

Block

4

(Part 1)

URBANISATION IN MEDIEVAL INDIA-1

UNIT 15

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UNIT 16

Early Medieval Urbanisation from Epigraphy and Texts 26

Expert Committee

Prof. B.D. Chattopadhyaya Formerly Professor of History Centre for Historical Studies JNU, New Delhi	Prof. Sunil Kumar Department of History Delhi University, Delhi	Prof. P.K. Basant Department of History Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi
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Dr. Daud Ali South Asia Centre University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia	Prof. Pius Malekandathil Centre for Historical Studies JNU, New Delhi	

Block Editor	:	Prof. B.D. Chattopadhyaya
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Course Coordinator	:	Prof. Abha Singh
---------------------------	----------	-------------------------

Programme Coordinator	:	Prof. Swaraj Basu
------------------------------	----------	--------------------------

Block Preparation Team

Unit No.	Resource Person
15	Dr. Sheena Panja Independent Researcher Ex- Associate Professor Department of AIHC and Archaeology Visva Bharati, Santiniketan
16	Prof. Suchandra Ghosh Department of Ancient History and Culture University of Calcutta Kolkata

Material Production	Cover Design	Illustrations
Mr. Manjit Singh Section Officer (Pub.) SOSS, IGNOU	Mr. Anil Kumar Saxena Mr. Vimal Gaurav Sharma EMPC, IGNOU, New Delhi	Mr. Vimal Gaurav Sharma EMPC, IGNOU New Delhi

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BLOCK 4 URBANISATION IN MEDIEVAL INDIA - 1

Urbanisation in Early Medieval India

In the previous Block you studied different aspects of the phase of urbanisation which emerged from around the middle of the first millennium BCE and spread gradually across the country. You have been able to understand how the character of this phase of urbanisation was different from the Harappan urbanisation. That is why it is called the 'Second Urbanisation'.

How long did this 'Second Urbanisation' last? Did it continue unchanged in character and merge with urbanisation of the medieval period? Or, did it, like the Harappan civilisation, start declining after a point of time and disappear altogether? The answer to such questions cannot be provided in simple, definitive terms. A number of scholars have advanced powerful arguments and evidence to suggest that the Indian economy, society, polity, and culture in general, were going through profound changes from around the Gupta period. A major indication of this change is seen in the decline of urban centres, which is to be located within the context of such a broad scenario. In place of cities and towns, it was villages which became centres of major activities. This happened because trade, particularly long-distance trade, declined; there was a corresponding decline in urban crafts production. With the expansion of agriculture through the increasing practice of land grants and colonisation of new areas, it was land and villages which emerged as important, self-contained units of human activities. Archaeological evidence available for cities and towns has been used to demonstrate this 'urban decay'. Along with this, circulation of metallic coins which are an essential item in commercial and various other transactions declined in volume and variety in the post-Gupta period. Combined with other indicators, these changes are taken to reflect on the growth of a feudal society in India, and the decline of urban centres needs to be seen in the context of this development.

Although there is much strength in this argument, it views India's early historical past essentially as a contrast between urban and rural, which is not tenable. An alternative view argues for a different approach for understanding the major changes that characterised the period. In India, the pace of change being uneven in terms of space and time, these changes in economy, society and polity – such as the emergence of local states with a monarch, intensification of cultivation under groups of organised peasants, local trading networks which however attracted long-distance items of trade like horses, spices and textiles, as also precious metals and minerals – covered a much larger geographical space and regions than before. It may be true that large, and sometimes not so large urban centres, declined by the Gupta and post-Gupta period; cities familiar from both archaeology and literature – such as Takshasila (Taxila) in Gandhara (now in Pakistan), Kausambi in Vatsa (now in Uttar Pradesh), Pataliputra in Magadha (south Bihar) and Ujjayini in Avanti (Madhya Pradesh) were not much visible archaeologically in post-Gupta times. However, now localities were coming up, including in mountainous, desert and former forest regions; local networks of contact and interactions between them also generated a new form of urbanism. Examples of some of these new urban centres will be given in the **Units** that follow. Besides, in several cases in South India, it has been suggested that big temples with enormous resources and a widespread network of resource use and religious contacts, acquired over time the distinctive characteristics of temple townships. Centres of political power which too incorporated sacred centres of artistic and religious importance developed into

urban centres in this phase. Kanchipuram, Thanjavur, Badami, Pattadakal were such new centres which came up in the Deccan and South India. Similar spaces, which emerged as centres of political power, as major centres of commercial exchange or as nodes of religious contacts emerged across various terrains of the country and came collectively to represent a new phase of urbanism.



UNIT 15 URBANISATION IN POST-GUPTA PERIOD: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE*

Structure

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Post-Gupta Polity
- 15.3 Urbanism from Texts and Inscriptions
- 15.4 Urbanism from Archaeological Evidence
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15.1 INTRODUCTION

Archaeology remains one of the most important sources in the analysis of the growth and character of past settlements. Epigraphy and literature can describe different spaces but it is the material evidence alone that can provide more convincing data on the size, nature and evolution of spatial units. The archaeology of settlements of the post- Gupta era is an area that has been neglected by researchers as a result of which we do not have adequate archaeological data of this period. This module is more an exploratory exercise to identify from this meagre archaeological work the character of sites and its link with 'urbanism' in the period 600-1200 CE.

The archaeology of the post-Gupta period has to be understood in the context of the significant political, social and economic changes that occurred during this time in the entire country. Epigraphic and literary sources have been primarily utilised to enumerate this transformation in polity while archaeology remains neglected in this respect.

15.2 POST-GUPTA POLITY

The political scenario in the post-Gupta period (after 600 CE) presented a fragmented system with the emergence of many smaller short-lived regional kingdoms as well as larger long-lived ones like the Cholas, Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas. This phenomenon has initiated intense debate with the idea of 'feudalism' at the core of the controversy. However now it has been argued that these states emerged from a process of agrarian expansion and political integration from the areas which were in the periphery or outside the core areas of ancient state formation. The process occurred first in the local nuclear area, then the formation of early kingdoms by integrating the surrounding

*Dr. Sheena Panja, Independent Researcher, Ex-Associate Professor, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan.

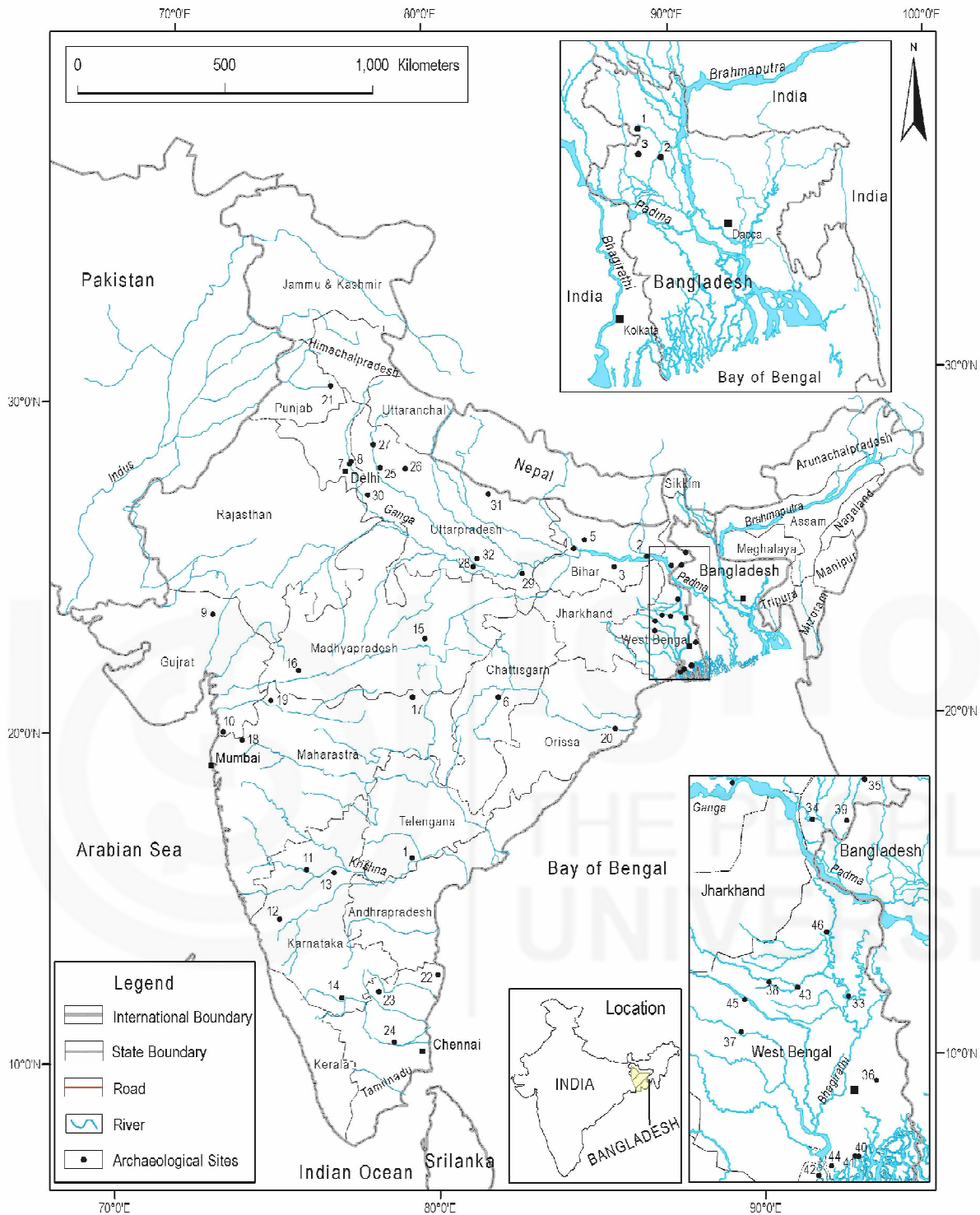
peripheral areas and finally the emergence of imperial kingdoms (like the Palas, Cholas), consisting of the nuclear areas and conquered and integrated zones of originally independent neighbours beyond the nuclear zones. Integration worked simultaneously at multiple levels, political, administrative, agrarian, ritual and cultural. These areas did not arise from the centres of the Gupta empire or provincial capitals but in their autonomous peripheral hinterland and in regions which were not conquered but were already under a wide range of influences of the Gupta empire. This period was marked by intensive state formation in areas that were in the heartlands of the earlier large kingdoms and empires (Kulke, 1997; Chattopadhyaya, 1997a).

15.3 URBANISM FROM TEXTS AND INSCRIPTIONS

Linked to the formation of states there is also a debate on the nature of 'urbanism' in this period. The 'feudal' thesis argued for a decline of cities and towns exemplified with the nature of 'poor' material remains as evident from a number of archaeological sites (Sharma, 1987). The critique of this view has mostly used epigraphic and literary data to analyse 'urban' centres in the post-Gupta period as archaeological data has been meagre and insufficient for a comprehensive analysis of settlements. This argument states that after an initial lull in the urban process after the second urbanisation in post-Kushana and Gupta periods there was again a burst of urban centres in the early medieval period. There is ample evidence of 'cities' both in north and south India which can question the notion of 'urban' decline decisively. Urban centres are present in epigraphs and also in literary texts as space or spatial units which can be distinguished from 'rural' spaces. The towns of Siyadoni, near Lalitpur in Jhansi district, UP and Ahar, identified with Tattanandapura near Bulandshahar in UP are amongst the many which portray a developed 'urban' settlement. This view though stressing the link between the earlier urban centres of the historical period with the early medieval does mention that these new cities unlike their predecessors did not have an epicentre and were far more rooted in their regional contexts. The early medieval urban centres were primarily nodal points in local exchange networks unlike the early historical centres which were directly linked with centres of authority with supra-regional loci (Chattopadhyaya, 1997b).

