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Development in Urban Studies in Indian History: The Scenario of Early Medieval Period in India

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Abstract:

This article deals with the development in urban studies in early medieval Indian history with an attempt to present a clear concept on this subject. Though we find that purposeful attempts were taken by Ayyar (1915) and Dutt (1925) in the early decades of the twentieth century, not much progress was undertaken in this aspect of History, till Sharma (1987) came up with his theory of 'de-urbanization' and Chattopadhyaya (1994) with his theory of 'third urbanization'. In this article both these theories have been dealt with in detail and a review of both the views have been attempted. A detailed literary review on the topic has been done in this paper to acquaint the readers with the importance of this subject. This article has been written with an impartial viewpoint giving due importance to both the theories and we have incorporated all known information on this subject and at the end, a rational conclusion has been derived.

Keywords: Urban centre, urbanism, urbanization, de-urbanization, third urbanization

1. Introduction

Till recently, History largely meant a political game between kings and nobles or wars and conspiracies or treaties. But increasingly, Historians are now committed towards the economic, social as well as the religious aspects of the life of our forefathers. To all these, study of urban History has added a new dimension.

At the outset, we need to know the changing definitions of urban centre and of the process of urbanism in History. Historians would consider urban centre as a unit of settlement, established by man, influenced by several historical factors. The Archaeologists take any settlement as urban which exposes few streets and one or two public buildings. The Anthropologists and Sociologists consider urban growth as a natural process and consider population and ecological factors as of prime importance in the growth of towns. Similarly, an economist would look into the growth of towns mainly through economic factors

Childe (1950:3-17) has listed monumental buildings, large settlement with dense population, on-food producing classes (including rulers, artisans and merchants) and the cultivation of art, science and writing as the basic traits of the urban revolution which took place in the Bronze Age. According to him, craft specialists as well as the role of surplus which supported non-food producing classes were important to enliven a city. But according to Adams (1968:18-26), increased size and density of population are crucial to urbanism and the contribution of specialized craft is negligible to primary urban needs.

Among Indian Historians, A Ghosh was one of the pioneer Archaeologist to tackle the problem of urbanization in early historical times. He considered an administrative and mercantile organization to be the pre-requisite for a city (Ghosh: 1973:19). In R.S. Sharma's opinion, a town is not distinctified by mere size and population, but also by the quality of material life and nature of occupations. Though agrarian surplus from hinterland is needed to boost city life, concentration of crafts and prevalence of money based exchanges are equally important features of urban life (Sharma:1987:19).

2. Objectives of the Paper

The early medieval period in Indian History (A.D. 600 – A.D.1200) is an age of transformation, of de-centralization, of shaping of regional societies and it ranges over a long span of 600 years from the fall of the Gupta empire to the advent of the Muslims. This period obviously poses a challenge (as formerly stated) for a researcher because of the pre-dominant theory of feudalism and of urban decay imposed on it. The urban factor of this period has invited controversies over the years and that will be addressed in this paper. Though studies on this very important aspect of History had started in the early twentieth century, significant approach came much later. In this paper, we have dealt in detail the view-point of different historians and the theories pertaining to this period.

3. Urban Centres in Early Medieval India: a Historiographical Review

The first purposeful academic attempts to understand ancient Indian cities were taken by C.P.V. Ayyar (1915) and B.B. Dutt (1925) whose works were based either on the traditional Indian principles of the modes of urban lay out as embodied in different *Vastusastra* texts or the old literature (the old Tamil literature in the case of Ayyar). A.K. Coomaraswamy (1930, 31) tried to analyze the early historical cities of India and their associated architecture primarily on the basis of *Jatakas* and other Buddhist texts. In later years, the

