



Second Urbanization in the Chronology of Indian History

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Abstract

During the time between 800 and 200 BCE the Sramana movement formed, from which originated Jainism and Buddhism. In the same period the first Upanishads were written. After 500 BCE, the so-called "Second urbanisation" started, with new urban settlements arising at the Ganges plain, especially the Central Ganges plain. The foundations for the Second Urbanisation were laid prior to 600 BCE, in the Painted Grey Ware culture of the Ghaggar-Hakra and Upper Ganges Plain; although most PGW sites were small farming villages, "several dozen" PGW sites eventually emerged as relatively large settlements that can be characterized as towns, the largest of which were fortified by ditches or moats and embankments made of piled earth with wooden palisades, albeit smaller and simpler than the elaborately fortified large cities which grew after 600 BCE in the Northern Black Polished Ware culture. The Central Ganges Plain, where Magadha gained prominence, forming the base of the Mauryan Empire, was a distinct cultural area, with new states arising after 500 BCE during the so-called "Second urbanisation". It was influenced by the Vedic culture, but differed markedly from the Kuru-Panchala region. It "was the area of the earliest known cultivation of rice in South Asia and by 1800 BCE was the location of an advanced Neolithic population associated with the sites of Chirand and Chechar". In this region the Shramanic movements flourished, and Jainism and Buddhism originated. This paper throws some insights on the second urbanization in Indian history.

Keywords: Urbanization, Chronology, Indian History

Introduction

The history of India includes the prehistoric settlements and societies in the Indian subcontinent; the advancement of civilisation from the Indus Valley Civilisation to the eventual blending of the Indo-Aryan culture to form the Vedic Civilisation; the rise of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism; the onset of a succession of powerful dynasties and empires for more than three millennia throughout various geographic areas of the subcontinent, including the growth of Muslim dominions during the Medieval period intertwined with Hindu powers; the advent of European traders and privateers, resulting in the establishment of British India; and the subsequent independence movement that led to the Partition of India and the creation of the Republic of India.

Considered a cradle of civilisation, the Indus Valley Civilisation, which spread and flourished in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent from 3300 to 1300 BCE, was the first major civilisation in South Asia. A sophisticated and technologically advanced urban culture developed in the Mature Harappan period, from 2600 to 1900 BCE. This civilisation collapsed at the start of the second millennium BCE and was later followed by the Iron Age Vedic Civilisation. The era saw the composition of the Vedas, the seminal texts of Hinduism, coalesce into Janapadas (monarchical, state-level polities), and social stratification based on caste. The Later Vedic Civilisation extended over the Indo-Gangetic plain and much of the subcontinent, as well as witnessed the rise of major polities known as the Mahajanapadas. In one of these kingdoms, Magadha, Gautama Buddha and Mahavira propagated their Shramanic

philosophies during the fifth and sixth century BCE.

Most of the Indian subcontinent was conquered by the Maurya Empire during the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE. From the 3rd century BCE onwards Prakrit and Pali literature in the north and the Tamil Sangam literature in southern India started to flourish. Wootz steel originated in south India in the 3rd century BCE and was exported to foreign countries. During the Classical period, various parts of India were ruled by numerous dynasties for the next 1,500 years, among which the Gupta Empire stands out. This period, witnessing a Hindu religious and intellectual resurgence, is known as the classical or "Golden Age of India". During this period, aspects of Indian civilisation, administration, culture, and religion (Hinduism and Buddhism) spread to much of Asia, while kingdoms in southern India had maritime business links with the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Indian cultural influence spread over many parts of Southeast Asia which led to the establishment of Indianised kingdoms in Southeast Asia (Greater India).

The most significant event between the 7th and 11th century was the Tripartite struggle centred on Kannauj that lasted for more than two centuries between the Pala Empire, Rashtrakuta Empire, and Gurjara Pratihara Empire. Southern India saw the rise of multiple imperial powers from the middle of the fifth century, most notable being the Chalukya, Chola, Pallava, Chera, Pandyan, and Western Chalukya Empires. The Chola dynasty conquered southern India and successfully invaded parts of Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bengal in the 11th century. The early medieval period Indian mathematics influenced the development of mathematics and

astronomy in the Arab world and the Hindu numerals were introduced.