15.4 URBANISM FROM ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The archaeology of this period remains a problem due to the lack of extensive excavations or explorations as the concentration has been mostly on the study of more 'ancient' cultures neglecting the more 'recent' aspects of the past. Inscriptions and texts have mainly provided the input for the analysis of settlements. In most archaeological works, the material record especially with habitation sites has been ignored or dismissed as unimportant by researchers. Research on the material remains has concentrated primarily on religious structures, either a monastic or temple complex (**Fig. 1**) or the study of sculptures (**Fig. 2**) which have been found in great numbers all over the country. The study of sculptures is not conducive for understanding past settlements as most of these are found in secondary contexts in isolation from other material remains. Structural remains inform us about architecture, mostly religious, but fail to give us any information on human settlements of the time. Moreover in the absence of any diagnostic archaeological criteria like pottery, it has often been difficult to define an archaeological site of this period where sculptures or architecture are not present which is mostly the case with habitation sites. Thus a vast area of the archaeological record has remained outside the purview of academic work on the post-Gupta cultures.



List of Sites: India: 1) Yelleswaram 2) Antichak 3) Chirand 4) Krimila 5) Vaisali 6) Sirpur 7) Lal Kot (Quila Rai Pithora) 8) Purana Quila 9) Vadnagar 10) Sanjam 11) Aihole 12) Banavasi-Gudnapur 13) Maski 14) Talakkad 15) Tripuri 16) Navdatoli 17) Manser 18) Nasik 19) Prakash 20) Sisupalgarh 21) Ropar 22) Kanchipuram 23) Kaveripattanam 24) Uraiyur 25) Ahar 26) Ahicchatra 27) Hastinapur 28) Kausambi 29) Rajghat 30) Sonkh 31) Sravasti 32) Sringaverapur 33) Ballalddhipi 34) Balupur 35) Bangarh 36) Chandraketurgh 37) Dihar 38) Goswamikhanda 39) Jagjivanpur 40) Jatar Deul 41) Kankandighi 42) Mandirtala 43) Mangolkot 44) Pakurtala 45) Pokhanna 46) Rajabadidanga

Bangladesh: 1) Birampur Complex 2) Mahasthan 3) Paharpur

Map 1: Archaeological Remains of the Post-Gupta Period
[Map prepared by Sheena Panja]



Figure 1: Ruins of Vikramshila

Photograph by Saurav Sen Tonandada, January, 2010

Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b3/VikramshilaRuins.jpg>



Figure 2: Sculpture of the Pala-Sena Period

Photograph by Sailko, October, 2012

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a0/Bengala%2C_epoca_pala-sena%2C_bodhisattva_kasarpana-lokesvara%2C_1090-1110_ca..JPG

It is with these limitations in mind that we turn to a review of the archaeological record of this period. The emphasis is on the study of human settlements rather than religious structures of which there are many examples.

15.4.1 North India

Taxila in the north-western part of the subcontinent in Rawalpindi district of Punjab in Pakistan is included here as it had been a very important settlement in the earlier historic period but in post-Gupta times we do not have any evidence as to its existence as a major settlement or an urban centre (Marshall, 1951).

Many sites in the Ganga plains are multicultural with cultures stretching upto the last 200 years. Nevertheless with the emphasis on antiquity the later periods have been ignored in most archaeological excavations and explorations. However many of the sites do have evidence of the post-Gupta period but the meagre nature of the remains has led to the theory that there was a 'decline' in the lifestyle of the population i.e. a deurbanisation as argued by R.S. Sharma in his thesis on the emergence of feudal systems in this chronological period (Sharma, 1987).

It is true that many sites are reported to be bereft of material remains of this period like *Atranjikhhera* (Gaur, 1983) and *Kausambi* (Sharma, 1960) or a disturbed archaeological record as at *Hastinapur* (Lal, 1954), *Sringaverpura* (Lal, 1993) and *Ahicchatra* (Vikrama, 2014) with flimsy structures, few stone images, pottery and other material objects. In many cases like at *Hastinapur* and *Sringaverpura* the dates of these layers often merge with the post-1200 CE or the 'medieval' period and it is difficult to differentiate the earlier phases. At *Hastinapur*, situated in Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh, Period V is dated from the eleventh century CE and is characterised by structures of brick-bats including a brick wall and a room, alongwith pottery, iron objects, terracotta objects and three stone images. In sites like *Sravasti* in Uttar Pradesh (Sinha, 1967) the remains are mostly of religious structures. *Sonkh* (Hartel, 1993) in Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh also portrays a picture of destruction and decay with fragments of mostly unconnected walls. The newly built structures were of poor quality due to the frequent use of brick-bats and rubble instead of compact bricks. However stone plaques with Hindu deities have been recovered from the excavations. *Lal Kot* in Delhi has been divided into the Rajput period from the eleventh to the twelfth centuries CE and has yielded no major structures except rubble walls and mud and lime floors and pottery mostly red wares. However the subsequent phase called the early Sultanate from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries CE has yielded more structures and artefacts. It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between these two phases at many sites due to the lack of systematic excavations (Mani, 2006). It has also been argued that the theory of 'urban decline' based on 'poor' material remains could well be due to archaeological methodology employed in many of the sites, whereby excavation strategies and problems of chronology may have biased the data and interpretations. However even though the concept of decay might be debatable this was however a period of transition and change rather than growth and stability (Kennet, 2013).

On the other hand we do find evidence of 'urban' like activity at sites like *Rupar* (Sharma 1953) (or Ropar) in Rupnagar district, Punjab. Situated on the banks of the Sutlej, the occupation in the ninth century CE spread to the southern part of the site with well constructed spacious brick buildings suggesting a good measure of prosperity (Sharma, 1953). At *Purana Qila* in Delhi, the Post-Gupta period was marked mainly by structural remains in baked or mud-bricks showing three phases. The baked bricks used in the structures had mostly been robbed from houses of the earlier periods. The size of mud-bricks was 30 × 24 × 4 cm. An interesting feature of the structures was the

presence of various types of ovens. Amongst noteworthy objects, mention may be made of a few decorated potsherds, beads, and a fine but damaged stone sculpture. The associated pottery was mainly a red ware, in which the knife-edged bowl was a distinctive type (**Fig. 3**). The subsequent period called the Rajput period (tenth to twelfth centuries CE) was also characterised by structures built of re-used bricks as also of mud-bricks. One of the house-walls showed alternate courses of baked and mud-bricks. Mud-floors with hearths were also encountered in some houses. The most impressive structure of the period, however, was a fortification-wall, belonging perhaps to the time of the Tomars. Built of rubble with a basal width of 1.5 m, it was exposed to a length of over 30 m. The Rajput period was represented by five structural phases, one of them showing floors with ovens. The principal building-material was the same as in the preceding period, with the addition of rubble. Other significant finds of the period included copper coins, carnelian beads, terracotta objects, ornate moulded bricks and a small figure of Vishnu in stone. The associated pottery was mainly of red and black wares, occasionally decorated with simple painted, stamped or incised designs (*Indian Archaeology - A Review*, 1969-70:4-5; *Indian Archaeology - A Review*, 1970-71: 8-11).



Figure 3: Typical Knife-edged Bowl from the site of Balupur
Source: Panja, Sheena, Arun K. Nag and Sunando Bandyopadhyay, (2015) *Living with Floods* (Delhi : Primus Publications), p. 106.

Kanauj a well known ancient city situated on the banks of the Bhagirathi, Farrukhabad district, UP, despite being an imposing site, was unfortunately excavated for a single season and yielded structural remains whose date can be said to coincide with the late medieval periods according to the excavators. Sculptures and terracotta plaques of the post Gupta periods had been discovered here as part of earlier explorations in the area (*Indian Archaeology- A Review*, 1955-56:19; Ghosh, 1989:199-200). *Rajghat* is a well known site situated in Varanasi, UP and excavations have revealed that the period 300-700 CE marked a great advance in settlement planning and architecture. This is revealed by the development of houses and town planning. Houses were of considerable size with room sizes ranging from 7.08×6.25 to 2.30×1.30 m. There were large structures close to the river which could not be classified as residential houses. One of the structures had large pillared halls. Underground structures the purpose of which is debatable have also been unearthed. There were wells and brick-built drains. The city had a regular layout divided by many roads and lanes. The town was well planned with elaborate drainage systems, large buildings both residential and 'public', industrial activity and religious structures. All this testified to a large urban centre which had earlier roots but stretched into the post-Gupta phase. This is also evident from the smaller excavations where Period V (700-1200 CE) has evidence of brick walls, two big buildings and

many architectural fragments (Singh, 1985). The site of *Ahar* in Bulandshahar district, UP covering almost 3800 acres in area, yielded a very large sandstone inscription of ninth to tenth centuries CE as well as a series of well made pottery, silver coins datable to 900 CE or earlier, copper artefacts, stone objects and a stone head dated to the tenth to eleventh centuries CE. Excavations also revealed the existence of a large house with several rooms, a platform with a brick structure and other buildings including a series of chambers with a hearth (*Annual Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 1925-26:57- 58).

15.4.2 Eastern India

Numerous inscriptions from both north and south Bihar testify to the importance of this region in the post-Gupta period. Like in other parts of the country many historical sites like *Vaisali*, *Pataliputra* and *Champa* do not have any material remains of this time. Archaeological work of this period concentrated on uncovering monastic establishments like *Nalanda* or *Antichak* (Singh and Kumar, 2006) or discovering sculptural remains. From *Kurkihar* almost 200 bronze images have been found. Another site *Itkhori* in Hazaribagh near the Dudhapani inscription site has yielded both Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures made from a stone not available locally. Sculptures and architectural remains have also been found from many other places in north Bihar made from non-local stones. A single gold coin of Sasanka, three gold coins of Lalitaditya Pratapaditya of Kashmir, a gold coin of Govindachandradeva and silver coins of Bhoja I Pratiharas have been found from Nalanda. All this indicates some sort of economic network and trade or exchange connections. Nalanda also has evidence of furnaces which indicates some form of industrial activity (Kumar, 2014). Even though the emphasis has been on excavating structural remains in this zone, habitation areas can be identified at two of the following sites.

Krimila is an area identified as Krimila Adisthana near Lakhisarai in Bihar. There are more than thirty mounds as well as image inscriptions and numerous Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures. A Siva temple had been excavated by Alexander Cunningham who had explored this area in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This is an extensive settlement complex covering an area of almost 30 sq km but no excavations have been conducted here so far (Kumar, 2011). *Chirand* in Saran district, Bihar, on the banks of the Ghagra, has evidence of the Pala period in Period V with substantial structural remains including eighteen courses of a brick structure (Verma, 2007).

The excavations at the port sites of *Manikpatana* near Puri and *Khalakapatana* near Konarak in Orissa have given evidence of external trading links especially with China between eleventh to fourteenth centuries CE even though no habitation remains have been unearthed (Patnaik, 2014).

Archaeological remains of the post-Gupta period have been discovered in many parts of West Bengal, but here again however the concentration has been on religious structures and their architecture as well as the study of the numerous sculptures found in isolated contexts throughout the state. In this region there is a continuity of occupation in many of the sites from the early historic period, however new areas of occupation are also visible in many sub-regions.

Rajbadidanga in Murshidabad has evidence of another monastic complex though no complete plan of any building was recovered. But the presence of platforms, stupa basements, staircase and pavements as well as plethora of seals and sealings bearing legends of individual names and the name of the monastery speak of a Buddhist monastery identified as the illustrious Raktamrittika sangharama. This site and its environs

have been identified with the capital city of Sasanka, Karnasuvarna which has many other mounds and archaeological remains within its surroundings (Das, 1968).