works by Stuart Piggot (1965), and B.N. Puri (1966) contained more material than was relevant to the theme. In 1972-73 and 1974, Dilip K. Chakrabarti published two articles. In the first he tried to analyze the concept of urban revolution in the Indian context, and in the other, he attempted to delineate the main political phases of India's early historic urban growth (Chakrabarti:1972-73,74). The first of these articles had the privilege of being commented on by several leading Indian Archaeologist including A. Ghosh who published soon after a full-length study on the topic entitled '*The City in early historical India*' (1973). Though this volume contained a deep insight into the various issues linked with the growth of early historical cities, it lacked a detail and region wise discussion of archaeological data and also an extensive knowledge on the physical feature of the cities. V.K. Thakur (1981) published a book entitled *Urbanization in Ancient India* where the approach was general and based mainly on literary rather than on archaeological issues. Kameshwar Prasad (1984) published a book named *Cities, Crafts and Commerce under the Kusanas* citing the archaeological data on cities during the period of Kusanas. In 1986 M. Lal tried to evaluate the role of iron in the clearance of forests and the growth of cities in the Gangetic valley in his paper entitled "Iron tools, Forest clearance and Urbanization in the Gangetic Plains" in *Man and Environment*, 10, pp 83-90. He wrote this paper on the basis of his earlier two publications in the same journal (1984 a, 1984 b). In 1987 R.S. Sharma in his *Urban Decay in India (C.300AD – C.1000AD)* argued that the early historic cities of the country declined along with the decline of trade economy which reached its high water mark during the Kusana period. In 1988 Erdosy assessed the problem of urbanization in early historic India against the background of his studies on the *Ancient settlement in the Allahabad Kausambi region*. In the same year Dilip K. Chakrabarti added some comments on 'The Phenomenon of Urbanization' in his book *Theoretical issues in Indian Archaeology* (Chakrabarti: 1988 a) and on The rural urban dichotomy in Ancient India in a volume published by the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology of Allahabad University (Chakrabarti: 1988 b). In 1989 F.R. Allchin wrote an article entitled '*City and state formation in Early Historic South Asia*'. In the field on ancient textual studies a significant contribution was made by K.T.S. Sarao (1989, 1990) especially in his *Urban centres and Urbanization as reflected in the Pali Vinaya and Sutta Pitakas* (Chakrabarti:1995:1-2). To this list may be added a few more recent writings. B.D. Chattopadhyaya (1994) in his book '*The Making of Early Medieval India*' has discussed at length urban centres of medieval India (with special reference to Rajasthan), their growth and their functions mainly based on epigraphical sources. He admits that archaeological contribution to this phase of Indian History is poor. F.R. Allchin (1995) published '*The Archaeology of early Historic South Asia; Emergence of Cities and States*'. In this book, he has highlighted on factors leading to birth of civilization and urban growth in South Asian context corroborated by archaeological sources. And Dilip K. Chakrabarti published his exhaustive work (1995) entitled '*Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities*' (1995). In 1997 an article named 'City in Early India' by B.D. Chattopadhyaya was published in *Studies in History*. In this volume, he has tried to sketch the pattern of cities with the help of the traditional *Vastuashastra* as depicted in *Kautilya's Arthashastra* and *Elanko's Silappadikaram*.

Studies in early medieval urban history has been done region wise in this field, in order to be more specifically acquainted with the regional trends of urban growth and flourish. In 1979, R. Champakalakshmi published an article named 'Growth of urban centres in south India; Kudamukku-Palaiyarai, the twin city of the Colas' in *Studies in History*. Again in 1986, R. Champakalakshmi published another article named 'Urbanization in Medieval Tamilnadu', in a volume entitled '*Situating Indian History*' edited by S. Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar. In 1987, Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya edited a volume entitled, '*Essays in ancient Indian Economic History*' which included a paper by Om Prakash Prasad on {Trade in the growth of towns: A case study of Karnataka (AD 600 – AD 1200)}. O. P. Prasad published yet another volume in 1989, entitled '*Trade in Karnataka: Decay and Revival of urban centres in Medieval South India*' (AD 600- AD 1200). In 1994 Sanjay Subrahmanyam edited '*Themes in Indian History – Money and Market in India*' 1100 AD – 1700 AD published by Oxford University Press. In this volume Kenneth R. Hall wrote an article ('Price making and Market hierarchy in early medieval south India'). And lastly B.D. Chattopadhyaya's (1994) '*The Making of early medieval India*' was a commendable output in this direction. There are three articles in this volume which needs special mention:

- Markets and Merchants in early medieval Rajasthan,
- Trade and urban centres in early medieval north India, and
- Urban centres in early medieval India; an overview