Muslim rule started in parts of north India in the 13th century when the Delhi Sultanate was founded in 1206 CE by Central Asian Turks; though earlier Muslim conquests made limited inroads into modern Afghanistan and Pakistan as early as the 8th century. The Delhi Sultanate ruled the major part of northern India in the early 14th century, but declined in the late 14th century. This period also saw the emergence of several powerful Hindu states, notably Vijayanagara, Gajapati, Ahom, as well as Rajput states, such as Mewar. The 15th century saw the advent of Sikhism. The early modern period began in the 16th century, when the Mughals conquered most of the Indian subcontinent. The Mughals suffered a gradual decline in the early 18th century, which provided opportunities for the Marathas, Sikhs and Mysoreans to exercise control over large areas of the subcontinent.

From the late 18th century to the mid-19th century, large areas of India were annexed by the British East India Company of the British Empire. Dissatisfaction with Company rule led to the Indian Rebellion of 1857, after which the British provinces of India were directly administered by the British Crown and witnessed a period of rapid development of infrastructure, economic decline and major famines. During the first half of the 20th century, a nationwide struggle for independence was launched with the leading party involved being the Indian National Congress which was later joined by other organisations. The subcontinent gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1947, after the British provinces were partitioned into the dominions of India and Pakistan and the princely states all acceded to one of the new states.

Mahajanapada

From c. 600 BCE to c. 300 BCE, witnessed the rise of Mahajanapadas, which were sixteen powerful and vast kingdoms and oligarchic republics. These Mahajanapadas evolved and flourished in a belt stretching from Gandhara in the northwest to Bengal in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent and included parts of the trans-Vindhyan region. Ancient Buddhist texts, like the Anguttara Nikaya, make frequent reference to these sixteen great kingdoms and republics—Anga, Assaka, Avanti, Chedi, Gandhara, Kashi, Kamboja, Kosala, Kuru, Magadha, Malla, Matsya (or Machcha), Panchala, Surasena, Vriji, and Vatsa—this period saw the second major rise of urbanism in India after the Indus Valley Civilisation. Many smaller clans mentioned within early literature seem to have been present across the rest of the subcontinent. Some of these kings were hereditary; other states elected their rulers. Early "republics" or Gaṇa sangha, such as the Vajji (or Vriji) confederation, centered in the city of Vaishali, existed as early as the 6th century BCE and persisted in some areas until the 4th century CE. The most famous clan amongst the ruling confederate clans of the Vajji Mahajanapada were the Licchavis.

This period corresponds in an archaeological context to the Northern Black Polished Ware culture. Especially focused in the Central Ganges plain but also spreading across vast areas of the northern and central Indian subcontinent, this culture is characterized by the emergence of large cities with massive fortifications, significant population growth, increased social

stratification, wide-ranging trade networks, construction of public architecture and water channels, specialized craft industries (e. g. ivory and carnelian carving), a system of weights, punch-marked coins, and the introduction of writing in the form of Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts. The language of the gentry at that time was Sanskrit, while the languages of the general population of northern India are referred to as Prakrits. Many of the sixteen kingdoms had coalesced into four major ones by 500/400 BCE, by the time of Gautama Buddha. These four were Vatsa, Avanti, Kosala, and Magadha. The life of Gautama Buddha was mainly associated with these four kingdoms.

Upanishads and Shramana Movements

Around 800 BCE to 400 BCE witnessed the composition of the earliest Upanishads. Upanishads form the theoretical basis of classical Hinduism and are known as Vedanta (conclusion of the Vedas). The older Upanishads launched attacks of increasing intensity on the ritual. Anyone who worships a divinity other than the Self is called a domestic animal of the gods in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The Mundaka launches the most scathing attack on the ritual by comparing those who value sacrifice with an unsafe boat that is endlessly overtaken by old age and death.

Increasing urbanisation of India in 7th and 6th centuries BCE led to the rise of new ascetic or shramana movements which challenged the orthodoxy of rituals. Mahavira (c. 549-477 BCE), proponent of Jainism, and Gautama Buddha (c. 563-483 BCE), founder of Buddhism were the most prominent icons of this movement. Shramana gave rise to the concept of the cycle of birth and death, the concept of samsara, and the concept of liberation. Buddha found a Middle Way that ameliorated the extreme asceticism found in the Sramana religions.

