CHAPTER VIII
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SUMMARY AND OBSERVATION

The foregoing chapters have endeavoured to define and interpret the settlement history of the Mathurā region, (during the Kushāṇa period) on the basis of archaeological sources, and its association with the history of a segment of Indian sub-continent, i.e. north and north western parts that were under the rule of the Kushāṇas. The interpretations proposed here may not be accepted by all, as researchers have individual perspectives and adopt diverse methodologies in analyzing the data related to the Kushāṇa history and the archaeology of Mathurā and its surroundings. Here we should mention that no interpretations in a field where the primary data are been gathered constantly can remain unchanged. At the same time, the study of the Kushāṇas and the archaeology of the Ganga valley, particularly Mathurā raises a fundamental issue in the general study of ancient society of the Indian sub-continent. There are some findings suggesting the survival of highly centralized political and economic organizations associated with the development of state centering on Mathurā. There is a pressing need in studies of south Asian history, culture and archaeology during the Kushāṇa period to rethink categorical definitions of various perspectives. Based on archaeological methodologies, the present work is a preliminary attempt to reconstruct the history of the Mathurā region during the period of the Kushāṇas.

Our discussion begins with the growth of farming villages and settlements of the Ganga –Yamuna Doab in the pre-Kushāṇa period. It has been noticed that the successful development of articulate farming provided the economic basis for the growth of large settlements of this region emerged between the pre-Kushāṇa and Kushāṇa periods. Sonkh, a major settlement in the Mathurā region certainly played an important
role to upgrading the agrarian setup as well as the socio-economic structure of this region. It may be assumed that bureaucracy or administrative mechanisms were essential devices of the government in the evolving agricultural, cultural, socio-religious and commercial centres of this region. Moreover, one could easily believe that, the simultaneous emergence of key dimensions in settlement dynamics as envisaged at several centres (if not competition among them) like Taxila, Hastināpura, Ahichchhatra, Kauśāmbī, Sanghol, Sunet, Agroha and others sites of the Ganga valley eventually led to the formation of the Kushāṇa empire. These large centres of multi-faceted activities, urban and semi-urban complexes, religious centres of learning, especially Buddhist and Jain pantheons, centres associated with the development of icono-plastic art traditions and commercial units themselves form the most striking heritage or historical identities of the Kushāṇa period. Yet, we should not forget that the combinations of intensive trading networks, development of political ideas and institutions along with the successful exploitation of the landscape of the Ganga valley (both upper and middle), the Doab and the adjoining territories of the Aravalli and Malwa mountainous zones by different farming and non-farming groups (metal smiths, traders, bead makers etc.) made the whole phenomena possible. We must not ignore the importance of the distant economic links with different sectors of the north-western frontiers especially with different regions of Central Asia and Malwa and Central Indian plateau towards the south, all of whom supplied essential raw materials to the settlement in and around Mathurā and in turn carried the influences far beyond the confines of Mathurā.

While deliberating on the changing contexts of Mathurā during the Kushāṇa period we found that major social, political and economic changes had transformed the nature of the society of the upper Ganga valley. True urban centres and commercial units made their first
appearances along with diverse trends of culture, economy and religion. Our work has tried to relate that there was a religious, cultural and economic growth and this amplification was facilitated to a great extent by the Buddhist ideology. It is significant that Buddhist ideology was at work. Though, archaeological sources provide some materials to visualize that Jainism was also played important role to mould the cultural matrix of this region. We have supported and agreed upon the fact that the economic history of the Ganga valley from the second century B.C. to the third century A.D. represented the high watermark of the economic processes which began in the middle of the first millennium B.C. In the context of Mathurā we may extend the viewpoint of Dr B.D.Chattopadhyaya, “The major features which highlight this phase are: i) There was a vast expansion in the network of commercial and cultural interaction extending now to Central Asia to the west and other regions. In fact, the period from the close of the first century B.C. is spoken as that of Indo-Roman trade attested by both literary works and finds of Roman coins and other archaeological objects in India. ii) There was a substantial increase in the number of urban centres which were no longer unevenly distributed, but emerged in almost all sub regions. Even a preliminary survey seems to reveal that this material culture was richest in the what is termed as the Śaka-Kuśāṇa phase-a phase which coincides with the period of Indo-Roman trade. iii) There was substantial increase in the volume and circulation of metallic currency, represented not only by the dynastic coinage of the Indo-Greeks, the Śaka-Pahlavas, the Kuśāṇas, the Kṣatrapas or the Sātavāhanas, but by varieties of local series as well. Together, these features are seen to reflect a high degree of ‘money economy’ in this phase, and it is the conjunction of the major feature enumerated above which present a sharp contrast to the subsequent phase of economy”.1
Regarding the scope of the present work we have assumed that it will be able to fulfill our academic ambition relating to the subject concerned. Unfortunately, there are certain aspects which require further investigations and this is beyond the scope of the present study. However, as evident from the summary of the individual chapters, we may highlight few major issues related to the archaeology of the Kushāṇa period of the region under purview. The main points are-