In the year 1996 R. Champakalakshmi published *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization in South India 300 B.C. to AD 1300*. She has based her research work on mainly two cities of early India – Tanjavur and Kanchipuram. She has concluded that both these centres got political back-up from the ruling powers, especially the Cholas and grew into prominence as ceremonial centres. *Trade in Early India*, edited by Ranabir Chakravarti was published in 2001 by Oxford University Press. This volume is a conglomeration of essays by historians of repute. As urban centres are linked with commercial exchange, therefore trade forms a basic feature of urbanization. The essays in this volume, apart from dealing with trade, also focuses on features concerned with the same. Another volume was published by Ranabir Chakravarti in the year 2002 entitled *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society*. This book also provides useful information in the context of early medieval urban history. In the year 2009, Ranabir Chakravarti wrote another article relevant to the theme entitled "Equestrian demand and dealers: The Early Indian Scenario (up to C.1300)" in Bert G. Fagner, Ralph Kauz, Roderich Ptak and Angela Schottenhammer eds. *Horses in Asia: History, Trade and Culture*. Trade is very much related with urbanization. The historiography of the early medieval period saw three different research genres. One of these presented conventional accounts of dynastic history featured by the absence of a paramount political power either in north India, or the Deccan or the far south. The conventional historiography emphasized very little on the issue whether these centuries were associated with appreciable changes in socio economic and cultural situations (Chakravarti: 2001:99).

The other genre of historical research is represented by Marxist historiography. It highlights and explains the processes of fragmentation and parcelization of sovereignty linked up with the rise of Samantas, languishing trade, marginal use of coins and widespread urban decay. Critics of the Marxist historians have termed the situation as 'decline syndrome' (Chakravarti: 2001:99).

Historians belonging to this genre of research include D.D. Kosambi (*An introduction to the study of Indian History, Bombay, 1956*); R.S. Sharma (*Indian Feudalism, Delhi, 1980*); B.N.S. Yadava (*Society and Culture in North India during the twelfth century, Allahabad, 1973*); D.N. Jha (ed) (*Feudal Social Formations in Early India, Delhi, 1987*).

The third group of research genre designated as the 'non-aligned' historians estimated the crystallization of regional features as an outcome of local level formations, which was a development from within, rather than the breakdown of an earlier socio economic and political order. These scholars have ruled out the existence of an epicentric position, for the appreciation of these local and regional formations (Chakravarti :2001: p100). To this genre belongs B.D. Chattopadhyaya (1) *The Making of Early Medieval India, Delhi, 1994*, (2) 'The State and Economy in North India: Fourth century to twelfth century' in Romila Thapar's (ed) "*Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*" Bombay, 1995, p.266-307 and 308-46), R. Champakalakshmi (*The State and Economy in South India : 400-1300*), Hermann Kulke (ed), *The State in India 1000-1700, Delhi, 1993*, and Ranabir Chakravarti ("Politics and Society in India 300-1000 AD in K.Satchidananda Murthi (ed), *Life, thought and culture in India (C. A.D.300-1000)*, Centre for Studies in Civilization, New Delhi, 2002).

4. Development in Urban Studies over the Years and an Analytic Discussion of Different Theories

Archaeological proof of desertion of previously occupied sites has led to the conclusion by various historians that there was a decline in the process of urbanization in the post Gupta period all over India.

Y.D. Sharma in two of his papers (1953a:116-69, 1953b:43-84) has justified this widely spread phenomenon through Archaeology. Likewise, R.N. Mehta and S.N. Chowdhary have followed his path (1975:66). In his excavation reports, C. Margabandhu has also pointed towards urban decline in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh in the post-satavahana period (1985).

Archaeology has attested desertion of previous sites, but the question is why this decline? Historians hold varying opinions regarding this aspect. K.C. Jain while referring to Rajasthan in his book opines that foreign invasions, particularly that of Muslims, ruined cities and towns in Rajasthan (1972: ch13). This view has been rejected on the ground that Turkish invasions took place much later (towards the end of the tenth century and continued till 13th century).

Mehta and Chowdhury are confused of the reason behind the decline. According to them, struggle for supremacy between the kingdoms was the main cause (1975:66).