Around the same time, Mahavira (the 24th Tirthankara in Jainism) propagated a theology that was to later become Jainism. However, Jain orthodoxy believes the teachings of the Tirthankaras predates all known time and scholars believe Parshvanatha (c.872-c.772 BCE), accorded status as the 23rd Tirthankara, was a historical figure. Rishabhanatha was the 1st Tirthankara. The Vedas are believed to have documented a few Tirthankaras and an ascetic order similar to the shramana movement.

Magadha Dynasties

Magadha formed one of the sixteen Maha-Janapadas (Sanskrit: "Great Countries") or kingdoms in ancient India. The core of the kingdom was the area of Bihar south of the Ganges; its first capital was Rajagriha (modern Rajgir) then Pataliputra (modern Patna). Magadha expanded to include most of Bihar and Bengal with the conquest of Licchavi and Anga respectively, followed by much of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. The ancient kingdom of Magadha is heavily mentioned in Jain and Buddhist texts. It is also mentioned in the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas. The earliest reference to the Magadha people occurs in the Atharva-Veda where they are found listed along with the Angas, Gandharis, and Mujavats. Magadha played an important role in the development of Jainism and Buddhism, and two of India's greatest empires, the Maurya Empire and Gupta Empire,

originated from Magadha. These empires saw advancements in ancient India's science, mathematics, astronomy, religion, and philosophy and were considered the Indian "Golden Age". The Magadha kingdom included republican communities such as the community of Rajakumara. Villages had their own assemblies under their local chiefs called Gramakas. Their administrations were divided into executive, judicial, and military functions.

The Hindu epic Mahabharata calls Brihadratha the first ruler of Magadha. Early sources, from the Buddhist Pali Canon, the Jain Agamas and the Hindu Puranas, mentions Magadha being ruled by the Haryanka dynasty for some 200 years, c. 600 BCE-413 BCE. King Bimbisara of the Haryanka dynasty led an active and expansive policy, conquering Anga in what is now eastern Bihar and West Bengal. King Bimbisara was overthrown and killed by his son, Prince Ajatashatru, who continued the expansionist policy of Magadha. During this period, Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, lived much of his life in Magadha kingdom. He attained enlightenment in Bodhi Gaya, gave his first sermon in Sarnath and the first Buddhist council was held in Rajgriha. The Haryanka dynasty was overthrown by the Shishunaga dynasty. The last Shishunaga ruler, Kalasoka, was assassinated by Mahapadma Nanda in 345 BCE, the first of the so-called Nine Nandas, Mahapadma and his eight sons. The Nanda Empire extended across much of northern India.

Persians and Greeks in Northwest South Asia

In 530 BCE Cyrus the Great, King of the Persian Achaemenid Empire crossed the Hindu-Kush Mountains to seek tribute from the tribes of Kamboja, Gandhara and the trans-India region (modern Afghanistan and Pakistan). By 520 BCE, during the reign of Darius I of Persia, much of the north-western subcontinent (present-day eastern Afghanistan and Pakistan) came under the rule of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, as part of the far easternmost territories. The area remained under Persian control for two centuries. During this time India supplied mercenaries to the Persian army then fighting in Greece. Under Persian rule the famous city of Takshashila became a centre where both Vedic and Iranian learning were mingled. Persian ascendancy in North-western South Asia ended with Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia in 327 BCE.

By 326 BCE, Alexander the Great had conquered Asia Minor and the Achaemenid Empire and had reached the northwest frontiers of the Indian subcontinent. There he defeated King Porus in the Battle of the Hydaspes (near modern-day Jhelum, Pakistan) and conquered much of the Punjab. Alexander's march east put him in confrontation with the Nanda Empire of Magadha and the Gangaridai of Bengal. His army, exhausted and frightened by the prospect of facing larger Indian armies at the Ganges River, mutinied at the Hyphasis (modern Beas River) and refused to march further East. Alexander, after the meeting with his officer, Coenus, and after learning about the might of the Nanda Empire, was convinced that it was better to return.

The Persian and Greek invasions had repercussions in the north-western regions of the Indian subcontinent. The region of Gandhara, or present-day eastern Afghanistan and north-west Pakistan, became a melting pot of Indian, Persian,

Central Asian, and Greek cultures and gave rise to a hybrid culture, Greco-Buddhism, which lasted until the 5th century CE and influenced the artistic development of Mahayana Buddhism.