Structural remains have also been discovered at *Ballal Dhipi* in Nadia district. The excavation revealed a gigantic brick structure in an extensive yard surrounded by walls. Excavators surmise that this could have been a temple. Stucco heads, terracotta human and animal figurines, copper utensils and other objects were found at the site (*Indian Archaeology- A Review*, 1982-83:105; *Indian Archaeology- A Review*, 1983-84:94-95).

The area in the Ganga-Mahananda and Tista-Mahananda floodplains in north Bengal which falls in a part of the ancient region of Varendra has evidence of numerous sites and site complexes of this period. This zone became an important area of occupation from the Gupta and post-Gupta periods onwards with evidence of earlier occupation at a few sites like Bangarh in Bengal and Mahasthan in Bangladesh. The famous monastic complex at *Jagjivanpur* (Roy, 2012) is situated in this region where an inscription has also been discovered with the name of the monastery, Nandadirghivihara. There are also many habitation zones with mounds, sculptures, and other archaeological evidence indicating this region was an important zone from the seventh century CE. Mention may be made of the large settlement complexes along the Cheeramati river in South Dinajpur district which has evidence of habitation, structures, sculptures (Panja, 2002). The site of *Balupur* (or *Picchli*), in Malda district situated along the Kalindri river was excavated to reveal occupation from the seventh to the nineteenth centuries CE. The period seventh to twelfth centuries CE revealed evidence of a settlement with mud and rammed brick floors, evidence of crafts like pottery and beads as well as the presence of Chinese coins which indicate external networks. This site has evidence of a pottery sequence of this period (**Fig. 4**) (Panja et.al, 2015). The site of *Bangarh* (**Fig. 5**) in South Dinajpur district, West Bengal, with a cultural sequence from the historic period has yielded rich material evidence of the post-Gupta period. The site has many mounds with the main mound called the citadel mound surrounded by a rampart wall with bastions, gateway and a moat. Beyond the main mound is the habitation area which is now a modern village. Stratum II which represents the post Gupta or the 'Pala' period includes a pillared hall, a number of bricks with human and animal figures and a lotus shaped structure called the 'Kunda' by the excavator. There are also two structures with sixteen low pillars probably used for storing grains. Other than this there are residential buildings, houses and compound walls and pavements. A structure claimed to be a temple has also been found at Bangarh (Goswami, 1948). In the middle region (Rahr) of Bengal sites like *Mangolkot*, an important early historic site, in Burdwan district have evidence of occupation after 700 CE. The Gupta period is characterised by burnt-brick structures, as well as artefacts like seals, beads, bangles suggesting renewed commercial activity (Roy, 1990). The post-Gupta period is disturbed with remains of brick structures and pottery (*Indian Archaeology - A Review*, 1988-89:91; *Indian Archaeology - A Review*, 1989-90:110). *Goswamikhanda*, also in Burdwan district also has a large structure which has been dated to the tenth century CE (*Indian Archaeology- A Review*, 1963-64:60-61). *Bahiri* in Birbhum have yielded structures in the post Gupta period though convincing evidence is lacking. In the western part temple complexes have been found in Purulia and Bankura as well as scattered archaeological remains mostly sculptures and pottery in many parts of the western zone of the state (Chattopadhyaya, 2010). In south Bengal the most notable historical site is *Chandraketugarh* in North 24-Parganas, beside the Bidyadhari river, where a large structure at *Khana Mihirer Dhibi* has been dated to the Gupta period. However S. K. Saraswati has dated it to the Pala period from the plan, architecture and plinth mouldings. The settlement continued to flourish

during the post-Gupta phase where structural remains have been found (Ghosh, 1989). In both North and South 24-Parganas, West Bengal there is evidence of post-Gupta remains like sculptures at *Atghara*, *Mandirtala*, *Kulpi*, evidence of structures at *Katandighi*, a temple at *Jatar Deul* at the edge of the Sunderbans and a plaque of proto-Bengali inscriptions at *Pakurtala*. The site of *Kankandighi* has many mounds which are strewn with sculptures (Chakrabarti, 2001).

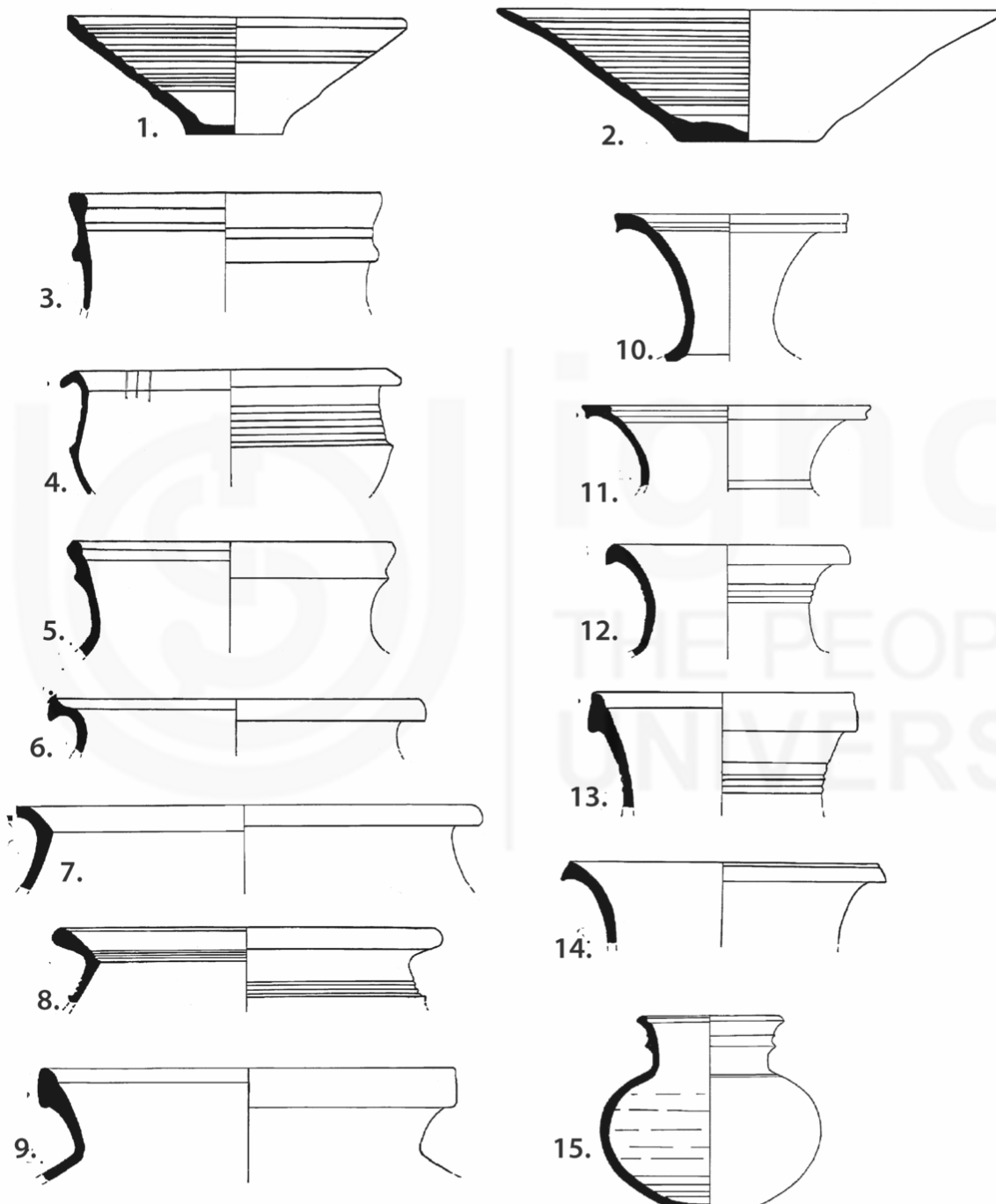


Figure 4: Pottery Shapes of the Early Medieval Period from the site of Balupur
Source: Panja, Sheena, Arun K. Nag and Sunando Bandyopadhyay, (2015) *Living with Floods* (Delhi : Primus Publications), p. 102.



Figure 5: Ruins of Bangarh

Photograph by Mrinmoy Saha, December, 2013

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/76/Broken_Palace_of_Bangarh.jpg

15.4.3 Bangladesh

The archaeological remains in Bangladesh are mentioned here as they form a part of the ancient zone of Varendra. Very large settlement complexes like Mahasthan and the monastic complex at Paharpur are some of the major areas. The Birampur area in Dinajpur district Bangladesh has revealed a large settlement complex, but excavations have concentrated mostly on the Buddhist and Brahmanical structural remains and thus the habitation zones are not very well understood.



Figure 6: Ruins of Mahasthangarh

Photograph by P K Niyogi, October, 2007

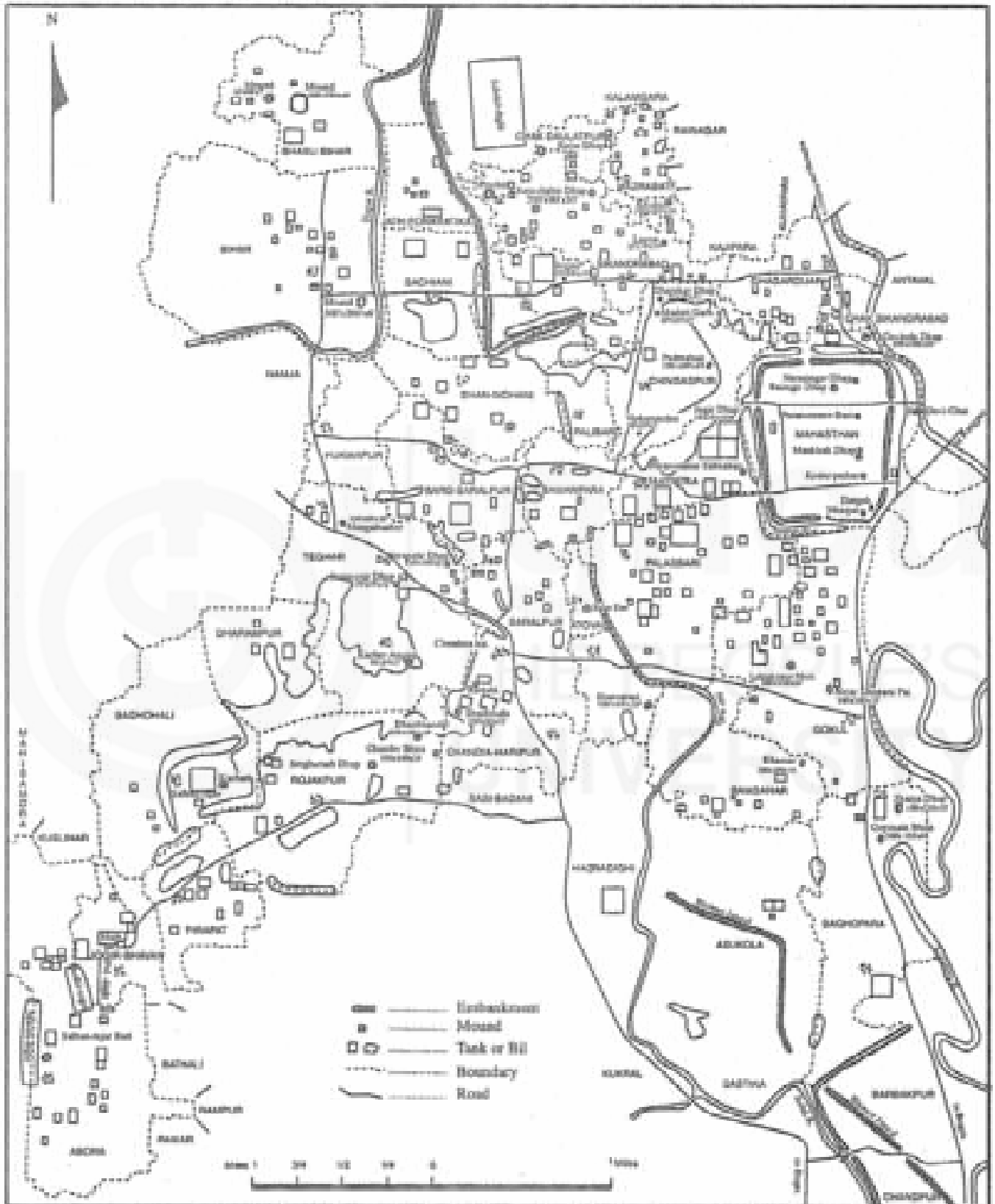
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6c/BD_Mahasthangarh1.JPG