4.1. View of R. S. Sharma (Protagonist of the theory of Urban Decay)

R.S. Sharma (1987:134-177) has taken into account all these opinions of various authors and analyzing each of them, and came forward with a view of his own which till date has remained a dominant view. Sharma has tried to attribute the cause of decline of urban centers to decline of long-distance trade (1987:135). He has sought the reason for the nourishments of the Satavahana and Kusana Empire in their trade relations with Central Asia and Roman empire. He surmises that due to prosperous trade relations, towns grew and thrived on both the sides, i.e. on the north western frontier of India and in Central Asia (1987:135). Based on information from the works of Prof. A.H. Dani and Prof. V. Masson, he has come to the conclusion that the urban centers that grew prosperous due to flourishing trade relations between the Kusana empire and Central Asia, declined after the fall of the Kusanas (1987:135). The Gupta period towns, he argued, did not suffer marked decline owing to its geographical location in mid-India or Madhyadesh. But its periphery regions such as Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh and the north western regions has exhibited few Gupta coins and inscriptions. Therefore, Sharma is inclined to think that the Gupta connection with Central Asia was either feeble or totally absent.

A substantial change in the money economy occurred during the post-Gupta period as the Roman empire and Central Asia stopped the supply of gold and the Hun invasions in the 5th century A.D. struck a final blow to the trade contacts between Central Asia and India. Archaeological finds attest the trade relation of peninsular India with Roman empire. Several sites in peninsular India have revealed roman pottery, coins, glasses and bullae. Roman finds generally occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamilnadu, and also in Gujarat and the coastal belt of Orissa and West Bengal. That the trade was favourable and hugely profitable is also well corroborated by Pliny and Strabo (1987:136).

But by the beginning of the fourth century A.D., a division of the Roman empire and eventually its fall radically changed the situation. The eastern Roman empire i.e. Byzantium empire had trade contacts with Gupta but not on the same scale as it thrived previously. India exported silk but by the middle of the sixth century, Byzantium had learnt the art of spinning silk thread by rearing silk worms on mulberry leaves. So it might have been cause of the decline of trade between India and the eastern Roman empire. According to Sharma, trade with the middle-east revived again towards the end of the eleventh century, chief items of import being textiles and clothing, and export items being iron and steel. Sharma also opines that de-forestation and wearing away of the landscape of the town may be one of the reasons for de-urbanization (1987:136-7).

He cites references from literature to explain urban decay. The *Puranas* and the *Brihat Samhita*, both describe periods of widespread unrest and both seems to be familiar with the ongoing process of de-urbanization. And the early law gives such as Manu (2nd century A.D.) prescribed grants of town as rewards. Therefore, Narada, in later times (5th century A.D.) speaks of disputes arising out of grant of towns. The accounts of Hiuen Tsang and inscriptions corroborate the law books. Hiuen Tsang mentions that towns were donated to monasteries. For that reason, town began to lose its essence where tradesmen were unable to play their normal role in economy. According to Sharma, these land grants restricted the economic operation of a town and gradually feudalize it. Sharma seeks the help of literature (e.g. *Jataka*) and inscription (Charter of the Chalukya ruler Bhogasakti & Malkapuram inscription of 1261-62 from Andhra Pradesh) to supplement his theory. He argues if traders were assigned land managements, then obviously their trading activities were reduced to a minimum (Sharma:1987:139-40).

To sum up Sharma's view, urban centres declined in the early medieval period primarily due to decline in long distance trade. The fall of Roman empire had an adverse effect on the favourable trade relations between India and Central Asia. Next, when Byzantium empire learnt the art of rearing silk worms on mulberry leaves, demand for silk (chief export item of India) from India decreased, as a result of which trade suffered. During the early medieval period, several monasteries sprung up which received direct state help through land grants. Huge areas of land usually in the form of towns were granted to them for their subsistence. These grants normally restricted the economic functions of a town and the townsmen to an agrarian expansion, the role of merchants transformed from traders to landed beneficiaries. The beneficiaries established direct ties between the producer and the consumer and compelled the artisans to produce articles of daily use. Sharma argues that donation of land grants was a widespread phenomenon and reflections of it can be found in the inscriptions of the Gupta and the post Gupta period. The period 600-1000 AD was the first phase of classical feudalism in India. He concludes that the nearly decaying towns were converted into either religious or military or administrative establishments and thereby ceased to be centres of technology, craft production and commodity exchange based on money. Therefore, in the post –Gupta era, land-grants and dispersal of townsmen to the country side gave a boost to a feudalistic model of state structure.