Maurya Empire

The Maurya Empire (322-185 BCE) was the first empire to unify India into one state, and was the largest on the Indian subcontinent. At its greatest extent, the Mauryan Empire stretched to the north up to the natural boundaries of the Himalayas and to the east into what is now Assam. To the west, it reached beyond modern Pakistan, to the Hindu Kush Mountains in what is now Afghanistan. The empire was established by Chandragupta Maurya assisted by Chanakya (Kautilya) in Magadha (in modern Bihar) when he overthrew the Nanda Dynasty. Chandragupta's son Bindusara succeeded to the throne around 297 BCE. By the time he died in c. 272 BCE, a large part of the subcontinent was under Mauryan suzerainty. However, the region of Kalinga (around modern day Odisha) remained outside Mauryan control, perhaps interfering with their trade with the south.

Bindusara was succeeded by Ashoka, whose reign lasted for around 37 years until his death in about 232 BCE. His campaign against the Kalingans in about 260 BCE, though successful, led to immense loss of life and misery. This filled Ashoka with remorse and led him to shun violence, and subsequently to embrace Buddhism. The empire began to decline after his death and the last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha, was assassinated by Pushyamitra Shunga to establish the Shunga Empire.

The Arthashastra and the Edicts of Ashoka are the primary written records of the Mauryan times. Archaeologically, this period falls into the era of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW). The Mauryan Empire was based on a modern and efficient economy and society. However, the sale of merchandise was closely regulated by the government. Although there was no banking in the Mauryan society, usury was customary. A significant amount of written records on slavery are found, suggesting a prevalence thereof. During this period, a high quality steel called Wootz steel was developed in south India and was later exported to China and Arabia.

Sangam Period

During the Sangam period Tamil literature flourished from the 3rd century BCE to the 4th century CE. During this period, three Tamil Dynasties, collectively known as the Three Crowned Kings of Tamilakam: Chera dynasty, Chola dynasty and the Pandyan dynasty ruled parts of southern India.

The Sangam literature deals with the history, politics, wars and culture of the Tamil people of this period. The scholars of the Sangam period rose from among the common people who sought the patronage of the Tamil Kings, but who mainly wrote about the common people and their concerns. Unlike Sanskrit writers who were mostly Brahmins, Sangam writers came from diverse classes and social backgrounds and were mostly non-Brahmins. They belonged to different faiths and professions like farmers, artisans, merchants, monks, priests and even princes and quite few of them were even women.

Conclusion

The period of second urbanisation (6th century B. C. to 3rd century B. C.) noticed large-scale beginning of town life in the middle Gangetic basin. The widespread use of iron tools and weapons helped the formation large of territorial states.

The towns became good markets and both artisans and merchants were organised into guilds under their respective headmen. Eighteen of the more important crafts were organised into guilds (Sreni, Puga), each of which was presided over by a Pramukha (foreman), Jyeshthaka (elder) or Sresthin (chief). Sarathavaha was the caravan-leader. A Pali text refers to sea-voyages and of trading journeys to the coast of Burma, the Malay world (Suvarna-bhumi), Ceylon (Tamraparni) and even to Babylon (Baveru).

The principal sea-ports were Bharukachcha (Broach) Suparaka (Sopara, north of Bombay) and Tamralipti (Tamluk in West Bengal). Of the riparian ports, Sahajati (in Central India), Kausambi on the Yamuna, Banaras, Champa and later Pataliputra on the Ganges and Pattala on the Indus, deserve special mention.

The great inland routes mostly radiated from Banaras and Sravsti. The chief articles of trade were silk, embroidery, ivory, jewellery and gold. The system of barter was also prevalent. This led to localisation of crafts and industries and the emerging of artisans and merchants as important social groups. Besides others, these cities began to use coins made of metals for the first time. The earliest coins belong to the fifth century B.C. and they are called punch-marked coins. The standard unit of value was the copper Karshapana weighing a little more than 146 grains. Silver coins were also in circulation.

The rural economy was mainly agriculture based. Rice was the staple cereal produced in eastern U. P and Bihar in this period. It was an economy which provided subsistence not only to direct producers but also to many others who were non-agriculturists. The greater part of the land came to be owned by gahapathis (peasant-proprietors).

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