

P K Basant, *The City and The Country in Early India: A Study of Malwa*, New Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, Pp. xi +369, ₹ 1150.

A study of urbanization in the Malwa region in 6 BCE based on archaeological, epigraphic and literary sources, the present work accounts for the social processes in the spatial context resulting in urban growth in the region. The aim of the book is to test the generalizations of the second urbanization by focusing on Malwa as a kind of case study, both from the perspective of the structure and the process of urbanization at the level of a spatial segment. It challenges the accepted paradigm of understanding the Indian past from a north Indian perspective. The first part takes up a study of the process of change from a pre urban to an urban one and the second attempts to underline the impact of this process on society and urbanism. A useful review of existing literature at the outset brings together scholarship on early Indian urbanism and the linkage of political structure, technological change and urbanization, along with archaeological and textual evidences connecting it to the theoretical debates on the origin of cities. Urban centres are the outcome of underlying processes with key features such as social stratification, the institution of the state, craft specialization and a set of relationships with the hinterland. The economic setting, emergence of agriculture, pattern of rural settlements and evolution of agricultural communities is interlinked to these social processes and contribute to the urban process.

The author traces the evolution of the cultivating groups in the Malwa region, the earliest being the 'kayatha' culture (2000 BCE -1800 BCE) when small agricultural communities spread over a 'uniform agricultural niche', having contact with the north west areas. This allowed for possible influence on institutional structure and craft specialization in Malwa. The next 'Banas' phase had affinity with Rajasthan and led to an increase in the size and interaction of agricultural groups. The Malwa phase (1600- 1300 BCE), named after a particular predominant type of pottery, is marked by a geographical expansion, use of copper technology and a consequent growth of settlements. Another phase of stable agricultural expansion known as the 'Jorwe' culture (1300-700 BCE), also saw the emergence of a variety of settlements. The author notes however, the frequent desertion of settlements, re-settlement and move to a more differentiated pattern of settlements and craft specialization in this time.

A new kind of social order seems to have emerged along with this economic development, new techniques of production and increased output. It resulted in a

growth in the number of settlements, concentration of units in the Ujjain area and brought into existence major settlements with fortifications, large buildings, roads, metal tools and long distance trade. By 500-600 BCE an urban social order was clearly taking shape. However, the author does not accept the idea that inherent needs and conflict of agricultural communities led to the emergence of state and urbanism, nor does he agree with the 'simplistic' notion that there was a progression from band to tribe to chiefdom to state, or with the view that the introduction of iron had any dramatic impact on material culture and urbanization. The emergence of urban centres and the origin of the state according to him, should be understood in the context of institutionalized community relations and the pattern of dominance by specific groups which culminated in the centralization of power and control over trade and trade centres.

An in-depth study of Sanchi from 300 BCE to 1000 CE reconstructs kinship structures, pilgrimage networks and class structure of urban society, through a focus on early buildings, patronage, forms of identity and social structure. According to the author, Sanchi represents a visible social structure which gave importance to acquired and universalistic relations, kinship and village identities which tied people to localism, and other professional work identities which linked them to the world at large. New identities thus, emerged modifying the existing forms of social organization, and acted together with political structure to create new regional identities. The crucial evidence at Sanchi, through rock art and stupas, depicts the concept of the universe, royalty, political power, urban and rural settlements as well as forest dwellings in an obvious hierarchical social order.

Literary evidence is used to substantiate the process of urbanization in Malwa. The area emerged as a distinct one with a prosperous city dominated by merchants and having definite bearing on the process of urbanism in early India. The image of the city and the countryside in literature is also taken up, specially of Ujjain, which reflected the personality of Malwa. The expansion of settlements and layout of towns and villages is also brought out clearly, and with it an exclusive urban community too, had emerged. It seems likely that a change in the social structure had occurred and urbanization on a larger scale led to a shift in rural groups from the country to the city and created a rural – urban divide.

Basant points out that studies in early Indian urbanization have been technologicistic in approach and have focused mainly on technical innovations and

creation of surplus, ignoring the role of moral-practical knowledge. The emergence of urban centres is linked to the agricultural development of the region. In tracing the evolution of urbanism he underlines that there is a replacement of kinship systems by the state. In fact, he is of the view that environmental factors and the migration by Yadavas to the Malwa region resulted in large scale desertion of settlements and warfare, due to a collision of two modes of life which eventually synthesized when Malwa became a part of the subcontinental tradition of polity and economy. The local communities were subjugated with Brahmanical ideology by the warrior or kshatriya groups who became dominant, appropriated the surplus and founded kingdoms with institutionalized political roles. The local people resettled under this new ruling class. Religion,

kinship, community and region were the constituents of the state and formalized under a variety of invisible actions, structures and institutions. Informal sites of power became part of the formal state along with large scale networks of contacts and exchange. Urban centres emerged in a parallel inter-related process linked to the centralization of power and formation of controls over the community. The process of centralization was taking place in politics, religion, economy and ideology which not only incorporated diverse traditions, but also linked them to each other and were a part of a larger world. P K Basant skillfully weaves together several strands to present an insightful new perspective on urbanization in India.

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THE PERIPHERY STRIKES BACK: CHALLENGES TO THE
NATION-STATE IN ASSAM AND NAGALAND

by UDAYON MISRA

Latest from IAS

It is in the country's northeastern region, with its complex mosaic of ethnic nationalities at different stages of socio-economic and political growth, that the Indian nation-state is today facing some of its gravest challenges. Time and again, the Indian State has had to work out new strategies and adjustments to deal with the issues thrown up by the different autonomy and secessionist movements of the region. The process of nation-building received its first major jolt when the Nagas, a people virtually untouched by the freedom struggle, expressed their reservations about becoming a part of the newly independent republic and launched an armed struggle for an independent Naga homeland. But, it is the secessionist movement in Assam which seems to pose a much more serious challenge to the nation-state especially in view of the fact that the Assamese has had centuries of socio-cultural interaction with the rest of the subcontinent and had played a major role in the national struggle. Today, with its really complex ethnic situation, the insurmountable problem of influx and demographic change and the backward "colonial" state of the economy, Assam has emerged as the problem state of the Indian Union. This is a study which analyses in detail the socio-historical and political factors which have led to secessionist insurgency in states as different as Nagaland and Assam and shows how the future of the nation-state in India depends a lot on the ability to resolve the questions that are being thrown up by the struggles for a Swadin Asom and an independent Naga Lim.

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