4.2. Third Urbanization: View of B.D. Chattopadhyaya

B.D. Chattopadhyaya has come up with a totally different view from that of R.S. Sharma in his book 'Making of early Medieval India' (1994), which is a compilation of his papers on the concerned subject in different journals, he asserts that an overview of the period from 600-1200 AD may seem to be very different from that of early period, but that should not be taken as a collapse of the early order, instead this period should be taken as shaping of regional societies (Chattopadhyaya:1994:34). Chattopadhyaya is reluctant to agree with Sharma that paucity of urban centres in the post-Gupta period was due to decline of long-distance trade. That trade was present in early medieval India can be seen in his selected works on) the Indo-Gangetic divide, ii) the upper Ganga basin, iii) the Malwa plateau. He has sought the help of epigraphy to establish his standpoint (Chattopadhyaya: 1994:132). He has chosen four sites from the above three regions, to take them one by one.

4.2.1. Prthudaka

Modern Pehoa in the Karnal district finds mention in the 'Peheva inscriptions from the temple of Garibnath' as adhisthana (AD 882-3).¹ This inscription is of the Gurjara-Pratihara period where details of a fair are described. Animals were bought and sold in this fair. Three points that emerge from this inscription encourages Chattopadhyaya to establish it as an 'incipient' urban centre. They are

- Horse-dealers who came to the fair were not local they hailed from nine different localities out of which one can be tentatively identified with a locality near modern Lahore.
- The horse-dealers were not foreigners, although contemporary sources do not reveal Indians to be horse-traders.
- The horse-dealers made donations to the religious shrines of not only Prthudaka, but also to Kanyakubja, Gotirtha and Bhojapura. The point to be noted is that all these places were distant from Prthudaka.
- The buyers of horses were elite persons such as the king, provincials, thakkuras etc whose agents were present in the fair and bought the horses for them,

Now, from the above epigraphical information, Chattopadhyaya has deduced that Prthudaka, if not an urban centre, was at least a nigama (or market center), which acted as a focal point for north-western horse traders. He cites example of Vaisali and Gopagiri (Gwalior), both of which were termed as adhisthana, one in the Gupta records and the latter in the 10th century records.

4.2.2. Tattanandapura

The second site is Tattanandapura (Chattopadhyaya:1994:134-5), which is identified with Dhar near Bulandshahar. Situated on the western bank of river Ganga, it was a fully developed township of the upper Ganga basin in the early medieval period. Chattopadhyaya has collected all information regarding this site from ten inscriptions of the Gurjara-Pratihara period dated between AD867 and AD904.²

Accordingly, one by one, Chattopadhyaya has analyzed the information and concluded the site to be an urban settlement.

- The suffix 'Pura' is used in its name and as it was called a pattana, therefore it was different from a grama, palli or agrahara (all these were different synonyms of a village).
- The place Tattanandapura was intersected by a number of roads, e.g. kurathya (small or narrow roads, lanes?), brhadrathya (big roads) and hattamarga (roads leading to the market area). The records state that the eastern area (Purvahattapradesa) had shops and residential buildings and therefore one of the nerve-centres of the town.
- The inscriptions record description of two types of buildings – avaris and grihas, the former being shops and the latter were residential buildings made of burnt bricks.

The above epigraphical description of Tattanandapura certainly proves it to be an urban centre and the fact is also corroborated by archaeological evidences. The site of Ahar has revealed mounds covering an area of 3800 acres and the five trial trenches laid there were scattered over one and a half mile. Apart from burnt brick structures of 9th century A.D., the exposed artifacts included excellent specimens of pottery, hand-grinding mills, a mortar, household articles of copper, an iron scythe and at least three varieties of early medieval coins.

4.2.3. Siyadoni

The third site Siyadoni (Chattopadhyay:1994:136) revealed similar features as that of Tattanandapura or Ahar situated near Lalitpur in Jhansi district, this site finds mention in a number of records ranging from between AD 907 and AD 968, and relates to the Gurjara-Pratihara period.³ It tends to be similar to the second site in all respects, e.g., being a Pattana and intersected by a variety of roads. In one record, there is mention of a road belonging to the merchants (vanijonijarathya). The residential buildings are named as aparasaraka (houses with a porch or vestibule), avasanika (dwelling houses) and grhabhitti (a house site owned by different communities). It seems that the spatial area of Siyadoni was larger than Tattanandapura as five hattas figure in the records. There is reference of a mint and a customs house in Siyadoni. Therefore we find that Chattopadhyaya has a concrete ground to call it an urban centre.