Mahasthan or Mahasthangarh in Bagura district, (Fig. 6 and Map 2) the earliest and the largest archaeological site in Bangladesh, with a long cultural sequence consists of the ruins of the ancient city of Pundranagara. The site is 13 km north of Bogra town. The northern, western and southern sides of the fortified city were encircled by a deep moat, traces of which are visible in the former two sides and partly in the latter side. The river Karatoya flows on the eastern side. Many more mounds lie scattered in adjacent villages, which are believed to contain cultural remains of the suburbs of the ancient fortified city of Pundranagar. Period V represents the Gupta and late-Gupta phase. Period VI represents the Pala or post-Gupta phase, evidenced by architectural remains of several sites scattered throughout the eastern side of the city, like Khodar Pathar Bhita, Mankalir Kunda, Parasuram's Palace and Bairagir Bhita. This was the most flourishing phase and during this period a large number of Buddhist establishments were erected outside the city. In addition to these sites, excavations have revealed three gateways of the city, a considerable portion of the northern and eastern rampart, and a temple complex near the mazar area. Apart from this there is evidence of many monumental structures like brick walls, tower, a large building (21x17 m for the main room to which two little rooms of unclear utility were added later to the north) surrounded by thick walls (1.5 m) and divided in its inner space by two rows of square pillars and a large circular platform of 4.3 m in diameter. The antiquities recovered from the site include a few large size terracotta plaques, toys, balls, ornamental bricks, and earthenwares (Alam and Salles, 2001).

The well known monastic complex Somapura Mahavihara at *Paharpur* in Naogaon district, has been the subject of research for decades concentrating on art and architecture. However recent work in this area has identified an extensive habitation zone encircling the complex which indicates that the religious establishment was not existing in isolation from the main social-economic processes of the time. Extensive structural and habitation remains as well as tanks have been found at Goal Bhita in the northeast corner of the mahavihara (Sen, 2014). *Birampur* in Dinajpur district, Bangladesh, has yielded clusters of archaeological remains with structures and pottery scatters as well as both buried and mound sites. Some of the clusters like Chandipur-Garhpinglai cover an area of 310 hectares. Excavations have been conducted at the structural complexes at Tileswardanga and Bowalar Mandap which are religious in nature of both Brahmanical and Buddhist significance (Sen, 2015).

15.4.4 South India

In this region many of the sites occupied in the historic period do not have material remains of the post Gupta era. However there is evidence of many architectural remains of this period and thus researchers have concentrated on the temple cities and structural architecture, but inscriptions mention many large cities and urban life the evidence of which is still lacking from archaeology. For example, *Kaveripattanam* in Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu is known for temples and architecture but no habitation remains have been unearthed (Soundara Rajan, 1994). (For temple complex at Kaveripattanam see Unit 19 of this Block).



Map 2: The Settlement Complex of Mahasthan

Source : Sen, P. C., (1929) *Mahasthan and its Environs*, Monograph No. 2 (Rajshahi: Varendra Research Society).

Excavations at *Talkad* in Mysore district, Karnataka, though concentrating on temples and their architecture did uncover some parts of the habitation in levels VII with existence of a brick wall and well planned water supply with many channels and ponds (Devaraj, 1996). *Kanchipuram* in Chingleput district, Tamil Nadu is known for its temples, but *Pallavamedu* in Kanchipuram has yielded archaeological evidence of the Pallavas. Three periods of occupation have been identified, Period I with pottery and other artefacts, Period II with mud floors, hearths and platforms and Period III with pottery and disturbed structural remains. Excavations have been conducted in many sites in Tamil Nadu associated with dynasties of this period like Pandyas (Korkai), Cholas (Kurumbanmedu and Palyarai) and Hoysalas (Kannanur) and mostly artefacts including pottery have been recovered but no structural remains except an irrigation system at Kannanur and a brick wall at Palayarai (Sridhar 2004). At the excavations at *Yelleswaram* in district Nalgonda, Andhra Pradesh, on the banks of the Krishna river, Period V yielded structures of rubble stone with brick, an iron smelting factory, glass bangles and sculptures. Votive shrines were also found here (Khan 1963). *Banavasi-Gudnapur* area in North Kanara district, Karnataka, known for the Kadamba dynastic rule has also been the subject of an archaeological survey in recent times. From the seventh to the sixteenth centuries CE shiva temples replace the stupas and there is indication of the expansion of the settlement from the presence of extensive pottery scatters, construction of reservoirs, a basalt stone manufacturing site and presence of iron slag indicating some production activity. The settlement seems to have shifted to a different zone than the earlier period due to the absence of later period ceramics in the area of the early historic settlement (Suvrathan, 2013). At *Aihole* in Karnataka, the concentration has been on the study of the famous temple complex in this zone but recent survey work has shown that the early Chalukyan temples were a part of a larger settlement system with the discovery of pottery scatters, reservoirs, large architectural complex with a pillared hall and room blocks, stone quarries and mortars in the 1 sq. km area surrounding the temple complex. The pottery found was mostly jars as opposed to bowls which might indicate cooking and storage (Kadambi, 2011).

15.4.5 Western and Central India

Many sites in these regions were not occupied after the chalcolithic and historical periods like *Nasik*, *Nevasa* and *Navdatoli* in Maharashtra, which do not have any remains of the post-Gupta period. They are occupied in what is called the 'medieval' period after 1300-1400 CE (Sankalia and Deo, 1955; Sankalia et.al, 1958). However there is evidence of large well planned settlements in many zones within this area.

Sirpur (**Fig. 7**) in Chhattisgarh, a village situated on the right bank of the Mahanadi in Chhattisgarh was the capital of Sarabhapuriyas and Panduvamsis of South Kosala from sixth century CE. Excavations at this site have yielded evidence of large secular and religious structures. Whether this settlement can be called a 'urban' centre is open to debate but there is evidence of what has been called a palace with a verandah on wooden pillars, with thick brick walls, large rooms and double storied houses. Every temple had a residential quarter and a tank (Sharma, 2012).



Figure 7: Site of Sirpur

Photograph by Theasg sap, November, 2012

Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1f/Sirpur24.JPG>

Mansar, a small town on National Highway No. 7 lies to the north-east of Nagpur in Nagpur district in Maharashtra. This site has yielded evidence of a temple and palace of the Vakataka period and a *Mahavihara* said to be built during the Vishnukundin's presence in this area after the fifth century CE. However no habitation remains were unearthed during the excavations (Joshi and Sharma, 2005). At Prakash in Dhule district, Maharashtra, Period IV did yield some remains of the sixth to eleventh centuries CE like beads, figurines, bangles, pottery, copper objects and other artefacts but no structural remains were unearthed (Thapar, 1967).

Excavations at the port site of *Sanjan* in Valsad, Gujarat revealed structures, ring wells, a mortuary structure typical of the Parsi community, temple fragments, foreign and local ceramics and other artefacts to confirm the existence of an urban settlement and the presence of the Parsis here between the eight to the thirteenth centuries CE (Gupta et.al, 2004). This is evidence of the fact that during this period many communities from outside the country came and settled here. *Vadnagar*, located in the northeastern part of Gujarat, is one of the state's ancient towns. The initial settlement of Vadnagar was established on the left bank of a wide shallow depression, possibly a remnant of the palaeo-channel of the Sabarmati River, presently flowing about 15 km southeast of the town. Period III from the first to the eleventh centuries CE is represented by a 7.60m to 9.00m thick cultural deposit. This period ushered in a new beginning in the life of the town. The interior of the prosperous town seems to have been re-laid according to new planning, and the earthen rampart was replaced with a strong burnt-bricks fortification, though with reduced breadth. It is evident that at this level the settlement planning was done afresh along with some alteration in the fortification. The plans and sections of the excavated trenches indicate that this revised planning of the town remained unchanged for more than 1,000 years. It appears that Vadnagar continued through several dynasties that ruled over Gujarat. Archaeologically, this deposit has yielded cultural material that can be associated with hitherto known periods of Gujarat history such as the Kshatrapas, Maitrakas, Gurjar Pratiharas and the Solankis. The next period from twelfth to

seventeenth centuries CE begins with major repairs and renovations to the fort wall carried out during the time of Solanki king Kumarpala. This archaeological evidence noticed in this cutting during the excavation corroborates well with the description of the twelfth century CE inscription of king Kumarpal that is exhibited at the Arjunbari gate in the northern wall (Rawat, 2011).

15.5 CHARACTER OF 'URBANISM'

'Urban' centres have been mentioned in many inscriptions and literature of the post-Gupta period but archaeology has yielded very meagre information on the topic. This is an aspect which distinguishes this period from the earlier urbanisation dating from sixth century BCE where archaeological data albeit limited gives us a picture of settlements of the time. However it is with the limitations in mind that we can begin to talk of the variation of space through material evidence.

As far as 'urban' centres are concerned, the first aspect to discuss is how do we define 'urban' space. Epigraphy provides us with a definition of a space which can be distinguished from 'rural' space where aspects of cultivable land or pasture are mentioned. Archaeologically we need to use other parameters to distinguish different types of spatial units. Size cannot always be a criteria, for example large complexes like Nalanda cannot be really called an 'urban' settlement. (Chattopadhyay, 1997b). Other criteria like moats, fortifications, large size of houses, specialised craft activity, presence of trade have to be treated with caution in analysing settlements of the past as these are not features present in all 'urban' sites. Many settlements which can be treated as 'urban' like Rajbadiganga (which corresponds to the city of Karnasuvarna) do not have any fortification walls, nor is there any compact enclosed space in many complexes like Krimila, or Birampur. The size and type of houses cannot be a criterion always as in many terrains like a flood prone zone like north Bengal, domestic houses are usually built with impermanent material while more 'public' structures are permanent due to the unstable region where river shifting and floods wash away all traces of habitation. But these sites can also be called 'urban' due to other aspects like craft, trade or large size like the site of Balupur in West Bengal. The space which speaks of exchange and manufacturing areas can also be considered as 'urban'. Inscriptions from south India give details about these centres as well as functioning of guilds and trading communities. Therefore an archeological site or a complex of sites is designated 'urban' on the basis of size, type of structures, industrial and trading activity.

Archaeological remains of this period can be divided into religious structures like monastic complexes or temples, secular architecture, habitation zones as well as isolated discoveries of sculptural pieces some which are inscribed, architectural fragments, pottery, seals and sealings. Sculpture and architecture form the major source of material evidence of this period. The main questions which arise in our analysis of 'urbanism' of the post-Gupta period are: 1) What are the various types of settlements we get in this period? 2) Can we identify any of these as 'urban' cities? 3) Is there a difference with the urbanism of the early historic period? 4) What are the salient features of post-Gupta 'urbanism'?

