus centre of commerce and trade .

2.   Kanauj: was one of the most beautiful ancient cities in India , that was ruled by diverse dynasties . The city was described as, "a city which raised its head to the skies and which in strength and beauty might boast of being unrivalled." Kanauj incessantly served as a place of immense historical significance.

3.   Bairat: is a much celebrated and momentous town in the northern Jaipur District of Rajasthan. It is located 52 km north of Jaipur and 66 km west of Alwar. It was considered a city with multi storied buildings & pathways.

4.   Kalibangan : is town situated in hanumangarh district of Rajasthan . The town is precisely located upon the banks of Ghaggar River. This ancient city of India, Kalibangan has been since long considered, as the third important city amongst all the excavated Harappan sites, under the Indus Valley Civilization. The word ' Kalibangan' has been derived from two words – 'Kala' and 'bhangan' . Kali stands for black and bhangan implying a bangle. The city had received its name from the innumerable pieces of terracotta bangles that were excavated here. (Veerendra Nath Misra – Indus Civilization 2012).

5.   Sravasti : this was a sacred city , exceptionally significant Buddhist religious and study center, presently in located in the Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh. Thin ancient Indian city owns the supreme honour of sheltering Buddha for 24 rainy seasons in the

Jetvana Gardens. The accounts of Buddha reflects on several cities & urban centers around this city.

6.   Sagala: is believed to be the modern day Sialkot, located in northern Punjab , now in Pakistan . Sagala had once served as a great centre of trade and commerce & business prospects.

7.   Hansi :is a town in the Hisar District of Haryana in India. The ancient Indian city of Hansi uniquely is known to possess 5 gates to enter Delhi. They majestically incorporates the Delhi Gate at the East, Hisar gate at the west, Gosian gate at the north - west, Barsi gate at south and Umra gate in the in the south west direction. the most crucial trait of this town is that, the altitude increases gradually as one enters Delhi city from any of the gates.

8.   Kumbhoi: is the name of an ancient town located in the Kolhapur district of Maharashtra.

9.   Kalpi: is an ancient city of India , in Jalaun district of Uttar Pradesh. kalpi rather seizes stronghold from its sisterly counrterparts, due to being conceived as the birthplace of sage Ved Vyasa, who had splendidly authored Mahabharata. The city of kalpi is also renowned for its art of paper making.

10.   Bhinmal: is a town in the Jalore district of Rajasthan. Bhinmal had once served as the capital of ancient Gujarat.

11.   Tamralipta: is the name of yet another decisive ancient city in India, situated on the Bay of Bengal, presently coming under west Bengal. now the place is however identified as Tamluk derives its name from the Sanskrit word Tamra lipta meaning "Full of copper".

12.   Urayur: is a city located in Tiruchirappali, Tamil Nadu. The word Urayur in Tamil stands for "the residence".

13.   Dwaraka, that very ancient and very regal ancient Indian city, is situated in the state of Gujarat. According to Hindu mythology, Dwarka was the dwelling place of Lord Krishna. The meaning of the word Dwarka implies a "door".

14.   Ujjain is located on the banks of river shipra in Madhya Pradesh. According to Hindu Mythology, Shipra had originated from the much admired churning of the oceans by the Gods and the Demons, with Vasuki, the serpent, serving as the rope.

15.   Osian : or osiyan is an ancient city in India , that is approximately located at a distance of 65 km from Jodhpur in Rajasthan. The city houses a number of temples and is presently a famous tourist spot. Osian gathers admiration and attraction, due to it being considered as an oasis amidst the desert of Rajasthan.

16. Bayana: is a town in the Bharatpur district of Rajasthan. The ancient name of the city was Sripatha or Sriprashtha or Shantipura. The city is claimed to have been discovered rather accidentally by an asura named Banasur.

17. chunar : is located in the Mizapur District of Uttar Pradesh State. chunar is well known and intimately in style for its pottery work, especially clay toys. It was a great commercial center with weekly fairs & trade in puts pouring in.

The Indian cities of Sopara, Aroha, Kurukshetra, Paithan, Vallabhi, Kalinjar and Tirunelveli etc hold immense findings towards the phases of urbanization . The innumerable port cities , the coastal cities , the trade cities , the silk cities , the spiritual cities, the fort cities, etc call for further excavations. As along with urbanization ancient Indian cities also faced the wrath of urbanization . Hindu , Buddhsit & jain works mention brothels, highway robberies , increased consumption of liquor , increasing demand for luxury articles ,drugs , etc. Ancient India cities even though reflected great sense of planning they also linked their culture to spiritual ethos.

Conclusion

Thus ancient India had already witnessed urbanization. The widened streets, paneled houses, citadels, fortified walls reflected the zenith of urbanization. Urbanization was not just reflected their sense of town planning it reflected their synergy towards a healthy living. Indian city life has still to be excavated

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