4.2.4. Gopagiri

The fourth site is Gopagiri(Gwalior) (Chattopadhyay: 1994:137) which on the analysis of two inscriptions dated 875 and 876 A.D.,⁴ is found to be a fort town. This settlement was administered by a chief appointed by a Gurjara-Pratihara king. In the second record, there is mention of a Kottapala and a Baladhikrta, both appointed by the Gurjara-Pratihara ruler. In comparison with Tattanandapura and Siyadoni, Gopagiri had a speciality. Gopagiri inscription, No-2 refer to Sribhojadeva-pratolyavatare which means the descent of the road of Bhojadeva, the Gurjara-Pratihara ruler B.D. Chattopadhyaya (1994: 146) is reluctant to give importance to foreign trade as major criteria for boosting up of trade centres. Though it is archaeologically proved that there was a decline in the Indo-Roman trade from the first century onwards, that cannot be taken as proper cause for urban decay. India lost its principal source of gold just before the beginning of the Christian era and therefore she established relations with south-east Asia. The Gupta period saw a spate of gold currency throughout, despite its debasement. If the chronology of the Roman hoards is to be followed, then the Indo-Roman trade had already declined by that time. According to Chattopadhyaya. India has never been a serious contender in the international trade scenario, be it the pre-Christian era or the post-Gupta period. But he contends that the Tajikas and the Turuskas were present in the markets of India (as confirmed by literary sources) and then commercial motivations sometimes turned political as is confirmed by their occasional raid in the central and western parts of India (Chattopadhyay: 1994:146-7). B.D. Chattopadhyaya opines, that trade and power structure are essential factors in urban growth. As goes with foreign trade, it was never an essential factor with early urban centre, and so it cannot be held responsible for urban decay in post-Kusana and post-Gupta period (Chattopadhyay:1994:148).

It is true that the account of Hiuen Tsang refers to the decay of a number of cities e.g. Kausambi, Sravasti, Kapilavastu, Ramagrama, Kusinagara and Vaisali. Side by side, he has also mentioned cities like Varanasi and Kanyakubja which were thickly populated and were great centers of commerce. He has also mentioned centres like Kui-pi-shwang-na (Kashipur in Nainital district) which were densely populated.

In order to establish the relationship between trade, urban centres and a stable political structure, Chattopadhyaya opines that the latter is necessary but not essential for boosting urban growth.

There are numerous instances in literature as well as epigraphs where it is found that rulers are establishing townships in widely distant regions such as Kashmir, Rajasthan and Bengal. Tattanandapura, Siyadoni and Gopagiri were not founded by any ruler but they emerged along with the rise of the Gurjara-Pratihara empire (Chattopadhyay:1994:153).

Again Chattopadhyaya says that the rise of a power structure would not necessarily bring in trade and urbanism. He has sought the example of eastern Chalukyas in this case. There are urban centers according to him, which survived despite political vicissitudes e.g. Varanasi. This centre survived not because of political stability but because of its location on a traditional artery of trade, the Ganga and also it was an important centre of textiles and ivory products from the early historical times down to early medieval times (Chattopadhyay:1994:153-4).

5. Analytic Discussion on Both the Theories of Sharma and Chattopadhyay

After reviewing both the views, one is tended to conclude that both Sharma and Chattopadhyaya have powerful stand points. Sharma has sought evidences from literature as well as archaeology to show urban decline in early medieval period. He has tried to establish his view from a feudalistic standpoint due to lack of long distance trade (decline of distant trade started from 1st century onwards and it totally terminated with the fall of the Gupta empire. The Muslim period saw the emergence of urban centres again after a span of 600 years), urbanization suffered. Sharma argues that de-urbanization gave space to agrarian expansion as a result of which merchants transformed into landed beneficiaries. He gives references of numerous land grants of the period which speaks loud of land donations to monasteries by the state, even sometimes towns were donated to monasteries. Donation of lands and dispersal of townsmen to the countryside gave boost to a feudalistic model of state structure.