There is no doubt that we find a large proliferation of settlements in different parts of the country in this period. It is true that many of the sites which represented 'urban' centres in the Ganga plains often have evidence of disturbed archaeological remains which has led to the theory of the 'urban decline' (Sharma, 1987). But there is evidence of a space which we can call 'urban' in many sites even with the limited material record available between the seventh and twelfth centuries CE.

The archaeological record with evidence of large settlements in all parts of the country testify to the growth of 'urban' centres during this period on a pan-Indian level. At Rajghat in the Ganga plains we find evidence of settlement planning and large structures during 300-1200 CE. At Purana Qila we find remains of a fortification wall and structures of mud bricks between tenth to eleventh centuries CE. At Rupar on the Sutlej we also see large brick buildings and the semblance of increased prosperity at the site from ninth century CE. In areas like present day Bihar we find the remains of very large site complexes like Krimila with numerous inscribed sculptures. Chirand also has evidence of substantial structural remains. Sculptures of non-local stone, coins have been found in many other sites including the famous Nalanda complex which indicates a significance beyond a 'religious' sphere (Kumar, 2014). West Bengal and Bangladesh have yielded a lot of material remains testifying to development of settlements with an 'urban' character in many sites like Bangarh, Mahasthangarh, Mangolkot. Structural remains are found at Rajbadidanga said to be in Karnasuvarna the city of Sasanka as well as near Chandraketugarh and Goswamikhanda. In north Bengal and Bangladesh the number of settlements increased from the earlier phase and settlement complexes dating to the post- Gupta period are found in many zones, the prominent of which is the Cheeramati river and the Birampur complex. Other sites in south, western and central India also show evidence of 'urban' activity like Yelleswaram, Pallavanedu, Sirpur, Vadnagar, with substantial walls, large structures and industrial activity. The site Sanjan indicates the presence of foreign communities involved in trading activities in this period.

Survey around sites like Paharpur which are known for their imposing monastic structure have also shown evidence of habitation activity indicating that even religious complexes did not exist in isolation. This is seen even with the temple complexes of south India where survey in Talkad and Aihole have identified extensive habitation areas around the temples. The problem remains however as to how to relate this habitation zone around a religious complex with an 'urban' formation. Here the concept of 'temple urbanism' (Heitzman, 1987; Champakalakshmi, 1996) applied to understand the growth of urban processes in south India is a useful starting point. It has been argued that the sites that grew around temples during the Chola period exhibit a variety of traits that classify them as 'cities'. Monumental architecture, occupational specialisation, trading networks, and interaction with a wider hinterland all characteristics of urban growth were present in these temple cities. But the problem remains as to whether these aspects were geared only towards the temple or formed part of a wider multifunctional society which would be more commensurate with an 'urban' centre. Temple settlements with a monofunctional character could not be labelled as 'urban'. The archaeology of these sites around religious complexes present a similar problem of identification and further work is required to understand whether the presence of habitation zones around a sacred centre can be characterised as a 'city' (For details on temple towns see Unit 19 of this Block).

'Urban' like settlements are therefore present in many parts of the country during this phase. The presence of a plethora of sculptural remains often carved out of non-local stone do demonstrate some organised exchange network which is not commensurate with a 'rural' exchange network. The presence of large religious structures within settlements also show the link between religion and stratified communities which supported and created many of these centres.

How was this process different from the earlier cultural phase? It has been suggested that after a lull in the second urbanisation phase there was again a surge in the urban process called the third urbanisation (Chattopadhyaya, 1997b). Many of the historical sites are not occupied in the subsequent periods; in many settlements the material culture reflects what has been called a 'decay' in material culture. But there are sites which

exhibit a continuity of culture like Bangarh, Mahasthangarh, Chirand, Rupar and others; hence this cannot be termed a universal phenomenon. It is therefore difficult to accept the view that the growth of settlements in the post-Gupta period was a separate historical process from the earlier phase but differences remain as to the nature of the settlements.

What were the salient feature of this 'urbanisation' that occurred from the seventh century onwards? To understand the nature of settlement activity one has to contextualise them in the changes in polity that were present at this time, the aspect of intensive regional state formation and political, economic, cultural integration.

Literary and epigraphic evidence shows that these 'urban' like settlements were more rooted in their regional and local contexts than their earlier counterparts (Chattopadhyaya, 1997b). Archaeology seems to indicate this regional and subregional character of settlements during this period. It has been surmised that historical cities had an epicentre from which it expanded to different parts of the subcontinent. This probably resulted in some sort of uniformity in archaeological material in most of the sites of this period. Post-Gupta cities on the other hand did not have an epicentre and hence they were more regional in character thus portraying a greater variety of material remains (Chattopadhyaya, 1997b). There is a great amount of variability present both in material culture (for example pottery) as well as in the urban process itself. For example we do not have any diagnostic ware of this period like the Northern Black Polished ware (and its variations) found during the historical period in many parts of the country.

Unlike the historical period these sites were not compact with a central core region and no post-Gupta settlement can be compared with a Kausambi or Hastinapur. Post-Gupta urban cities were more dispersed in nature being a complex of sites rather than a complex of mounds as in the historical period. It is true that in many sites like Bangarh or Mahasthangarh there was a fortified core area but it was not present in other sites like the Birampur complex or Krimila which was a constellation of sites encompassing both religious, political and social dimensions. The Talkad, Aihole or Paharpur complexes portray this link between religion and the settlement system as a whole. It is prudent to speak of *urban complexes* rather than urban sites to understand the settlements in a holistic perspective.

Another characteristic of this period is that we see the growth of settlements in many new areas which came into the fold like many parts of north Bengal which do not have a rich historical material record except at a few sites. Outlying regions were also brought into the system with areas like the semi-arid western part of West Bengal where we find settlements and architecture of this period. An important zone is the Himalayan region where there is evidence of the emergence of states with political centres and nodes of exchange. The Chamba state is an important example in this respect where the Mushana dynasty founded the city of Champaka (Chamba) or the city of Karttikeyapura in Kumaun district (Majumdar, 1964 pp. 122-23; Sharma, 2004). Archaeological evidence of habitations is however scarce in these areas and the emphasis has been on religious structures and monuments.

It is difficult to come to a definite conclusion about the evolution and nature of 'urbanism' from the archaeological remains but we can demonstrate that there was a proliferation of settlement activity in many parts of the country, many of which can be designated as 'urban'. These dispersed site complexes were characterised by large structures, exchange networks, industrial activity, religious monuments, sculptures and other aspects of material culture, unlike the compact settlements of the earlier phase. Variation and diversity is the key to understanding the nature and formation of urban centres in this period. The evolution of these settlements was not a uniform phenomenon but should be understood

as encompassing diverse formation processes with a distinct regional and subregional character.

However the paucity of archaeological material of this period is the major lacuna for identifying settlements of this period, the evidence limited to literature and epigraphy. Future archaeological work needs to move away from the art/architecture centred approach and understand a settlement from a holistic perspective encompassing social, political, religious and economic dimensions. It is at regional and subregional level that research has to be directed to unravel the variability of the 'urban' process. It is through this approach that one can move away from the prevailing model of a 'historical city' and understand the diversity and regional character of the post-Gupta 'urban' settlement complex.

15.6 SUMMARY

Post-Gupta polity was marked by the emergence of regional kingdoms as a result of agrarian expansion in the 'peripheral' hinterlands, away from the 'core'. The archaeological evidence contests the so-called 'feudal' thesis that towns and cities declined during the post-Gupta period. The urban centres that emerged were rather rooted in local exchange networks. Though old existing urban centres showed signs of decline (Taxila, Atranjikhara, Kausambi, Hastinapur), a number of new urban centres with brisk trading activities emerged (Bangarh, Mahasthangarh, Paharpur, Aihole, Krimila). It clearly suggests that what is termed as 'deurbanisation' process in the post-Gupta period does not hold ground. These new emerging centres were more rooted at the regional and local levels. Unlike the earlier cities one does not find any unifying epicenter that could suggest the emergence of an uniform pattern, instead it was more heterogeneous and dispersed in nature.

15.7 EXERCISES

- 1) 'Early medieval centres unlike the early historic centres were primarily nodal points in local exchange.' Comment.
- 2) What is the theory of 'deurbanisation' in the post-Gupta period? Critically evaluate.
- 3) Examine R.S. Sharma's theory of deurbanisation in the light of the contemporary archaeological remains in the post-Gupta period.
- 4) What are the salient features of post-Gupta urbanism?
- 5) Identify the similarity and dissimilarity of the urbanism of post-Gupta period to that of early historic period.

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UNIT 16 EARLY MEDIEVAL URBANISATION FROM EPIGRAPHY AND TEXTS*

Structure

- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 The Proliferation of Land Grants and the Theory of Urban Decay
- 16.3 Urban Decay: A Critique
- 16.4 Social Change and Urban Growth
- 16.5 Representation of Urban Centres in Literary Texts
- 16.6 Representation of Cities in Normative/Prescriptive Texts
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16.1 INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation in the early medieval period (c. 600-1300 CE) of Indian history was connected with the growth of regional kingdoms and an expansion of Indian Ocean trade. Macro level changes took place which produced new patterns of interaction. *Agrahara* system of land grants by the royalty created a new class of land holders which was a new socio-economic formation based on land grants. There was a substantial change in the material milieu from the earlier period as a result of these land grants. Expansion of agrarian economy could be perceived along with state formation and expansion of state societies in the periphery. Villages were neither isolates nor undifferentiated, and were connected with the apex or supra-local political centres through administrative tiers at locality levels. Agrarian economy gave fillip to non-agrarian sector thereby leading to a process of urbanisation. Thus early medieval urbanisation could be characterised by changes in the agrarian economy, greater complexities in the political sphere and an expanding Indian Ocean trade network. However to locate the urban centres and then to explain their growth remain a vexed problem and sifting through the vast epigraphic and other types of textual data and looking for a *pura*, *nagara* or *pattana*, different terms denoting urban centres, would be a preliminary way of approaching the problem.

Epigraphic and textual sources are generally used for understanding early medieval urbanisation. Many epigraphs describe towns, exchange centres and commercial networks. Texts like travel accounts, *kavya* literature, secular texts etc. are often replete with descriptions of a city. Archaeology is not always very helpful in this regard as it is, in the case of early historic urbanism, due to lack of excavations in early medieval sites. Past studies that talked of urban centres, in general, relied heavily on textual sources. Arab Geographers' accounts, Alberuni's evidence or normative, prescriptive treatises

* Professor Suchandra Ghosh, Department of Ancient History and Culture, University of Calcutta, Kolkata.

like *Manasara*, *Mayamata* or *Samarangasutradhara* were used to discuss the presence or absence of urban centres in India in the early medieval period. Thus Pushpa Niyogi writes, “Towns and Cities along the main or subsidiary trade routes easily developed into commercial centres. Innumerable references to cities flourishing along such routes are found in the writings of Muslim historians” (Niyogi, 1967: 117). In a section on instances of planned towns, Niyogi states on the basis of *Kumarapalacharita* that there were eighty four market at Anahilapura in the 12th century and therefore it was a great emporium of trade. Stress is laid on texts like *Mayamata*, *Aparajitaprachhha* or *Sukranitisara* to understand town planning. According to B.B. Dutt, whose work is largely based on *Manasara*, *Mayamata*, etc., “the streets of India were arranged and planned according to what is known as rectangular chess board system of planning”. (Dutt, 1925: 116-117) The existence of urban centres is taken for granted in such works and no reference is usually made to the historical context in which they may have emerged. Therefore these works finally appear as compilations of urban place names from literature and epigraphs. The problem with the use of text for understanding urban planning is that in most cases the date of a text cannot be ascertained with certainty. B.N.S. Yadav (Yadav, 1973: 240) argued that, though the description of cities in the texts belonging to post-Gupta period became conventional in nature, yet it was possible to deduce some broad features of city life from these texts. The texts mainly discussed by him were the description of Ujjayini in *Padataditakam* (c. 6th - 7th century CE), the *Kadambari* (c. 7th century CE) and the *Navasahasankacharita* (c. 10th century CE); of Kundinapura in the *Nalachampu* (c. 10th century CE) and the *Naisadhiyacharita*; of Pravarapura in the *Vikramankadevacharita* etc. The urban features in these texts are in the first place, strong fortifications of cities consisting of ramparts and moats, localisation of trading community or professional/occupational groups within the precincts of a city, presence of magnificent mansions and bustling trading activities. These works thus refer to urban centres without attempting to understand the process of urbanisation.

