

Urbanization in India During the Medieval Period -An Analytical Study

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Abstract: Urbanization in India can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization, with cities such as Mohenjo-daro and Harappa representing the earliest examples of urban life. This initial phase was characterized by planned settlements, craft production, trade networks, social stratification, and administrative organization. A second phase of urbanization emerged around the sixth century BCE during the Later Vedic, Mauryan, and post-Mauryan periods, when cities such as Hastinapur, Shravasti, Rajgriha, Ujjain, and Mathura flourished. Janapadas and Mahajanapadas played a crucial role in this development. In other side urbanization in south india represent a distinctive pattern shaped by temple institutions, agrarian expansion and long-distance trade networks.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, medieval India witnessed a renewed expansion of urban economic structures. Political centralization, monetization of the economy, and the expansion of road and communication networks accelerated urban growth. Although early initiatives were undertaken by rulers such as Sher Shah Suri and Sikandar Lodi, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries marked a significant expansion of trade, commerce, and transportation. Contemporary accounts, including those of Tavernier, highlight the widespread presence of monetary transactions even in rural areas. The Turkish and Mughal empires were inherently urban-oriented, and the growth of administrative institutions, markets, and crafts contributed significantly to urban expansion. This paper examines the nature, process, and impact of urbanization in medieval India, highlighting its economic, social, and cultural dimensions.

Keywords: Urbanization; Crafts; Handicrafts; Trade; Caravanserai; Revenue Administration; Dynamic Cities; Social Heterogeneity.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization and economic development are intrinsically interconnected. With the emergence of civilization, the foundations of urban life were laid. Planned cities such as Harappa and Mohenjo-daro exemplify the role of trade, culture, and economic activities in shaping early urban societies. Medieval Indian urbanization was closely linked with state power, trade and administration. According to Mr. Krishna's article (A Study on Urbanization in India- Issues and Challenges), two conditions are required for the occurrence of urbanization, creating of surplus products which sustain human in non-agricultural setup. Secondly to attain the level of development which allows or make capable the big communities to work successfully alone. V. Gordon Childe's theory of the 'Urban Revolution' suggests that cities did not emerge suddenly but were the outcome of long-term socio-economic transformations, including agricultural surplus, division of labour, and the formation of state institutions. Urbanization refers to the process through which rural settlements transform into urban centres, leading to the growth of non-agricultural occupations, industrial activities,

markets, and a monetized economy. According to Mr. Kala Setharam Sridhar "urbanization has both benefit and cost features, in a market economy the trade off between benefits and costs determines the level speed and pace of urbanization. Urban areas improve their life style, mechanism and facilities. The physical barriers hard mountain life and charm of better life style, increase the cost of urbanization. India's urbanization shows that over 370 millions people live in the cities and small towns of India that is greater than the population of U.S.

➤ Definition Of Urban Area- If we discuss about the real meaning of urban, can discuss it in some points-

- All places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment board or notified town area committee.
- A minimum population of 5,000
- At least 75% of the male main working population engaged in non-agricultural activities.
- A population density of at least 400 persons.

Census of India, 2011 says that in India the state of Delhi is the most urbanized at 98%, Chandigarh at 97% and Uttarakhand at 30.55%.

➤ *Types of Medieval Cities:*

Medieval Indian cities can be broadly categorized into the following types:

- Administrative and Political Cities – Centres of governance and political authority.
- Craft and Industrial Cities – Urban centres specializing in production and trade.
- Religious and Cultural Cities – Cities developed around pilgrimage and cultural activities.
- Fortified and Military Cities – Cities established for defence and military purposes.
- Mobile Cities – Temporary capitals and moving camps associated with royal mobility.
- Garden Cities – Cities characterized by planned gardens and recreational spaces.

➤ *Urbanization During the Sultanate and Mughal Periods:*

The establishment of cities in medieval India was closely linked to geographical location, availability of water resources, agricultural productivity, trade routes, and political considerations. Medieval cities largely depended on surrounding rural areas for essential supplies, reflecting a symbiotic rural-urban relationship. During the Sultanate period, the construction of forts, mosques, markets, sarais, and administrative buildings contributed significantly to urban growth. Firoz Shah Tughlaq played a pioneering role in urban planning through the construction of new cities, gardens, canals, and water supply systems.

With the foundation of the Mughal Empire in 1526 CE, urbanization gained further momentum. Existing cities were renovated, beautified, and expanded, while new urban centres were established. The Mughal period witnessed remarkable growth in architecture, crafts, markets, and administrative institutions. Cities such as Delhi, Agra, Lahore, Banaras, Ahmedabad and Ajmer emerged as major political, commercial, and cultural hubs. Urban development reached its zenith during the reign of Shah Jahan, marked by architectural excellence and economic prosperity.

II. URBANIZATION IN MEDIEVAL SOUTH INDIA

Urbanization in medieval south India was a gradual and regionally grounded process. It was closely linked with expansion of agriculture, the rise of powerful regional kingdoms such as the Cholas, Kaktiyas and the Vijayanagara empire and the growth of internal and overseas trade. Towns and cities did not merely serve administrative purpose but functioned as religious, commercial and cultural centers. In south medieval India, temples were the highest point for urban development, large temple complexes functioned not only as religious institutions but also as economic centers. Market and residential quarters developed around temples giving rise to temple towns such as Thanjavur,

Chindambaram, Srirangam, Madurai and Kanchipuram. In this time south India maintained active trade relations with West Asia, Southeast Asia, China. Important ports included Nagapattinam, Calicut, Kozhikode, Kolallam, Masulipatanam.

III. CONCLUSION

Urbanization in medieval India was a continuous and dynamic process shaped by political stability, economic surplus, centralized administration, and cultural development. The period witnessed the transformation of villages into towns and towns into cities, alongside the revival and expansion of older urban centres. Medieval India achieved a remarkable level of urban growth, surpassing many contemporary European cities in terms of scale, organization, and economic vitality. Consequently, the medieval period occupies a distinctive place in the history of Indian urbanization.

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