While Sharma is so loud of asserting his theory of de-urbanization in a feudalistic model of state structure, Chattopadhyaya brings in a new lease of life to this period and terms this phase as third urbanization of India. He locates a new spurt of urbanisms different from the earlier phase, and takes the early medieval phase for shaping of regional societies.

Sharma while speaking of de-urbanization highlights only on the places which were previously occupied and totally overlooks the point of emergence of new urban centres. It is true that archaeological excavations exhibit total desertion of previously occupied sites, but Chattopadhyaya by drawing instances from epigraphs have curbed a new picture of urban centres. While Sharma is busy be fitting the European model in Indian state structure, B.D. Chattopadhyaya has tried his level best to explain the situation from an Indian Perspective. The urban situation prevailing in the post-Gupta period is termed by him as third urbanization as it was in some way different from the earlier period. After evaluating both the views, it stands out that a total negation of the existence of urban centres

would be wrong. As mentioned earlier, urbanization and civilization are related terms. So negating urbanization means negating civilization. We don't glorify the Neolithic farmers by calling them civilized. But the Harappan people were civilized as they had cities and they led sophisticated lives as city folks do. They had granaries, brick-built buildings, terracotta indoor games and used exotic designed ornaments- all these are traits of city life.

Likewise, if we think that the early medieval period saw decline of previous urban centres, then we have to assume that new exchange centres emerged which were different from the previous ones. B.D. Chattopadhyaya has rightly claimed that decline of long distance trade or absence of a central political power does not matter in the process of urbanization. He has cited the example of four urban centres from inscriptions which emerged between 9th and 10th century during the times of Gurjara-Pratihara period - Prthudaka, Tattanandapura, Siyadoni and Gopagiri - the inscriptions reveal certain common features of these place through which they can be given urban status. All these centres were primarily busy market centres. The inscriptions mention these centre having shops, residential buildings and hattas and Siyadoni had a mint and a customs house also.

Archaeology is not a very reliable source to prove urban decline, especially in our country where field works conducted are not regular and the process of digging is often unscientific. Most of the sites are vertically excavated and through this type of excavation, one cannot prove urbanization or de-urbanization in a concrete way. Vertical excavation is very useful to ascertain the stratigraphy of a site, otherwise to confirm an urban site, area excavation is needed. Unfortunately, very few sites in India have received area excavation. Therefore, to deduce any inference through vertical excavation will be incorrect. A very important parameter that should be taken into account while digging a site is the prevailing geographical condition of the place. Humid and moist weather plays a havoc destructive role over a site. Many a times, the bricks are dug out from the site for constructing buildings by the local people e.g. Chandraketurah and Panchakot. Many a times, digging comes to a halt because of huge subsoil water. Therefore, we see Archaeology has its own limitations and will not prove very helpful to infer urbanization.

On the other hand, epigraphy lends a helping hand to the historian on this aspect of study. The epigraphy are reflections of the period they represent; the material they provide can quench many of our queries- therefore they are much more reliable informative source than Archaeology.

Chattopadhyaya has chosen the second source to establish his theory, rather than Archaeology or literature, and therefore his interpretations are much more acceptable than those of Sharma's. He has added a new dimension to urban study- because of him many historians have started taking interest in this aspect of History.

6. Conclusions

We have reviewed the developments in the urban studies in the early medieval period of India in this article. Development means progress, continuity and contemporaneity. Therefore, apart from a detailed historiographical review of urban study in India in general and early medieval period in particular, we have also highlighted on the ongoing debate on the early medieval urban issue. Whether urbanization existed or not, is a matter of controversy in the early medieval period in India but it certainly makes sense that debates and controversies enriches a subject and pumps life into it. We have also contributed our own views on this aspect. To put in a nutshell, we conclude by saying that urban centres existed in this period against a feudal backdrop.

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7. Notes

¹ Buhlar, G, 'Peheva inscription Garibnath' in *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol I, Allahabad, pp 184-190

² Sahni, D.R., 'Ahar Stone Inscription', *Epigraphia Indica*. XIX, Archaeological survey of India, New Delhi, 52-4

³ Kielhorn, F., 'Siyadoni stone Inscription', *Epigraphia Indica* I, Allahabad, 162-79

⁴ Hultzsch, E., 'The two inscriptions of Vaillabhassvamin temple at Gwalior', *Epigraphia Indica*, I Allahabad, 154-162

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