1. At the present state of research, it is difficult to distinguish the 'Core Area' and the 'Peripheral Area' of the Mathurā region. Our assumption is that the concentration of settlements at the central point of Mathurā could be termed as the 'Nucleus Zone' or the 'Core Area'. This zone includes both excavated and explored sites/mounds situated inside Mathurā city (covering both fortified complexes and its immediate surrounding areas). The 'Peripheral Area' probably includes distribution of settlements outside Mathurā city. In this context it is to be noted that there are few more sites/mounds (like Bhūteśvara, Rāja-Bali-Kā-Ṭīlā, Saptarṣi Ṭīlā, Sītalā Ghāṭi, Chaubārā, Chaurāši, Jail mound and others) situated in the 'Core Area' are yet to be excavated or not scientifically excavated. On the other hand, we have more important sites like Sonkh, Māṭ, Maholi, Gosna, Nohjheel, Bajna, Pālikherā, Govardhan, Koṭā, Morā, Parkham etc., which were located beyond the nucleus zone. The observation of B.D.Chattopadhyaya regarding this issue may be referred- "the urban dimension of Mathurā appears to have been much wider if one considers the distribution of Mathurā mounds which, if Sonkh as a indicator, were habitational units with both secular and non-secular contents. The mounds, some of which may have been
located across the Yamunā on its left bank, suggest that the urban settlement of Mathurā was not nucleated".2

2. We have meagre information regarding the place of issue of the inscriptions of the Kushāṇa period at Mathurā. It is our assumption that, the find spots of such inscriptions may not always indicate the place of issue.

3. The presence of lesser number of Imperial Kushāṇa coins and larger amount of Later Kushāṇa coins probably suggest that Mathurā was relatively less important during the Imperial Kushāṇa rule, whereas it became a centre of attraction during the rule of the Later Kushāṇas. Inadequate information constrains us to explain the political condition of Mathurā in the latter half of the Kushāṇa period.

4. Mathurā had meagre role in the circulation of gold coins. Not a single gold coin of the Kushāṇas has been reported in the stratified contexts at Mathurā and Sonkh. The point requires further investigation in the context of settlement archaeology.

5. The Kushāṇa coin moulds are not available from the stratified contexts either in Mathurā or in Sonkh. It might be suggested that Mathurā inspite of its political importance during the Kushāṇa period did not enjoy the status of a mint town. Whereas, palaeographical evidence of a coin from Sonkh suggests that at some time of the Kushāṇa period, Mathurā was a centre of minting.

6. Some terracotta moulds of punch marked coins have been unearthed from the early Kushāṇa levels at Sonkh. This particular finding seems to suggest that Mathurā continued to be a manufacturing centre of punch-marked coins during the Kushāṇa period. It may be assumed that, for some time in the early Kushāṇa period, punch-marked coins were probably in circulation at Sonkh and later gradually supplanted by the Kushāṇa coins.
7. Jaina inscriptions have been discovered in larger numbers in and around Mathurā. This phenomenon undoubtedly implies the popularity of Jainism in the Kushāṇa period. Our study tentatively suggests the ratio of epigraphic sources. At least seventy Buddhist inscriptions (thirty one dated and thirty nine undated) and at least ninety one Jaina inscriptions (fifty five dated and thirty six undated) of the Kushāṇa period discovered so far certainly had their impact on the society of the Mathurā region. Nevertheless, we should not ignore that the early Kushāṇas were Buddhist and Later Kushāṇas gradually shifted their patronage towards Brāhmaṇism. Further investigation may achieve more supportive evidences to elaborate this point.

8. The Kushāṇa inscriptions of Mathurā refer to different Buddhist Vihaaras. Archaeologically, it is quite difficult to identify these vihaaras. In most of the cases, we have meagre information regarding the provenances of these inscriptions (mentioning the name of the Vihaaras). Except the inscription mentioning the name Dhanyavarmā Vihaara, all are found during explorations/trial diggings. Although, some sites (like Jamālpur, Maholi etc.) have yielded sculptures and architectural members related to the Buddhist pantheon. Here we should mention that, an inscription from Sonkh mentioning the name of some Vihaara, but we have not found any structural evidence related to the Buddhist monastery during excavations at Sonkh. However, the site has yielded two apsidal brick temples.