16.2 THE PROLIFERATION OF LAND GRANTS AND THE URBAN DECAY

Proliferation of land grants in the early medieval period is taken to be suggestive of a new socio-economic formation leading to the formulation of Indian feudalism, according to many historians. The arguments presented in favour of feudal milieu highlight that the large number of grants enjoyed by landed intermediaries resulted in the emergence of the self-sufficient enclosed village community. It was suggested that expansion of agrarian economy through land grants impacted growth of urban centres in this period. Thus in the opinion of R.S. Sharma, B.N.S. Yadav and others the early medieval period corresponded to a period of urban decline which was linked with languishing trade and monetary anaemia. Urban contraction was said to have been the result of agrarian expansion (Sharma, 1987: 177). On re-examination of the available evidence some historians like D.C. Sircar, B.D. Chattopadhyaya, R. Champaklakshmi and others have challenged the theory of urban decay. It was suggested that while some urban sites of the early historical period show proof of their decay, there are others which provided no signs of desertion¹ (Sircar, 1976: 97-119; Chattopadhyaya, 2012: 134-189; Champaklakshmi, 1998).

The first archaeological documentation of decline of urban centres was provided by R.S. Sharma. He meticulously examined evidence relating to four broad regions, the north, the middle Gangetic plains and eastern regions, central and western regions and

¹ For details see our Course History of Indian Economy, Block 3, Units 10 & 14.

the south. According to him, material, artefactual remains signifying artisanal and commercial activity involving exchange in metal money in an archaeological horizon lend urban character to it. Among other factors if a marked decrease particularly is noticeable in trade, handicrafts and the use of metal money, such a scenario would denote de-urbanisation. During his endeavour to understand the growth and decay of an urban centre, these criteria's were measured. He associated decline of trade and urbanism with feudalism. In his preface to his book *Urban Decay in India* Sharma (1987: xi) makes it clear that de-urbanisation is viewed by him as an integral part of a new pattern of production marked by agrarian expansion. He then goes on to explain the new phenomenon which was obviously the result of *agrahara* system of land grants which resulted in the expansion of rural economy. Thus self sufficient rural economy is portrayed as the principal agent behind the disappearance of cities in India. He culled inscriptional references to migration of brahmanas from towns to rural areas. While talking of the relation between an urban centre and its hinterland, he harped upon the fact that archaeologists should dig the sites which lie at the periphery of an urban space as the nature of connection between a town and its supportive agrarian base cannot be established otherwise. The decay of urban centres is also seen as an impact of the languishing long distance trade. Sharma viewed languishing trade as a major ingredient of feudal formation in India. Thrust was put on the transactions in high-value, small quantity, portable luxury items completely disregarding the more sustained and important trade in daily necessities. Dwindling trade was linked with paucity of coins of precious metals. Among the three regional powers of early medieval times namely the Palas and Senas of Bengal and Bihar (750-1200 CE) and the Rashtrakutas of Deccan (754-974 CE) did not issue any coins and the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Kanauj issued debased coins.

Within pre-feudal scholarship D.N Jha (Jha, 2008: 323-324) reiterated his critique of Sharma's emphasis on foreign trade though he is in general agreement with the theory of de-urbanisation. According to him there is a theoretical inadequacy of the explanation of the feudal developments only in terms of foreign trade whose decline to a large extent depended on the factors external to the Indian situation. To attach greater importance to foreign trade than it deserves within the Marxist frame of analysis would imply that the ancient Indian society did not possess any built in potential for change – a position implicit in the Marxist concept of Asiatic Mode of Production. Jha talks of the internal social contradictions with which the decline of trade, paucity of coins and the growth of closed economy would have to be linked in various degrees. Puranic texts were used to show sharp changes in social, economic and political situations. Attention has been drawn to Puranic descriptions of the impoverished conditions of merchants in the *Kaliyuga*, the worst of all the *yugas* which witnessed a social crisis. This social crisis, according to Sharma, not only accelerated the process of grant of villages by the rulers for the support of priests and officials but also led to the widespread conversion of towns into fiefs. Excavated and explored information about early medieval cities is much poorer and many of the former urban centres have yielded evidence of their decaying material milieu, haphazard layout and utilisation of re-used bricks. These are interpreted as distinct signs of de-urbanisation in the Indian subcontinent. A Prakrit text *Vividharathakalpa* by Jinaprabhasuri mentioned that urban centres turned into villages (*nayarani gamabhu-ani hohinti*). This was used as an example of urban decay. It has been inferred that urban centres as sites of exchange and crafts production gradually faded away and were replaced by military and political headquarters. The case of *jayaskandhavaras* was brought in as copper plates of this period are replete with references to *jayaskandhavaras* or victorious army camps. Early medieval north India witnessed the rise of many centres of pilgrimage (*tirtha*) which as sacred centres sometimes assumed urban proportions. The historians who support the thesis of urban

decay argue that as urban centres lost their primary relevance as trading zones, they became religious centres which did not play the role of centre of production or exchange. Xuan Zang's account has been used among other things, to show that towns and shops were given away to temples and monasteries for meeting their needs. Text like *Manasara*, a text on architecture, compiled around or after twelfth century CE was used to point out the distinction between a village and a town. It is said that the text discusses the planning of the village and the town in such a manner that one cannot be differentiated from the other.



Map 1: Urban Centres in India c. 1300 [After Chakravarti, Ranabir, *Exploring Early India up to c.AD 1300*, Third Edition (New Delhi: Primus Books), Map 8, p. 417.]

16.3 URBAN DECAY: A CRITIQUE

As referred to earlier, the notion of 'urban' decline has been decisively questioned as there is ample evidence of 'cities' both in north and south India. Urban centres are present in epigraphs and also in literary texts as space or spatial units which can be distinguished from 'rural' spaces and specific terminologies are used to distinguish an urban centre. Thus we have *pura*, *nagara*, *pattana* and *mahanagara*. To this one should also add *pattinam* which was a port town. Urban centres are present in epigraphic records from about the 9th century CE. *Hatta* or *mandapika* emerge as key terms for understanding the core of the urban space structure. They combine manufacture and exchange – two dominant activities of any settlement. The term *hatta* could mean a trade centre in an urban area, in addition to its more common connotation of a rural exchange centre. Urban areas, belonging to the non-agrarian sector of the economy, were linked up with trade centres, and many of urban centres were major centres of trade and commerce. How an urban centre was created is a moot question.

There are numerous references in early medieval records to the creation of townships by rulers and officials. The records however do not give us any clue to ascertain how these were planned. Thus it has been argued that the creation of an urban centre was an extension of an already emergent process; the creation of townships in such cases consisted of laying the foundation of a core exchange centre or a ceremonial centre, the foundation of which was necessary but which was not equivalent to the urban process as a whole (Chattopadhyaya, 2012: 172). Here the example of Ghatiyala inscription of 861 CE from the Jodhpur area may be cited where the creation of a hatta is clearly mentioned (*atra hatto mahajanascha shapitah*) (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. IX: 280). The disagreement with R.S. Sharma was initiated by D.C. Sircar (Sircar, 1981: 80-87) who in his discussion on 'Trade and Commerce', drew on inscriptional evidence and a vast array of textual sources including Al-biruni's account to trace out routes of communication that criss-crossed the country, as well as the variety of products that were transported from one part of the subcontinent to the other and to lands beyond the seas to refute the notion of a decline in long-distance exchange. B.D. Chattopadhyaya (2012: 150-154) argued that foreign trade was never central to the growth of urban centres and a decline in foreign trade might not necessarily imply a decline in internal trade or petty commodity decline. In order to assess the viability of such a thesis B.D. Chattopadhyaya attempted to structurally examine 'urban centres' which were projected as a crucial variable in the idea of Indian feudalism. The source used by him was primarily epigraphic as there is a paucity of field archaeological materials during this period. It is interesting that Chattopadhyaya chose inscriptions from the regions like Rajasthan, the upper and middle Ganga river valley and Malwa which formed a part of the erstwhile Gurjara Pratihara kingdom which was incidentally one of the core regions of Sharma's study. His research describes the expansion of centres of exchange or nodal points like *hatta* or *mandapika* and associated residential areas, often serving as seats of local ruling lineages. The case of Naddula to be precise is an excellent example. Naddula was one of the *gramas* or villages among twelve such areas. The central location of Naddula vis-a-vis other rural centres turned it into a point of convergence for movements among the twelve villages. This resulted in the subsequent transformation of the rural settlement into a trade centre with a *mandapika*. Naddula eventually became an urban centre and finally an administrative centre of a branch of the Chahamanas (Kielhorn, 1907-08: 62-66).

Ranabir Chakravarti's (Chakravarti, 2002, 187-200) studies on *Mandapika* and *Pentha* as middle category market centres based mostly on epigraphic data and literary sources brought to light the linkages between the market places of cities and villages in the early medieval period. Many *mandapikas* were known as *sulka mandapika* i.e., tolls and customs were levied both in cash and kind at the *mandapika*. Inscriptions present impressive range of commodities which were brought to the *mandapika* for sale. Like *mandapika*, *pentha* was another type of market centre in the Deccan. The *pentha* seems to have been a trade centre larger than an *adda* (*hatta*) and *santhe* (weekly fair) but smaller than a *pura* or *pattana*. The *pentha* continued to exist in the Deccan for a long time.

Nagarams located on important trade routes and at the points of intersection by itinerant traders developed into large towns, both in terms of their size and volume of trade and commerce. K. R. Hall (1980) suggested that *nagarams* served as markets for the *nadus* or locality level centres. They were potential centres of urban growth and became a part of a wider network of inter regional and overseas trade from the 11th century. These researches thus negate the thesis of urban decline as a universal phenomenon and moreover stress the linkage of an urban centre with an outside space and interaction, a regular urban activity.