9. So far as the recorded evidence about the characteristics of settlements defining citadel and non-citadel areas is concerned, we have hardly any materials to reconstruct the city dwellings in their proper perspectives. However, in the historical writings we have enough interpretative data explaining the characteristics of urban
centres representing the features of fortifications including its functions. In this context we should mention that, structural evidence from Mathurā gives a complete picture about the fortification wall around the city and also hints about the probable citadel areas. From the structural remains of Sonkh one could get an idea about the major/minor settlement complexes, but, it did not yield any kind of fortification around the city. However, to get a complete picture about the inner components of the city dwellings during the Kushāṇa period, we need a thorough scrutiny of the existing archaeological remains in the modern settlement areas and the earlier records highlighting more evidences about the urban character of the site.

10. It has been observed that excavations at Sonkh have yielded only Brāhmaṇical sculptures, besides sculptures associated with the Nāga cult. Buddhist and Jaina sculptures were completely absent. Whereas, plenty of Buddhist and Jaina sculptures have been reported from other parts of the Mathurā region and even excavations at Mathurā have also yielded Buddhist sculptures. The presence of sculptures associated with the Brāhmaṇical pantheon at Sonkh sharply contrasts with the abundance of sculptures associated with Buddhist and Jaina pantheon of this region. This difference is highlighted by R.C. Sharma as, “Although Mathurā region was the stronghold of Buddhism the excavation at Sonkh does not confirm its prevalence in this part. One is inclined to conclude that the Buddhism was confined to the urban centres and the country side continued to stick to the original faith which bore the stamp of Hinduism as testified by the discovery of several Brāhmaṇical deities. The worship of Nāgas, Skanda and Mahishāsuramardini seems to have been very popular and this represents a folk tendency of Hinduism or Brāhmaṇism”.3
11. Considerable numbers of other deities, probably associated with three major pantheons of ancient India, have been reported from the Kushāṇa period at Mathurā. We may assume that the tendency of assimilation of the so-called deities on three major pantheons have been noticed in the Mathurā sculptures of the Kushāṇa period which became more prominent during the Gupta and post-Gupta phases.

12. In the context of ceramic tradition it has been noted that the maximum number of pottery types continued for a longer period having association with the core tradition of Kushāṇa pottery. Therefore, we need a clear-cut stratigraphic context based on further excavated materials after the successful probing of more Kushāṇa sites in and around Mathurā.

13. The excavation reports available so far throw little light on the terracotta and stone objects of domestic/household values, whereas, we have plenty of such objects reported from the Kushāṇa period at Sonkh. In fact, Mathurā during the Kushāṇa period symbolized the process of urbanization and reached a period of maturity. Therefore, urbanization implied an overall advancement in economy and accumulation of social wealth, besides other aspects of society. One may assume that both terracotta and stone were commonly used as the medium of expression in the artistic activities, whereas terracotta and stone objects of domestic/household values have not received much attention.

14. Lesser numbers of Buddhist and Jaina elements in terracotta art certainly contradicts with the abundance of Buddhist and Jaina images in forms of stone sculptures.

15. It is very interesting to note that the artefacts related to farming had their continued existence in the Kushāṇa phase. The concentration of milling tools in the stratigraphic contexts
belonging to the Kushāṇa levels prove that processing of agricultural products had been taken place locally. Such elements also suggest urban-rural dichotomy of the site and the involvement of farming groups in the city area.

16. The paucity of art objects made of ivory in the Kushāṇa period at Mathurā contradicts with the abundance of ivory sculptures found in the contemporary period at various sites of the Gandhāra region and in Begrām.

17. Continuity of archaeological materials clearly indicates a gradual development of settlements (found in archaeological remains) from the pre-Kushāṇa to the Kushāṇa and even to the post-Kushāṇa period had taken place consistently rather than being a sudden growth.

18. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the material remains particularly diagnostic types of artefacts like ceramics, objects made of terracotta, metal, stone, bone, ivory, glass etc. of the Kushāṇa period of the Mathurā region have close resemblances with that of the material remains reported from the contemporary period at Hastināpura, Ahichchhatra, Kauśāmbi, Śrāvasti, Rājghāt, Rang-Mahal, Taxila, Shaikan Dheri and others. In one hand all these sources help us to demonstrate the Pan-Indian character of Mathurā and its integration with the other regions of the Ganga valley and the north-western provinces through the expansion of trading networks. On the other hand, the elements of Central Asian affinities presence in our study area also suggest Central Asian and South Asian contacts.

The above outline as well as observation related to the archaeology of the Mathurā region are tentative and would no doubt be altered as new data is collected. Although, the suggestive approaches as well as
interpretations presented here apply specifically to the region concerned, they do have important implications for the interpretations of South Asian archaeology in reconstructing the society under the rule of the Kushāṇas. While working on a theme like this we fully realize our own scholarly limitations. Here we have tried to offer nothing more than a comprehensive record and brief archaeological reconnaissance of Mathurā and its surroundings during the Kushāṇa period.

REFERENCES