16.4 SOCIAL CHANGE AND URBAN GROWTH

Growth of urban centres should be viewed from the point of social change and the nature of the economy of a given period. With the kind of social formation early medieval India experienced, many rural centres were transformed into urban centres as a gradual process. The crystallisation of this process manifested through the increase of urban centres in the post-9th century period. Different regions must be having their own reasons for urban growth. A work on the Andhra region within the time frame of 1000 and 1336 lists several factors which resulted in urban growth in the region. They are: a) the holding of fairs, b) the emergence of religious centres, c) commercial activities created around ports, d) the bestowal of urban status on rural settlements, e) initiatives taken by kings and ministers in the creation of urban centres (Chattopadhyaya, 2012: 174). Two elements are essential as markers for urban centres. First it has to have linkage with the space outside and secondly there should be a nucleus within an urban area through which interaction, as a regular urban activity, takes place. The greater the convergence of economic, political and cultural (including religious) activities at an urban area, more eminent would be its position than cities with a predominantly single functional role. Thus urban character of a given place would depend on the multiple functions of a settlement. A few examples may be cited. We can begin with Tattanandapura (Ahar in western UP). Tattanandapura is referred to as a *purapattana* in epigraphic records of 867-907 CE. It is marked by a *brihadrathya* (high street), *kurathya* (small road), *hattamarga* (road leading to the market place), *purvahattapradesha* (a market place in the eastern part of the urban area), *griha* (residential house), *avasanika* (ordinary dwelling) and *aparasaraka* (house with balcony). The impressive size of the urban centre of Tattanandapura is unmistakable as it is reported to have covered an area of 3800 acres Sahni, 1927-28: 52-54).

Another urban centre of prominence was Siyadoni in the Bundelkhand area of Uttar Pradesh. Labelled as a *pattana*, it had a *mandapika* and shops which were known as *vithis* or *apanas*. Some shops were described as hereditarily owned by some merchants (*pitrapitamahoparjita*), some were owned or built by merchants themselves (*svoparjita*). The hereditary ownership of shops suggests commercial transactions at Siyadoni over a long period.²

An interesting record which provides information on commercial activities is the Belgaum (Venugrama, in north Karnataka) record of 1204 CE. It also provides a partial glimpse in the layout of an urban space by mentioning land including arable land as an item of grant within the territorial limits of Venugrama. It is also said in the record that Ratta Karttavirya donated to the Jaina sanctuary four bazaars 'on the east of the high road at the western end of the northern course of the north street'. The record shows considerable intermingling of residential cum institutional and non-residential space as well. Great bulk of goods converged at Venugrama and several group of itinerant traders from Gujarat as well as Kerala thronged here. The range of the products covering grain to horse invariably point to the diverse merchant groups that travelled to Venugrama. The transformation from a rural place to an active commercial centre is evident. The act of exchange in a certain space, as pointed out by B.D. Chattopadhyaya, is intermingled with other economic and non-economic activities. Venugrama is believed to be the chief town of a small district of seventy villages even though the suffix *grama* continued to be in use.

² A detailed description of Siyadoni inscription and also brisk activities on horse fair from Pehwa inscription are given in our Course **History of Indian Economy, Block 3, Unit 14**.

VENUGRAMA

(Lines 37-38) – Hail! When the *Mahamandalesvara Kartavirya-deva* [IV], possessor of the *pancha-mahasabda*, in the company with (*his*) younger brother the Heir-Apparent Prince *Vira Mallikarjuna-deva* was enjoying the delights of empire in the camp of *Venugrama*,-

(Lines 38-40) – for the purposes of the regular worship, anointment, and other religious offices of the divine Santinatha of the *Ratta temple of the Jinas*, which had been constructed by *Bichiraja*, the Chief Scribe and head of all the ministers,-

(Lines 40-41) – he granted to Subhachandra-bhattaraka-deva, the teacher at that temple of the Jinas, at the time of the *samkramana* on Saturday, the second day of the bright fortnight of Pushya of **the cyclic year Raktakshi, the 1127th (year of the Saka era)**, in company with the four thousand burgresses, with pouring of water, (*an estate on tenure of*) *sthala-vritti* in *Venugrama*.

(Lines 41-42) – On the west from the ditch of the *baje* on the southern side thereof, in the twenty-fourth *hatti* of the *koda-gey*, (*he granted*) five *matter*, together with an *irisil* [a pitfall to catch tigers, elephants, etc.] structure;

(Lines 42-45) – In the aforesaid *Venugrama*, in the western course of the great eastern street, on the north of the house of *Duggiyara Tikana*, one house; in the western course of the western street, one house, in the western town-gate, one house; in front of the white plastered building of the god *Kapilesvara*, on the east of the *Sala-basadi* (*temple*), three houses; on the north of the road going to the *Aneya-Kere* [the Elephant's Tank]. A flower-garden (*comprising*) two *matter* (and) two hundred and seventy-six *kamma* according to the rood of the aforesaid *Venugrama*; on the west of the great tank on the west of *Alur of Kanamburigo* [very likely a large tank on the north of the fort], twelve *matter* of arable land; in the street on the south of the western market, one house, five cubits in width and twenty-one cubits in length.

(Lines 45-49) – Furthermore: Hail! All the Mummuri-dandas of the place of *Venugrama* and the *Mummuri-dandas* of both (*classes of*) itinerant traders, comprising the merchants (*pattanaga*) of the *Kundi* three-thousand and others, with *Samaya-chakravartti Jayapati Setti* at their head, who are adorned with a series of many virtues, endowed with veracity, prity of conduct, policy, and courtesy, kindly to dependents, maintaining the religion of strict *Bananjus* according to the course (*enjoined*) by the books of the lay-disciples instructed by the saints of the Jina established in the town of *Maghapatti*, performing meritorious works, receiving the grace of boons from the goddess Padmavati [a tutelary goddess of the Jain church], causing delight to all folk, highly reputed for just acquisition (*of wealth*) and practices of trade, carrying in their hands *bhallumki* staffs;-

(Lines 49-51) – and all the traders of *Lata* [Gujarat], headed by *Parasurama Nayaka*, *Pommana Nayaka*, and *Ammugi Nayaka*; and all the *Maleyala* traders, headed by *Padapa Nayaka*, *Konda Nambi Setti*, *Poreyacha Setti*, and others; and likewise the other traders of the aforesaid place of *Venugrama*, headed by the gold-workers and clothiers; and the oil-merchants; and the *dimka-saligas* : all these in assembly granted to the sanctuary of the aforesaid divine Santinatha a revenue in the following form:-

(Lines 51-52) – On each horse coming from the north, a *nelamettu* (?) of one quarter (of a *pana*); on one that passes on the south, a toll of one quarter (*of a pana*); on each horse of the *Maleyalas*, one quarter (*of a pana*); in the case of sixty-five oxen and buffaloes, however they be laden, (*there is to be*) immunity from all imposts:-

(Lines 52-53) – On each *chira* of gold-works, on each clothier's shop, cotton-shop, jeweller's shop, perfumery-shop, perfumers' bazaar, (*and*) goldsmith's booth, one large quarter (*of a pana*) as annual tax under each separate head.

(Lines 53-54) – On each *kadage* of cloth coming from without, one-sixteenth (*of a pana*); on each (*parcel of*) perfumery coming from without, and on each *bhanda* of grass, one *gadyana* and five *tuka* on the *bhanda*; on each *bhandi* of cotton, three *tara*; on each load thereof, one *kani* [The *kani* is 1/64 (equivalent to modern rupee); *tara* is 1/2 of an *anna*, so 3 *tara* are double of 1 *kani*.]

(Lines 54-55) – On each *bhandi* of paddy, one *balla* of paddy; on each load thereof, one *mana* of paddy; when paddy (*to the extent*) of an *ankana* is sold, one *balla* of that paddy; on each bazaar of paddy-shops, a regular *sollage* of paddy; on each shop for husked rice, one *adda* of husked rice;-

(Lines 55-56) – On each load of black pepper, one *mana* of black pepper; on each half-load thereof, a half a *mana*; on each *pettige* of asafoetida, one *gadyana* and six *tuka* (*on the value of*) the asafoetida; on each half-load of green ginger and turmeric, five *pala* of the *bhanda* thereof; on each load thereof, ten *pala* of green ginger and turmeric; on each oil-mill, a regular *adda* of oil; on each load of areca-nuts, twenty-five areca-nuts; on each half-load thereof, twelve areca-nuts;-

(Lines 56-59) – On each load of betel-leaves, one hundred betel-leaves; on each parcel, fifty betel-leaves; on each load of coconut, one such fruit; on each load of palm-leaves, two bundles of palm-leaves; on each parcel thereof, one bundle; on each *bhandi* of coarse sugar coming from without, fifteen blocks of coarse sugar; on each parcel thereof, one block; on each load of plantains, six such fruits; on each *hagara* of sugarcane, one cane; on each load of potstone, one *pala* of potstone.

(Lines 59) – Likewise, to the aforesaid sanctuary of the divine Santinatha were given by king *Kartavirya* [IV] bazaars, four, on the east of the high-road at the western end of the northern course of the north street.

(Lines 60-61) – *Sagara* and many other kings have made grants of land...

(Lines 61-62) – While the whole earth joyously utters abundant praise, long may the sequence of the extensive empire of the blessed *Kartavirya*...*Bichiraja* has been well told with great clearness by the *Kavi-Kandarpa* whose verses possess goodly ornaments of style and lucid meaning.

(Lines 62-63) – Free from faults, remarkable for significance in this decree which the *Kavi-Kandarpa*, whose verses are equal to nectar, an emperor of the poets of the four tongues, has joyfully related. (*This is*) the decree related by *Balachandra-deva*, a swan in the lotus-wood of everlasting literature that has risen from tasting the nectar of the utterances of the blessed *Madhavachandra*, emperor of masters of the triple lore.

Barnett, Lionel D., (1915-16) 'Two Inscriptions from Belgaum, Now in the British Museum', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XIII (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India), pp. 25-26).

Certain areas in an overall rural context sometimes assumed features of a town. For example, in early medieval Vanga under the Chandra kings (a regional power ruling in present day Comilla, Dhaka and Sylhet area in Bangladesh) we have the presence of a *hattika* attached to Dhritipura. In Bengal a number of archaeological sites such as Bangarh and Mangalkot exhibit a continuity of settlement extending from the peak of early historical urbanisation into the Pala-Sena period. In southeastern Bengal an urban centre was Devaparvata. Though identified with the monastic complex of Mainamati in Comilla, Devaparvata was a sub regional node which was an administrative centre and also a riverine trade centre that had linkages with the outside world. It was located in the Mainamati ridge near Comilla and archaeological excavations and explorations in the area have revealed its extraordinary historical as well as archaeological importance. We know about Devaparvata from five inscriptions (Husain, 1997:207-231) each of them giving a vivid description of the landscape of the site. The earliest epigraphic description of Devaparvata is found in the Kailan copper-plate of Saridharanòarata (c.AD665-675) followed by the Udòisivara copper-plate of the same ruler. In the description of the landscape in the Kailan copper plate it is said that Devaparvata was encircled by the river Ksòiroda (modern Khirnai), both banks of which were decorated by boats and in which elephants bathed. It is described as *sarvotabhadra* which means that it was perhaps approachable on all sides. The record also refers to three boat parking stations (*naudanoòòakas*) which indicate that it was a riverine port. It was also the principal political centre of the Ratas. Devaparvata can again be seen in a copper plate of Rajaputra Balabhatòòòà, sometimes in the latter half of the seventh century CE. It speaks of the issuance of the charter from his palace at Katòakasila of Devaparvata, a *jayaskandhavara* which is surrounded by the sacred river Ksòiroda. The next reference to Devaparvata is found in the Asiatic Society copper plate of Bhavadeva Abhinavmròganka (c. 765-780 CE), a ruler belonging to the Deva dynasty of Samatatòà. Devaparvata is associated with the river Ksòiroda in this record too. The city has now gained substantially in stature and glory and its river has become the most sacred. In the eighth century CE, Devaparvata is explicitly stated to have been the *jayaskandhavara* which was often coterminous with the royal capital or a major politico-administrative centre. The last known epigraphic evidence of Devaparvata is furnished by the Paschimbhag copper plate of Erichandra (c.925-75CE), dated in his 5th regnal year. Here too its location is on the Ksòiroda, on which plied many boats. It is said in the record that Lalambivana (present day Lalmai, close to Mainamati) was searched by hundreds of boat men for medicinal herbs (*Lalambivanam=atra navika-sìatair=anvisòòòà*). This further speaks of Devaparvata as a riverine port. (Chakravarti, 2002:167; Ghosh, 2009:352-359).

16.5 REPRESENTATION OF URBAN CENTRES IN LITERARY TEXTS

Literary portrayals of early medieval urbanisation are also important to understand the varied nature of urbanisation. Banabhatta's *Kadambari* (7TH century CE) gives us a vivid description of Ujjayini. It is said to be surrounded by moats, has suburbs, possesses turrets reaching the sky, is crisscrossed by avenues lined with bazaars, is adorned with many temples, including groves, parks and ponds and displays a wide range of architecture, like assembly halls, way stations, bridges. Its citizens are urbane and sophisticated and good looking too. They have mustered the language of all countries. This statement speaks for the fact that people from different countries visited Ujjayini.

Another kind of representation of a town e.g. Kanauj or Kanyakubja is found in the travel account of Xuan Zang. Kanyakubja replaced Pataliputra as the premier city in

northern India during the late first millennium. Xuan Zang visited Kanauj during Harsha's reign (606-647) when the city shot into prominence. The description is as follows:

The capital which had the Ganges on its west side, was above 20 li in length by 4 or 5 li in breadth; it was very strongly defended and had lofty structures everywhere; there were beautiful gardens and tanks of clear water, and in it rarities of strange lands were collected. The inhabitants were well off and there were families of great wealth;the people had a refined appearance and dressed in glossy silk attire; they were given to learning and the arts (Watters, 1904, 341)

An image of the prosperity and beauty of the city of Kanyakubja comes through from his description. If one reads into the description minutely, the commercial character of Kanyakubja is also revealed.

16.6 REPRESENTATION OF CITIES IN NORMATIVE/PREScriptive TREATISES

A text on architecture like the *Manasara* has a section called *nagaravidhana*. It specifies eight types of town but if we take the forts into consideration then the number would be sixteen. In the *Manasara*, the *nagara* has a political character as it is to be founded by the king. Its size varies according to the rank of the king/prince. On this basis we have a gradation of nine kings arranged in hierarchical order. The *Manasara* also describes a *skandhavara* as a place which is located close to a river and is furnished with gardens, royal edifices and many riverside residential houses. *Sukranitisara* (Sarkar, 1913) is another text which gives an account of town planning. According to him the Sabha or the Council House should be in the centre of the capital and the royal palace in the midst of the council buildings. To the north of the palace, the king should locate the court and the *Silpa shala*. The houses of ministers, clerks, councilors and high officers should be located towards the north of the palace, after leaving a space of 100 cubits. Sukra also tries to maintain an order in the allocations of buildings of the military personages. Sites for the common people were determined according to wealth and birth.

16.7 EARLY MEDIEVAL PORT CITIES

Growth of port cities was also part of the process of urbanisation in the early medieval period. Epigraphic and textual sources provide information on them. There were a number of ports of significant importance on the west coast, like Daibul, Bharukachchha (Broach), Somnath, Stambhaka (Cambay), Sthanaka (Thane), Samyana (Sanjan), Surparaka (Sopara), Chemuliya (Chaul), Mangalapura (Mangalore), Kulamali (Quilon) etc. The ports on the eastern littorals are Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram), Nagapattinam, Vishakhapatnam, Tamralipta (till 8th century), Samandar etc. These ports witnessed their share of ups and downs and some re-emerged after a period of slumber. Bharukachchha or Bharuch/Broach, formerly one of the premier ports on the west coast, seems to have suffered an eclipse but never disappeared, re-emerging as one of the chief commercial centers in the 11th/12th centuries. The port of Thane/Thana, located on the navigable creek bounding Salsette Island on the north, rose in seventh century as a premier port of the Chalukyas and later the Silahara dynasty that controlled much of the western coast of Maharashtra between c. 800 and 1265 CE. The Moroccan traveller al Idrisi, in 'The delight of those who seek to wander through the regions of the world' (*Nuzhatu-l Mushtak*) of the mid-12th century CE, described the port of Samadar in Southeastern Bangladesh (near Chittagong) in the following manner:

Samandar is a large town, commercial and rich, and where there are good profits to be made...it stands upon a river which comes from the country of Kashmir. Rice and various grains, especially excellent wheat are to be obtained here...Aloe wood is brought here from the country of Karmut (Kamarupa) 15 days distance by a river of which the waters are sweet.....one days sail from this city, there is a large island well peopled and frequented by merchants of all countries....

This description gives an idea of Samandar's network of commercial linkages. The Arab chronicles furnish maritime voyages from Samandar to Uranshin (Orissa), Kanja (Kanchipuram) and Serendib or Silandib (Sri Lanka).

A look at the history of Nagapattinam would show that it was transformed from a transit port to a major harbour. A Chinese pagoda was built at Nagapattinam by Pallava ruler Rajasimha. Our only source which provides references to the activities of the port is the verses of Saint Sundarar who belonged to the first half of the ninth century CE. We learn that *kanakam* (gold) and *karpuram* (camphor) were traded by the merchants of the city (verse 7.101.5). He also mentions the fact that the city was surrounded by ships with large masts or sea-sails (verse 7.101.7; *Idhai soozh thennagai*) The songs also provide direct evidence to the levies and taxation that were carried on along the shores of Nagapattinam and on how various kings were attracted to the riches of the port town. Thus one can visualise the vibrancy of the port which was called Southern Nagai in the writings of Saint Sundarar and not a *pattinam* even after it had emerged as a full-fledged harbour. Later, during the time of the Cholas, it was called Nagapattinam and during the control of the Chola-Chalukyas, it was mentioned as Cholakulavallipattinam. During the heyday of Nagapattinam under the Cholas, it became the focal point of Srivijaya's attempt to establish friendly diplomatic relations with the Cholas through temple donations. (Seshadri, 2010, 118-121)

16.8 TEMPLES AND URBANISATION³

A particular characteristic manifestation of early medieval Indian urbanisation is of the form of vast temple complexes, some of them developing into veritable temple cities. This particularly happened in South of India. A new type of urban development began under the Pallava dynasty (sixth-ninth centuries), centred especially in the capital city of Kanchipuram. The developments originating in the Pallava period came to fruition during the subsequent reigns of the Chola kings, when many areas of Tamilnadu experienced the growth of small urban sites around temples (Heitzman, 2008: 46). The centrality of the temple sites for interactions with a wider hinterland occurred on several levels: economic interaction took place through trade in metals, salt, and specialised ritual items (camphor) for temples but was probably overshadowed by transactions in agrarian produce from temple landholding networks. The central place in the Kaveri River delta was the town of Kudamukku (present Kumbakonam). During the Chola period Kudamukku was a major site in the urban complex attached to Palaiyaru, a Chola capital, which spread over a large area to its south and west. Kudamukku functioned as the sacred centre having a number of temples. The twin cities were located on an important trade route and noted for its transactions in two bulk items, areca nuts and betel nuts. There was also a concentration of metal workers in the area. The rise of Kudamukku Paliyarai, the twin cities of the Cholas, to prominence has been attributed to:

³ For further details on the emergence and proliferation of temple towns see **Unit 19** of this **Block**.

- 1) Geographical location as a point of convergence. Its access to and linkages with the hinterland for the supply of local agrarian products.
- 2) Trade which was incidental to urbanism. The importance of luxury items for the consumption of the elite groups.
- 3) Importance as a centre of political and administrative activities.
- 4) Its role as a religious centre leading to temple establishments.

These temples usually dominated the urban landscape. Though Thanjavur had already existed prior to the rise of the Cholas, its heydays began with the accession of Rajaraja I in late tenth century. At the very centre of Thanjavur stood the monumental temple, Brihadishvara. Around the temple was located the quarter for the political and priestly classes, forming the uppermost crust of the elites and thus occupying the urban space closest to the shrine. After this came the residential area housing various urbane groups, including the residence of the merchants. The brisk commerce of Thanjavur was conducted by the four markets (*angadis*) and *nagarattar*, while itinerant traders like *Kongavalar* interacted with them (Champaklakshmi, 1996: 437). Around the city lived farmers, herdsmen and artisans. The requirement of the temple rituals and services generated demands and therefore transactional functions in milk, flowers, betelnuts and areca nuts. By the time temple construction reached its final stage, a veritable colonisation had taken place, indicating the implanting of a royal city, including a series of army contingents. According to Champaklakshmi, Thanjavur was a planted city by the royalty.

16.9 SUMMARY

It may be argued from the foregoing discussion that there was to a certain extent continuity of inland trade and of urbanisation associated with it in the early medieval period. One should not forget also the buoyant Indian Ocean trade network in the period concerned. There was a pronounced continuity of expansion of towns which rested on a continuous history of urban development going back in some cases to the beginning of the first millennium. Urban centres of early medieval times, however, are seen not merely as a counterpoint to the feudal social formations, but also as possessing distinctiveness from cities belonging to the early historical phase. The survival of old urban centres or the emergence of new ones in these areas is attested by archaeology as well, though archaeological excavations are comparatively insignificant in comparison to early historical period. Epigraphy helps us the most in the case of early medieval period. Descriptions of the middle category market centres in inscriptions give us an idea of the mechanisms of production and mobilisation of commodities from the coast to inland or one centre to another. B.D. Chattopadhyaya has argued that early medieval cities were far more rooted to their regional contexts than their early historic predecessors that had an epicenter and then subsequent diffusion. Such regional formations were largely helped by agrarian expansion, generating resources for local or supra-local ruling groups. Thus heterogeneity, multiple functions, utilisation of spaces, both religious and secular etc. made the early medieval urban centres distinctive and thus was identified as a phase of third urbanisation in the history of the subcontinent by Chattopadhyaya.

16.10 EXERCISES

- 1) How do epigraphs and literary texts help in the construction of patterns of urbanisation in the early medieval period?
- 2) Do you agree that proliferation of land grants led to decline of urban centres in early medieval period?
- 3) Explain R.S. Sharma's theory of urban decay? What has been the nature of response to this theory?

- 4) What do early medieval literary texts indicate about the presence of urban spaces and spatial units which could be distinguished from 'rural' spaces?
- 5) What are the markers of an urban centre in the early medieval period? Elaborate your argument on the basis of Tattanandapura, Siyadoni and Venugrama.

16.11 A NOTE ON EARLY MEDIEVAL SOURCES

Alberuni (973-1048 CE)	: A famous historian, mathematician, philosopher, poet and scholar of the court of Mahmud Ghaznavi. His book 'Tahqiq-e-Hind' is a very valuable source of information of economic, political, religious and social conditions prevailing in contemporary India.
Al-Idrisi	: An Arab Muslim cartographer, geographer, traveller and Egyptologist of the early 12 th century.
Aparajitaprachhha	: A thirteenth century Apabhramsha text written by Bhuvanadeva.
Kadambari	: A novel composed by Banabhatta in the first half of the 7 th century.
Kumarapalacharita	: A twelfth century Sanskrit text written by Hemchandra.
Manasara	: A twelfth century text.
Mayamata	: A Sanskrit text on <i>vaastushastra</i> .
Nalachampu	: Written by Trivikramabhatta.
Navasahasankacharita	: Written by Padmagupta, court poet of the Paramara rulers in the beginning of the eleventh century.
Padataditakam	: A 6-7 th century Sanskrit text.
Samarangasutradhara	: An eleventh century Sanskrit text attributed to Paramara King Bhoja.
Sukranitisara	: A Sanskrit text written by Sukra.
Vikramankadevacharita	: Composed by Bilhana in the eleventh century.

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